

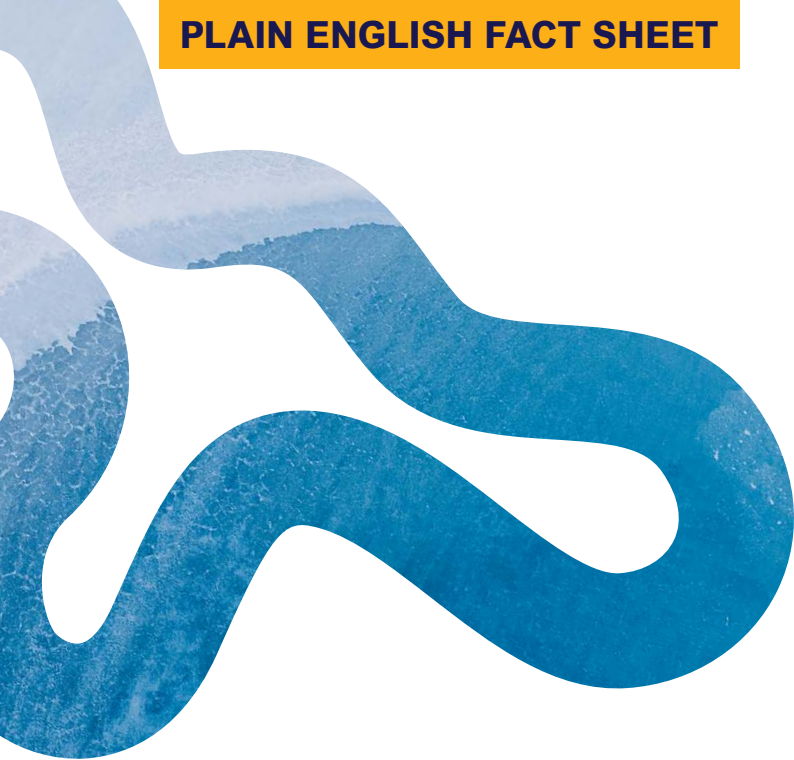
# Supporting Recovery

## Blue Knot Foundation fact sheet for people with disability and experiences of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation (complex trauma)

- Trauma which happens between people over a long time or many times is called complex trauma.
- Supporting an adult who is living with the effects of complex trauma can be hard. It can also be inspiring.
- It can help to understand about trauma and the ways it can affect people.
- When bad things happen to people in childhood, we can this childhood trauma.
- Childhood trauma often happens between people. It is often bad and can go on for a long time. It can also happen lots of times.
- Childhood trauma causes complex trauma.
- Trauma happens with abuse. Trauma is when another person hurts you. The person can hurt your feelings. The person can hurt your body.
- The person can do things to you that you do not want them to do. The person can hurt you in private places.
- Sometimes trauma means that you do not get your needs met. This is called neglect.
- Some trauma happens when a person in the family hurts another person. This is called family violence.
- Sometimes a person looking after a child cannot care for them. The person cannot meet the child's needs. A person may not be able to look after a child if the person had their own trauma. This can happen if that trauma is still affecting them.
- Some people experience trauma when they are an adult. This can happen with refugees. It can also happen if there is violence in the family or community.

- Trauma as an adult can make the effects of trauma as a child bigger.
- Trauma which happens between people over a long time or many times is called complex trauma.
- Research tells us that people can and do recover (heal) from complex trauma. But they need the right support.
- Parents and other people looking after children can pass on trauma to them. When people with trauma heal, their children do better.
- Many people can support survivors to recover (heal). This includes friends, family members, carers, advocates and professionals.
- Trauma often occurs in relationship. It can also be healed in relationship.
- Every interaction you have with a survivor of trauma is important. No matter how small.
- Being 'trauma-informed' can make the way we interact with people better.
- Being trauma-informed follows key principles. They include safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration and empowerment.
- Being trauma-informed also means tuning into each person's background and culture. It means tuning into differences.
- Being trauma-informed makes interactions better. It means being aware that a person may have experiences of trauma. It also means understanding that people with trauma experiences can be very sensitive to different things.
- Being trauma-informed means understanding that people with trauma experiences can have trauma responses. It also means understanding that people with trauma experiences can cause different challenges.
- Some survivors seem to manage okay. But complex trauma can make people have bad health.
- It is not possible for survivors to just get over their trauma with no support. Telling a person with trauma to 'be positive' does not help. It can make people feel more alone.
- Not only survivors can feel 'alone'. Friends, partners, families and professionals can feel alone too.
- It is important for everyone to be aware of the links between trauma and current challenges.
- People experience complex trauma in relationships. This can make close relationships hard for survivors.





- Survivors can find relationships hard. This is because they can be easily 'triggered'. This means that something which you may not know about can make the person react.
- It is important for any person who supports a survivor to understand about triggers. This can help you to empathise with the survivor. It can also help you to not to take things 'personally'.
- Being trauma-informed helps you 'do no harm'. It understands how trauma processes can take a survivor over.
- Being trauma-informed focusses on how we offer support. This is more than what the support is. It helps survivors feel that other people are thinking about their safety and feelings.
- We know that our brains can change in structure and function. We call this 'neuroplasticity'.
- Every interaction can help our brain rewire. Trauma-informed interactions support wellbeing and healing from trauma.
- Children do things to try and stop the pain and distress of their trauma. These things are called coping strategies.
- Many coping strategies are good at first. Many coping strategies are not good later on.
- Some survivors use alcohol, drugs, eating or work to stop try and stop their pain and distress. Some people avoid other people. Some of these strategies can make people sick.
- When people understand why they use their coping strategies they can start to heal. They can also learn new strategies. This can take time.
- It is important to understand that taking risks may be a coping strategy. This can be the start of recovery.
- It is important to build healthy coping strategies but this can be hard. This means that support is needed.
- Being jumpy and on high alert (hyperarousal) and being shut down (hypoarousal) are trauma responses. They are 'normal' responses to trauma.
- A survivor who does not respond is often 'hyperaroused' too. Being jumpy and shut down both mean that a survivor can no longer tolerate their feelings. This means that it is best to stop the interaction. Continuing the interaction may retraumatise the person.
- Some survivors dissociate when they are overwhelmed. This is a sort of hypoarousal. When a person dissociates, they 'separate from the present'.
- If a person dissociates, you can support them to feel safe and grounded. You can suggest strategies to help the person be in the present.

- Knowing about the brain can help your relationship with the person you are supporting. It can also help your own well-being.
- The brain includes the 'higher' cortex (thinking), limbic system (feelings) and brain stem ('survival' responses). Under stress, 'lower' (brain stem) responses take over. This can stop us being calm, thinking and responding flexibly.
- Survivors can often be overwhelmed by brain stem responses ('easily triggered'). But we can all experience stress. This stops our 'higher brain' working. This is not how the brain works.
- As a partner, friend or family member of a survivor, you may have your own stress. It is important for you to look after yourself and find the strategies which ground and soothe you.
- Caring for yourself will help you have trauma-informed interactions with the survivor you care about. It will also show them the importance of self-care.
- It is important to remember that all relationships have minor ruptures. The good news is that these ruptures can be repaired.
- Ruptures in interactions with survivors often happen when there are triggers. This is why trauma-informed responses are important.
- Support for supporters can be hard to find but there is help. It is important to reach out when you need to.



There is more information here [www.blueknot.org.au](http://www.blueknot.org.au) The website has more fact sheets, videos and podcasts too.

---

If you or someone you support lives with disability and experiences of violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation OR is affected by the Disability Royal Commission, you can call the **National Counselling and Referral Service on 1800 421 458** between 9am and 6pm AEST Monday to Friday and between 9am and 5pm AEST Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays.

If you or someone you support has experiences of childhood trauma or is considering the National Redress Scheme, you can call the **Blue Knot Helpline and Redress Support Service on 1300 657 380** between 9am and 5pm Monday to Sunday AEST.