

# Guidelines for Planning and Facilitating Trauma- and Violence-Informed Meetings



# The Knowledge Hub

The Knowledge Hub is an initiative of the Centre for Research & Education on Violence against Women & Children at Western University.

The Knowledge Hub actively supports projects across Canada funded through the Public Health Agency of Canada that use trauma- and violence-informed approaches to promote the health and wellbeing related to preventing and addressing family violence. This support includes:

1. Facilitating a national community of practice (CoP) for members of projects funded through the investment to share and enhance learning regarding trauma- and violence-informed research and practice.
2. Coordinating knowledge mobilization activities for projects and the broader community through live events, written resources, and videos.

Trauma- and violence-informed approaches are at the heart of all work conducted by the Knowledge Hub and are central to each project brought together into the CoP. This includes the research methods, practices, intervention and prevention efforts carried out by the projects, the research methods and practices of the Knowledge Hub, and the activities of the CoP, including regular meetings and gatherings of CoP and Knowledge Hub team members.

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## Applying Trauma- and Violence-Informed Principles to Meetings

This guide is a reference tool for those involved in in-person, virtual, or hybrid meetings that support trauma- and violence-informed practices. It provides suggestions for incorporating trauma- and violence-informed principles into planning, hosting, or attending meetings.

Proactive consideration of how to make meeting contexts more trauma- and violence-informed can increase feelings of safety, trust, support, collaboration, empowerment, understanding, and connection for participants. Modeling and practicing trauma- and violence-informed principles in meetings can extend these principles beyond their centrality in intervention and research contexts.

### Trauma- and Violence-Informed Principles

Approaches to trauma- and violence-informed practice involve fundamental aspects of modified environmental contexts, awareness-based interaction, and recurring reflection and preparation. It is important that such practice infiltrates all levels of practice, from socio-cultural systems to practitioner organizations, to families and individuals. These levels often intersect to produce impacts stemming from both historical and ongoing violence and systemic and interpersonal trauma.

There are a few thematic principles that can generally characterize a trauma- and violence-informed approach.<sup>1</sup>

1. An awareness and understanding of trauma and violence, including how these experiences impact people's everyday livelihoods, within structural, cultural, historical, and gender issues.
2. Facilitation and maintenance of an emotionally and physically safe environment that prioritizes trustworthiness and transparency.
3. Intentional creation of opportunities for peer support, collaboration, connection, and mutuality.
4. Emphasize and encourage empowerment, voice, and choice.
5. A strengths-based and capacity-building perspective that supports skill-building and efforts in coping and resilience.

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<sup>1</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14-4884. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014.

Poole, N., Urquhart, C., Jasiura, F., Smilie, D. & Schmidt, R. (2013). Trauma Informed Practice Guide. BC Centre of Excellence for Women's Health: Vancouver. DOI:10.13140/RG.2.1.5116.9122

Ponic, P., Varcoe, C. and Smutylo, T. (2016). Trauma- (and Violence-) Informed Approaches to Supporting Victims of Violence: Policy and Practice Considerations. *Victims of Crime Research Journal*, 9, 3-15.

# General Guidance for Trauma- and Violence-Informed Meetings

This guide offers suggestions for planning for, facilitating, and participating in trauma- and violence-informed meetings. There is sometimes overlap between ‘good practices’ and trauma- and violence-informed practices, but there are specific trauma- and violence-informed practices that are above and beyond what are defined as ‘good practices’. In this section, the suggestions apply to all forms of meetings, whether facilitated in-person, virtually, or as a hybrid format, while the following section provides additional suggestions specific to meeting format.

## Meeting Preparation

The planning and preparation phase of meetings is an important step in ensuring trauma- and violence-informed principles are put into practice. Suggestions during this phase can be summarized in three themes:

- Communication with participants
  - Provide sufficient notice of the meeting date and time.
  - Send an agenda, meeting materials, and details about the accessibility of the meeting as far in advance as possible (in all known preferred languages). This will allow participants to familiarize themselves with the content, provide additions to the agenda (if appropriate), and request any additional accessibility requirements.
  - Invite participants to submit brief bios and indicate their preferred pronouns and confirm their consent to circulate this information in advance of the meeting.
- Logistic and accessibility considerations
  - Confirm which types of interpreters are required, arrange for language interpretation equipment, and book interpreters.
  - Prepare meeting materials in the languages required and in as many formats as possible (e.g., slides, handouts) to meet accessibility requirements (e.g., colour contrasts, descriptive text for images).
  - Determine if and how the meeting will be recorded, ensuring to seek consent from all participants in advance, including knowledge about how and with whom the content will be shared.
- Meeting culture
  - Consider possible power differences involving participants (between either facilitators and participants or between fellow participants) and develop strategies for how to help reduce power differences and increase experiences of equity, comfort, and safety.

## Starting Meetings

The beginning of meetings is an important phase when incorporating trauma- and violence-informed principles because it sets the stage for pending activities, including the expectations for all participants and facilitates the culture from the welcoming.

- Behaviour guidelines
  - Collaboratively develop new guidelines, or review previously agreed upon guidelines, concerning the ways participants interact, communicate, and resolve differences during the meeting.
  - Explicitly identify the processes required to help everyone feel safe to participate, such as the use of respectful and inclusive language that does not perpetuate inequity, violence, injustice, marginalization, or any other emotionally laden language that may invoke trauma images, memories, and reactions.

- Culturally sensitive practices
  - Consider opening the meeting with a land acknowledgement—a statement that names the Indigenous peoples that live(d) on the lands where the meeting is held. Settler land acknowledgements support reconciliation efforts by identifying the impact of historical and ongoing colonialism on Indigenous peoples and their lands. See the Considerations of Indigenous Culture and Invited Elders section of this guide for additional suggestions.
  - Invite participants to introduce themselves using their name and pronouns (if participants feel comfortable doing so). Meeting facilitators should lead by example with their own introductions.
  - Content-dependent, provide trigger warnings, offer resources for those desiring support (e.g., helplines) and encourage participants to do what they need to in order to take care of themselves (e.g., step away from the meeting).
- Logistic and administrative considerations
  - When outlining the agenda, clearly identify planned breaks and invite participants to take additional breaks as required.
  - Incorporate activities to support relationship- and trust-building (e.g., ice breakers) and invite group members to participate to the extent and in ways they are comfortable.

## Throughout Meetings

During meetings, it is important to facilitate the ongoing inclusion of trauma- and violence-informed principles in practice to ensure a safe and positive experience for everyone involved.

- Content considerations
  - Explain terms that might be less familiar to some people and use acronyms only when accompanied by their description.
  - Avoid loud noises when possible (e.g., banging on a table for emphasis when presenting) in respect to individuals with experiences of trauma and neurodiversity.
- Participation considerations
  - Give credit to participants for their ideas, maintaining an awareness that contributions made by individuals from marginalized groups and/or those holding less power (particularly in a meeting setting), can often be lost or misattributed to others.
  - Honour individuals' right to share and participate as well as their choice not to or do so in different ways (e.g., verbal, written, anonymous). When facilitating discussions, invite sharing and provide opportunities in multiple forms without creating expectations or pressure for sharing (e.g., option to pass during round robin contributions). Silence is okay.
- Human needs requirements
  - Following breaks, restate remaining agenda items.
  - Consider using specific breaks to check in with participants about what is going well and whether changes are needed in terms of the remaining agenda items and planned activities/discussions (e.g., shifting to small group discussions rather than a large group discussion).
  - Encourage people to do what they need to in order to take care of themselves (e.g., step away from the meeting). Support self-regulation practices (e.g., grounding and breathing exercises) and, when possible, incorporate similar practices in a group setting through facilitator-led exercises.
  - Understand that meeting participants may have different needs in order to feel fully included in the meeting. Be responsive to these differences and open to feedback from participants about how to facilitate participation and make meetings more inclusive.
- Culturally sensitive practices
  - Monitor, discuss, and supportively address the use of language that has an impact that is creating or furthering harm, inequity, structural violence, or marginalization.
  - Where possible, correct participants' misuse of pronouns. If this is done by a facilitator, correct yourself and immediately return to the meeting content to avoid drawing more attention to the error which may cause further discomfort to the individual.

## Closing Meetings

There are important ways to end meetings when practicing trauma- and violence-informed principles, particularly to allow for reflection and feedback on how to better implement these principles for the specific participants, as well as other participants and for different meetings, in the future.

- Logistic and administrative practices
  - Repeat the meeting objectives, summarize the meeting activities, and advise of any follow-up tasks.
  - Clarify how any noted information will be shared with participants following the meeting, and when they should expect to receive it.
  - End the meeting at the agreed upon time or earlier if the agenda is completed.
- Reflection and feedback practices
  - Invite participants to share any final thoughts about the meeting or next steps about the objectives.
  - Create opportunities for participants to provide feedback regarding the meeting, particularly how to improve future meetings or address any concerns arising from the completed meeting, and clarify how this will be accomplished (e.g., questionnaire, anonymous survey, email communication).
  - Follow up after the meeting with participants who reported experiencing concerns (e.g., confrontations with other participants) or difficulties (e.g., accessibility concerns) during the meeting, and validate their experiences and offer support.

# Guidance for Conducting Trauma- and Violence-Informed Meetings across Specific Formats

## In-Person Meetings

- Organization and logistics
  - Select a meeting space that offers minimal external distractions, provides proper ventilation and ample space to move around, consider different variations of set-up based on participants (e.g., a circle formation, lecture hall style), and offer a separate safe space—private room for people to use if they feel overwhelmed or distressed.
- Accessibility considerations
  - Prior to the meeting, inform participants of the location of parking options, highlighting accessible parking options, and note any fees associated with parking.
  - Make interpretation equipment available and identify interpreters.
  - Ensure access to gender neutral washrooms and provide directions to them.
  - Make fidget toys available (e.g., rubber bands, pencil and paper, stress balls, etc.).
- Human needs considerations
  - Ensure water is available, and if budget and safety protocols allow, offer food options that are nutritious and do not contain common allergens—making sure to provide information about the food ingredients (e.g., halal, gluten-free).

## Virtual Meetings

- Organization and logistics
  - Offer a separate safe space—private virtual breakout room for people to use if they feel overwhelmed or distressed. If resources allow, consider keeping a host in this space to communicate with and help those desiring.
- Accessibility and privacy considerations
  - Consider enlisting a technical support person to ensure technology is not a barrier to participation.
  - Consider how safety, privacy, and confidentiality will be maintained—provides links to any relevant documents.
  - Designate a facilitator to monitor the chat function, and where appropriate vocalize these contributions, to ensure contributions and questions are included.
- Participation considerations
  - Provide participants with a choice to enable their cameras during the meeting and invite participants to contribute in ways most comfortable to them.
  - Build in frequent breaks to counter screen fatigue.



# Challenges in Conducting Trauma- and Violence-Informed Hybrid Meetings

## Hybrid Meetings

Hybrid meetings include both virtual and in-person meeting settings. In these situations, the guidance for holding in-person and virtual meetings should be considered for all stages of the meeting. Considerations specific to conducting trauma- and violence-informed hybrid meetings include:

- Confirm use of cameras, speakers, and microphones allows all meeting participants to be heard and seen (when their microphone and camera are on).
- Explicitly invite virtual participants to contribute in one of multiple ways (e.g., speak, type text, raise hand, etc.) and ensure these contributions are experienced by the participants joining in-person—best accomplished through the role of one designated facilitator.
- Ensure that all meeting materials (presentations, visuals, handouts, etc.) can be seen and accessed by both in-person and participants joining virtually.

However, it is difficult to give all participants a trauma- and violence-informed experience during hybrid meetings. Some notable challenges include:

- It can be difficult to have all participants seen and heard when the in-person group is large (e.g., microphones may not reach all in-person participants so virtual participants cannot readily or easily hear any of their comments), or when there are several virtual participants (e.g., needing sufficient screen space to have all their videos projected for in-person participants to see). These considerations are important to ensure virtual participants avoid feeling isolated.
- If virtual participants do not project video, their names should be displayed on a large screen visible to in-person participants.
- It can be difficult to effectively integrate in-person and virtual participants for discussion practice, and often small groups are restricted to discrete gatherings of in-person participants and discrete breakout rooms with virtual participants.

## Considerations for Indigenous Culture and Invited Elders

When facilitating meetings with Indigenous peoples (First Nations, Metis and Inuit) it is important to be aware of cultural protocols and considerations specific to those in attendance. A trauma- and violence-informed meeting with Indigenous peoples requires an explicit awareness of historical and present traumas within colonialism experienced by Indigenous peoples. Helpful resources, such as [checklists](#), [guides](#), [tips](#), and [protocols](#) are readily available.

- General Considerations and Meeting Preparation
  - It is important to be familiar with considerations specific to the local participating Indigenous community.
  - Meeting a level of Indigenous cultural competency can include many things, such as inviting Elders or Knowledge Keepers, completing introductions using Indigenous languages, establishing and maintaining relationships, offering land acknowledgements, offering tobacco ties or other traditional gifts, or smudging ceremonies.
- Specific Considerations for In-Person Meetings
  - If the Elder desires to hold a smudging ceremony, check with meeting venue on protocols specific to this, and provide all participants with notice of this ceremony.
  - Consider appointing an aid for invited Elders, to guide them and ensure their needs are met throughout the meeting experience and ensure any travel expenses incurred are promptly reimbursed.
  - If a land acknowledgement is offered, it should be specific to the location in which the meeting is being held.
- Specific Considerations for Virtual Meetings
  - If a land acknowledgement is offered, it should be specific to the location in which the meeting is hosted from.

## Conclusion

Trauma- and violence-informed meetings increase feelings of safety, trust, support, collaboration, empowerment, understanding, and connection for participants. This guide is meant to support those who are planning, facilitating, and attending meetings, whether in-person, virtually, or hybrid, to cultivate experiences that align with, and center, trauma- and violence-informed principles.

## Resources

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