

Creating Trauma-Informed Services and Organizations: An Integrated Approach

Introduction

The National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health (NCDVTMH) has developed an approach for creating **A**ccessible, **C**ulturally responsive, **D**omestic **V**iolence and **T**rauma-**I**nformed (**ACDVTI**) services and organizations. This integrated approach draws from a number of different places and perspectives - from the voices and experiences of survivors, advocates and clinicians; from the insights of social and political movements; and from research and science, including a growing body of research on child development and neurobiology.

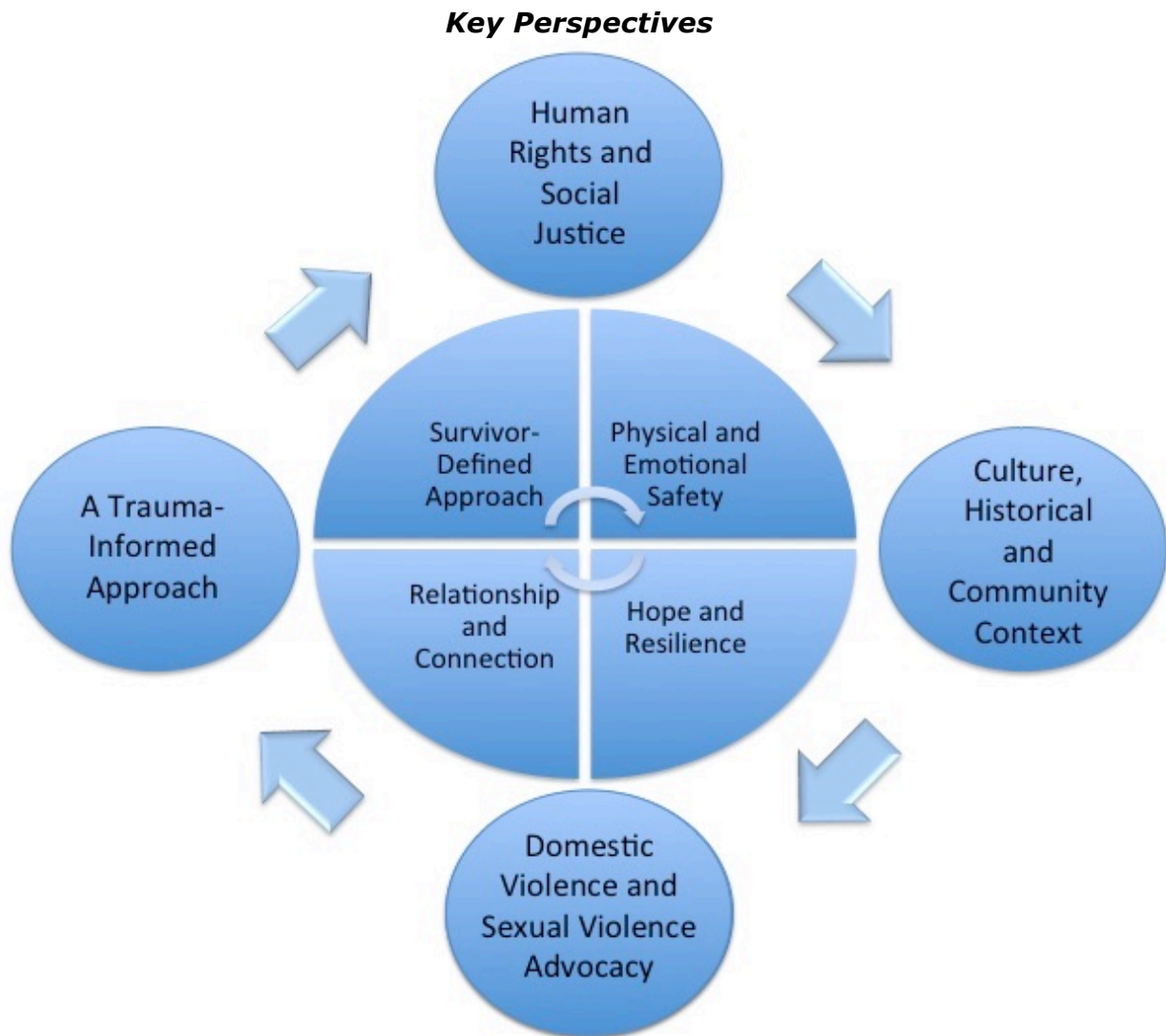
Initially developed as a way to bridge trauma-informed and advocacy perspectives, this more integrated approach has evolved into a framework for holding many of the key elements that are critical to doing our work - work that is grounded in a domestic and sexual violence (DV/SV) advocacy perspective, that incorporates an understanding of trauma and its effects, that recognizes the centrality of culture and that is committed to social justice and human rights.

More specifically, this framework provides a foundation for doing work that is inclusive and accessible, attuned to the range of people's experiences, and responsive to the people and communities we serve. It also provides a foundation for working in ways that are grounded in dignity, respect and equality; that honor people's strengths and creativity; that foster resilience and healing; that attend to the well-being of staff, organizations and communities; and that support activism and social change.

It provides additional scaffolding for holding the depth, nuance, sensitivity, attunement, self-awareness and accountability that is so important to our interactions with others and the broader political awareness needed to understand our own and others' experiences in context. It also provides the inspiration, analysis, and tools to advocate for change within our organizations, in the systems that impact the lives of survivors and their children, and in the attitudes and policies that contribute to abuse and violence in our world and restrict people's options.

The following perspectives and principles help provide a foundation for ACDVTI work. They also offer a framework to draw on when our work becomes challenging and to support us in creating services and organizations that truly reflect our intentions and values.

Key Perspectives and Core Principles for Engaging in ACDVTI Work



NCDVTMH's framework is informed by several key perspectives, which, when woven together, provide a more integrated approach for working with survivors and their children. Each perspective offers an important dimension that helps inform how we see and how we do our work. All contribute to our ability to ensure our programs are welcoming, inclusive and accessible.

- **Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence (DV/SV) Advocacy:** This perspective highlights the importance of attending to not only the traumatic effects of domestic and sexual violence but also the ongoing realities of coercion and control by an abusive partner and by the systems where survivors seek help. A DV/SV perspective also brings an analysis of gender-based violence, including transphobic and homophobic violence, to our work and emphasizes the importance of holding individuals and systems accountable for their abuse of power.
- **Culture, Historical and Community Context:** This perspective focuses our attention on the historical and social context of people's lives including their ongoing experiences of oppression, discrimination and microaggression. It helps us recognize the richness and complexity of people's identities, beliefs, and experiences and the traditions, values and relationships that serve as sources of meaning and strength. It also places the creation of services that are inclusive, culturally resonant and linguistically accessible at the forefront of our work.
- **Human Rights and Social Justice:** Incorporating a human rights/social justice perspective ensures that awareness of the conditions that create and uphold abuse, violence, oppression and discrimination in our lives, our communities, and our society remains central to all that we do. It strengthens our ability to recognize social injustice, to critically analyze the conditions that produce it, and to work toward social change. It also helps us to be more attuned to any stigma or discrimination experienced by survivors and staff in our own programs and to actively take this on.
- **A Trauma-Informed Approach:** A trauma-informed perspective brings an understanding of the pervasiveness of trauma and its impact on survivors, ourselves, our organizations, and our communities and what we can do to help mitigate those effects. It normalizes human responses to trauma and reminds us that the quality of our interactions is at the heart of countering the experience of abuse. A trauma-informed approach provides guidance on how trauma can affect people's experience of services and what we can do to reduce further traumatization at every level of our organizations. When we understand trauma responses as adaptations to being under siege, then part of our work is to do everything we can to reduce the likelihood that survivors will feel discounted and disempowered in our programs and systems. A trauma-informed perspective also informs the creation of services and environments that support the resilience and well-being of people and communities through the work we do and the way we work. Lastly, a trauma-informed perspective acknowledges the need to support staff and to create opportunities for reflection and growth.

Core Principles

The following core principles or values provide a foundation for doing ACDVTI work. They are all part of creating a relational environment that can help to counteract people's experiences of trauma and dehumanization - one that is deeply respectful and that honors and supports each person's experience, resilience, agency and humanity. Central to an ACDVTI approach is recognizing the importance of the quality of our interactions and the relationships we create. Each of the following principles represents a somewhat different aspect of this overarching approach.

These principles include recognizing and honoring the importance of:

- **Physical and Emotional Safety:** A key aspect of ACDVTI work involves attending to both physical and emotional safety, while honoring each person's understanding of what safety means for them. This includes considering people's experiences of safety in relation to cultural, historical, and community context as well as safety in relation to how people experience our services.
- **Relationship and Connection:** Relationships are central to healing, growth, and change including our relationships to the people, places, practices and things that help us to cope, grow, and thrive. Because harm often occurs in relationship, the quality of our relationships and interactions has the potential to counteract experiences of abuse and discrimination and create a sense of connection and belonging. When trust has been betrayed, being honest, clear, transparent, and consistent and relating in ways that are genuinely respectful, collaborative, and non-hierarchical are essential to creating safety and building trust.
- **Hope and Resilience:** Holding hope and resilience as core entails believing in the human capacity to survive and heal and recognizing the strengths, resources, and tools that survivors already possess. It also means that we embody a genuine sense of possibility in our relationships and our work.
- **A Survivor-Defined Approach:** Embracing a survivor-defined approach means recognizing and honoring each person's right to define and determine what works for them, working to eliminate power imbalances in our interactions, and ensuring that choice and control rest with each survivor. It also includes ensuring the meaningful involvement of people who use our services in our planning processes as well as in the evaluation and oversight of our programs.

In essence, being trauma-informed means embodying in our lives and work the world we want to create.