

# FACT SHEET

## Resolution and Healing

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No child should ever experience trauma, abuse, or neglect. As children, we have a limited capacity to protect ourselves, if at all. We are still developing physically, emotionally, and psychologically. Children cannot seek or find safety like adults can and are particularly vulnerable to abuse, neglect and violence.

Given this, the fact that a child has survived and continues to survive as an adult is a substantial achievement. They have developed resources and strategies to survive, as a child, and as an adult. Each person is an expert in their own experience, and has their own strengths. This all deserves acknowledgment and celebration. However it is also important to note that childhood trauma survivors are often very good at caring for others but can struggle in caring for themselves. Many don't recognise their own strengths.

Considering these strengths, the best person to drive restoration is each survivor. Our service systems however make strong assumptions about what is best for survivors. Our role, in the system in which we work, may be better oriented to supporting survivors to work out what they really need, and then supporting their planning to achieve this. This is empowering, respectful and trauma-informed.



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## ***Working with Professionals***

For those who experience childhood trauma, abuse, and neglect, there is a growing evidence base for what is helpful and restorative when working with professionals. In general, we know that the following strategies can be restorative when implemented by professionals:

- Working with the trauma-informed principles of safety, choice, empowerment, trustworthiness, and collaboration.
- Providing care and support, using strategies that help to counteract the feelings of the original experience of the person's historic abuse and neglect (e.g., if they were not validated, we validate them).
- Focusing on what has happened to that person, as opposed to pathologizing the person (e.g., not looking at "what is wrong" with a person).

Reiterating that child abuse and neglect is never a child's fault and that they are never to blame.

## ***Opportunities for Systems Change***

Despite the prevalence of the childhood trauma, service provision for those directly and indirectly affected remains largely inadequate – inaccessible, unaffordable and poorly matched to need. There has been an endemic failure to invest in person-centred trauma-informed recovery oriented services across the life span.

Primary care and frontline services are not equipped to identify, appropriately respond to, and/or comprehensively address the complex needs of abuse survivors. Significant gaps and inequities in accessibility to, affordability of, specialist services and trauma-informed supports are compounded by poor care coordination and limited referral pathways.

Additional challenges relate to the survivor difficulties in seeking and sustaining help, due to difficulties around trust, safety and prior experiences of re-traumatisation.

Empowering recovery from childhood trauma recognises the needs for survivors across systems of care, and across their life cycle. It also recognises the importance of services not only for individuals but for families impacted by trauma, violence and abuse.

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Trauma is a state of high arousal that affects how the different domains of learning and memory work together. Trauma is biochemically encoded in the brain.



The brain is not static in structure and function but is continually shaped by experiences. Throughout our lives, our nerve cells can grow and pathways between them can repair. This is called neuroplasticity.



Research establishes that neurons (nerve cells) are activated by experiences, especially those involving emotional relationships. Our wellbeing depends on our relationships with others.



Healthy relationships soothe people affected by trauma and promote recovery and wellbeing.



Positive relationships build good connections in our brain right across our lives. These foster healthy development and functioning.



When the nerve cells and different areas of the brain work together (integration), longstanding trauma can be resolved, and its negative intergenerational effects intercepted.



People can and do recover and when parents have made sense of their trauma, their children do better. On the other hand, less constructive experiences in our relationships negatively impact on our wellbeing and possibilities for recovery.



Recovery from trauma requires support as 'going it alone' only compounds the isolation of the original trauma. Relational trauma is healed within healing relationships



Just as damaging experiences change the brain in ways that are negative for subsequent functioning, new, different and positive experiences also change the brain in ways that are conducive to health.



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