

# Respond: Incorporating Trauma-Informed Workplace Policies & Practices

*Workplaces can **respond** by incorporating an understanding of trauma into workplace policies and practices.*

Workplaces can become more trauma-informed by considering how current policies and practices impact survivors and make adjustments to better approaches to reflect how individuals experience trauma. Being trauma-informed is “less about ‘what’ you’re doing and more about ‘how’ you’re doing it.”<sup>i</sup> It is an on-going process that can range from simple actions to sweeping change.

There are six key trauma responsive elements that workplaces should consider when developing and implementing policies and practices that support workplace safety and promote prevention.



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## Physical and psychological **safety**.

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Physical and psychological safety is essential for a thriving and productive workplace. To promote a workplace culture that centers and individuals' physical and psychological safety, consider the following steps:

- ☑ Establish clear standards on acceptable workplace behavior and the consequences for violating those expectations. Communicate these standards and expectations to employees not only during on-boarding but periodically during staff meetings. Facilitate discussions that help ground all employees in what these expectations mean in practice.
- ☑ [Provide paid sick and safe leave](#) so that survivors can seek physical and mental health services, support from a victim advocate, cooperate with criminal and civil justice proceedings, and seek safe housing, without risking loss of income or employment. Ensure that any documentation requirements do not put undue burden on survivors due to cost, accessibility, or require them to disclose violence in order to receive accommodations.
- ☑ Ensure that policies or practices address aspects of physical and psychological safety and well-being of employees whether performing their job duties on- or off-site. For example, have a third-party anonymous tip or feedback line where employees can safely share concerns, or offering flexibility around work hours and remote work.
- ☑ Ensure that key personnel who may be turned to for help, such as human resources or supervisors, receive regular training on how to recognize and respond to survivors with non-judgement, empathy, and support.
- ☑ Establish anti-retaliation policies to ensure that those who experience violence, report violence or harassment in the workplace, or seek accommodations or help are protected from retaliation or other adverse employment outcomes.
- ☑ Offer a range of accommodations that enable an individual to be safe from an abusive person's behavior while at work. This can include adjusting work schedules, changing worksites, limiting the abusers' access to the workplace, or offering a safety escort from the parking lot.
- ☑ Build relationships with local victim service providers with whom survivors could be referred to for support.

- ☒ Offer to collaborate with a victim service provider to develop and implement a safety plan that considers immediate and long-term safety when employees impacted by violence and harassment seek support.
- ☒ Prioritize the safety of survivors and co-workers when reports of incidences of violence and harassment have been made against an employee while investigations into claims are being conducted.
- ☒ Start all training programs domestic and sexual violence by establishing a safe space that keeps confidential information share by participants, encourages self-care, and centers empathy.
- ☒ Power indifferences can exacerbate an individual's vulnerability to violence and harassment. Provide pay parity across similar positions, post salary ranges for specific job categories, and be transparent around cost of living and pay raises.

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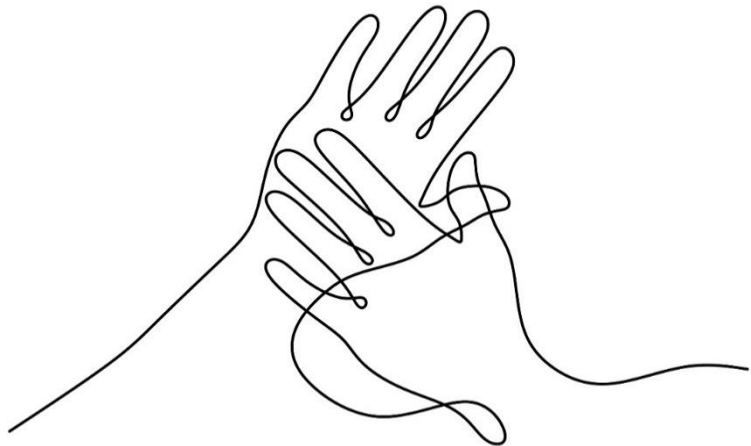
## **Transparency and Trust**

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Workplaces can have model written policies and practices that uphold survivor safety, but if those policies are not implemented consistently and transparently, workers will be unable to trust the employer's response to the impacts of violence and harassment in the workplace. Workplaces should consider the following policies and practices:

- ☒ Describe processes to report harassment or violence and provide information on available accommodations and support services or referrals to community resources that can offer assistance related to current or previous victimization.
- ☒ Be consistent in the application of all policies and practices and access and sharing of resources to ensure no favoritism and increase the belief that all employees will be treated fairly.
- ☒ Establish community expectations that deter workplace gossip and breaches of confidentiality.

- ☑ Clearly define accommodation/support and investigation procedures related to workplace responses to domestic violence, sexual violence and harassment, and stalking.
- ☑ Make sure that policies and practices related to workplace responses to domestic violence, sexual violence and harassment, and stalking are accessible – strive to use plain language, limit unnecessarily legal jargon, translate into languages spoken by all employees, and make available in multiple places to ensure that all employees are able to find and review policies when needed.
- ☑ Be prepared to fully explain the decision-making processes behind the execution of policies and practices to help employees understand the considerations decisions makers weighed in applying those policies.
- ☑ Provide individuals who have sought accommodations or are involved in investigations with consistent updates regardless of whether progress has been made.
- ☑ Audit outcomes from accommodation requests and investigations to ensure that policies and procedures are applied uniformly to all employees, share findings, and make corrections if needed.
- ☑ Publicly respond to incidents of violence and harassment that occur within the workplace in a way that upholds individual privacy and shares actions taken to ensure safety and accountability in a timely manner.
- ☑ Conduct annual climate surveys to assess employee wellbeing and accountability.
- ☑ Regularly share data and feedback related to the utilization of and satisfaction with services and



supports for individuals who experience violence shared, in an anonymous way.

- ☒ Share findings from data and feedback collected from employee surveys, suggestion boxes, and audits and make changes to existing structures and policies shared when critical issues are raised.

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## Peer Support

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Employees are a workplace's most valuable asset. Creating workplaces that strive to cultivate its own workforce by building leadership, sharing expertise, and supporting professional development of others is essential. Opportunities for peer support helps to build comradery and can reduce the isolation that result from experiences of violence, harassment, and trauma.

- ☒ Cultivate mentors and other leaders with various backgrounds and identities to help create opportunities for individuals to connect and receive peer support from individuals they can better identify with because of shared experiences.
- ☒ Ensure that training and education programs focus on building empathy, reducing stigma, and creating a culture of safety and support.
- ☒ Train all employees to respond to disclosures of domestic violence, sexual violence or harassment, and stalking without judgement, with empathy, and with the knowledge of available resources for with survivors.
- ☒ Train all employees on how to potentially intervene if they witness or suspect abusive behavior or harassment.

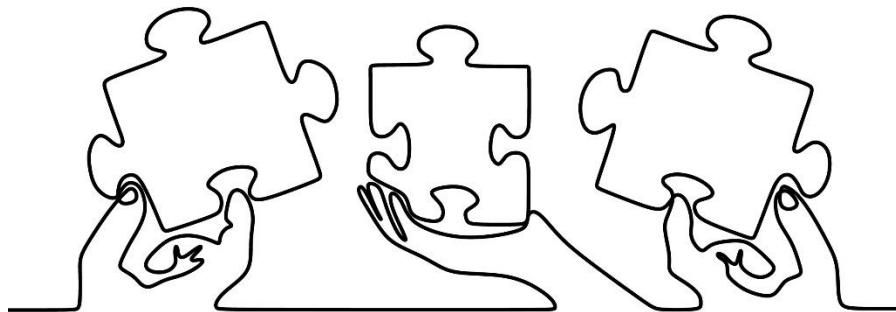
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## Collaboration and Mutuality

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Workplaces must foster a culture that promotes dignity, agency, collaboration, and respect. Valuing all employees as equal members in fulfilling the employer's mission can help to do that in a meaningful way.

- ✓ Engage diverse voices, including individuals who have experienced violence and harassment, in the development and review of policies and practices related to supporting survivor and holding perpetrators accountable.
- ✓ Create feedback mechanisms for individuals who seek and are provided workplace accommodations and supports to evaluate their effectiveness.
- ✓ Institute annual audits to evaluate all aspects of violence and harassment prevention and response policies and practices.
- ✓ Create an internal working committee that includes an employee stakeholder to address the impacts of violence and harassment in the workplace.
- ✓ Identify and build partnerships with local service providers to be able to ask for their assistance when issues arise, or to build a company specific training for the workplace.



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## **Empowerment, Voice, and Choice**

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Survivors are the experts on their own experiences and know what they need to be safe and thrive at work. Providing opportunities for survivors to exercise choice and control, share feedback, and to determine what practices make the most sense for them, is vital.

- ✓ Empower employees with a meaningful voice and information-driven choice in determining how to address what needs and supports they identify to be safe at work.

- ☒ Provide opportunities for survivors to define their needs to be safe at work, create a process in which these needs are considered, and allow survivors to determine what accommodations would be best for their situation.
- ☒ Offer survivors a range of potential accommodations to ensure they can continue to work safely or address their needs without jeopardizing their job or facing adverse employment decisions.
- ☒ Create opportunities for individuals who participate in investigations to provide feedback on the efficacy of and satisfaction with the process.
- ☒ Provide multiple ways to individuals to seek help or report abuse or harassment in the workplace.
- ☒ Ensure that individuals who have experienced workplace harassment and violence are not forced to participate in an investigation.

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## **Culture and Historical Issues**

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Domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and harassment cannot be separated from other forms of discrimination. Abusive individuals exploit others to gain greater power and control, which can compound one's experiences of violence or harassment and exacerbate the impacts of trauma. Workplaces must address all forms of violence, harassment, and behaviors intended to exercise power and control over others to workplaces that promote respect, dignity, and greater safety for all.

- ☒ Integrate discussions about the intersections of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and harassment with other forms of discrimination into education and training programs.
- ☒ Promote professional development, mentorship, and leadership opportunities for employees at all levels in the organization.
- ☒ Create policies and practices that include everyone and treat everyone the same.
- ☒ Include a range of culturally specific service providers among the employers' referrals agencies.



- ☑ Include a range of mental health and healing services that are accessible to a wide range of cultures and practices in the employers' health insurance plan.
- ☑ Review policies and practices routinely to promote cultural humility by engaging in critical self-reflection, recognizing and challenging power imbalances, and accepting institutional accountability for harms cause.

Considering principles – safety; trust and transparency; peer support; collaboration and mutuality; empowerment, voice, and choice; and cultural and historical issues – when developing and executing workplace policies, administrative and supervisory practices, and supporting those who have experienced domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and harassment, will help create safe and more productive workplaces for all.

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Workplaces Respond provides technical assistance to workplace stakeholders seeking to better prevent and respond to domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and harassment impacting the workplace. Scan this QR code to access the Resource Center.



This project is supported by Grant No. 15JOVW-22-GK-04852-NRCW awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed herein or in any materials herein, are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.

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<sup>i</sup> Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services. *Resource Guide to Trauma-Informed Human Services*. Retrieved from: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/trauma-toolkit>.