

Trauma-Informed Supervision Training Curriculum

This sample training curriculum can be used to develop a 90-minute virtual training session on trauma-informed supervision for new employees in a supervisory role. The curriculum includes:

- Sample content outline
- Resources for drafting training content
- Sample activities, videos, and accompanying handouts.

What is Trauma-Informed Supervision?

Trauma-informed supervision is a supervisory approach that incorporates an understanding of the varied impacts of trauma and emphasizes safety, trust, and collaboration. A trauma-informed supervisor is able to:

- Realize the widespread impact of trauma and understand potential paths to healing;
- Recognize the signs and symptoms of trauma in oneself and in their colleagues;
- Respond to the pervasiveness of trauma by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and
- Actively resist re-traumatization by fostering a work environment that does not compromise the health, safety, or well-being of its workers.¹

Why is Trauma-Informed Supervision Needed?

- ! Almost 1 in 2 women and more than 2 in 5 men reported experiencing contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking victimization by an intimate partner at some point in their lifetime.²
 - About 1 in 2 women and 1 in 4 men report experiencing unwanted sexual contact in their lifetime.³
 - Nearly 1 in 3 women and 1 in 6 men were stalked during their lifetime.⁴
 - 1 in 3 women and 1 in 9 men report being harassed in a public place at some point in their lifetime.⁵

Domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and sexual harassment (DVSASSH) are traumatic events that can have lifelong impacts on those who are harmed (referred to as “survivors” throughout this curriculum”). Although the likelihood of someone experiencing at least one of these forms of violence is high, social and cultural stigma can make it difficult or even unsafe for survivors to speak openly about their experiences, particularly in the workplace.

For example, survivors may live with chronic pain, struggle to focus on their work, or be emotionally distressed, all of which could negatively impact their work performance. Even if they need support, survivors in the workplace may choose not to disclose their struggles to their employer for various reasons. For example, a survivor may fear that disclosing their experiences of domestic violence at home may cause their employer to treat them differently. Or an employee might not report a colleague who is sexually harassing them because they fear their employer won’t believe them or will blame them. Survivors can be incredibly resilient in navigating their trauma, but their resilience and healing can be hindered without proper support in the workplace.

This is where supervisors play an important role. A study that measured social supports from different domains and their effects on worker health and well-being found that “lack of supervisor support was almost consistently found to have the strongest negative effect or impact of all studied factors on both health and well-being at work.”⁶

“Being unable to count on the support of a direct supervisor in case of problems at work and even at home was shown to involve a substantially increased risk of poor health and work-related outcomes.”⁷

Insufficient support from a supervisor can result in varied physical and emotional impacts for employees including emotional exhaustion, burnout, anxiety, and physical pain. Ongoing lack of support can also drive employee turnover. When a worker experiences traumatic events at home or at work, an unsupportive supervisor can make the experience significantly worse.

A good supervisor, however, can make a world of difference. Supervisors who both understand trauma and are skilled in providing social support to their supervisees positively contribute to the health and wellbeing of their

supervisees, colleagues, and their organization at large. This curriculum offers a place to start gaining that knowledge and practicing those skills.

At the [Workplaces Respond Resource Center](#), we believe that domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and sexual harassment (DVSASSH) are workplace issues. If we focus on supporting the safety and wellbeing of workers by understanding the manifestations of violence and trauma, implementing trauma-informed policies and practices, and educating employees to promote awareness and prevention, workplaces can create safer and more productive work environments in which all workers can thrive.

Considerations:

Audience: Employers can provide this training to all staff who will be supervising one or more employees, volunteers, interns, or part-time employees.

Modality: This curriculum is intended for a virtual training session. Online training sessions are not always the most desirable nor accessible method for learning (due to no in-person interaction, participants with limited internet access, and varying levels of technology literacy, potential for participants to disengage or be distracted, etc.). However, when organizations have remote workers, limited capacity or resources for hosting in person events, and require more flexibility for trainers and participants, virtual training may be the only option. Agencies that prefer in person learning opportunities should consider these when writing grants and preparing budgets.

Facilitation: It is not expected nor realistic for internal staff, such as Human Resources or a hiring committee, to be experts on these topics or in training facilitation. We recommend that this training be fully facilitated by trainers from an external agency, such as a local anti-domestic violence agency or sexual assault service provider, or co-facilitated by an external expert and an internal staff member. If partnering with or hiring expert facilitators is not possible, this curriculum provides guidance and educational resources that any employer can use to provide an overview of trauma-informed supervision.

Development: As with all training, the goals, delivery, and environment of the training should be customized to your specific organization and employees. It

should meet the needs that have been identified specifically for your workers and workplace, and/or set the tone for how employees are expected to be. It should also be updated and revised to fit your organization's changing needs. The following curriculum provides content you can use to inspire the creation of your organization's own Trauma-Informed Supervision training. *For adapting and creating your own training, turn to the brief curriculum development toolkit in the Appendix.*

Example Curriculum

Logistics

Location:	Virtual/Zoom
Time:	90 minutes with 5-10 minute breaks
Audience:	Cohort of newly hired employees
Accompanying handouts:	A digital and printable copy of any visuals used (such as PowerPoint slides), company policy(ies), and resources listed below.
Preparation:	Email participants ahead of the session with the above handouts, instructions for accessing the virtual platform and for using its accessibility features. Note any documents they should read or work they should complete prior to attending the session. Assigning pre-work improves participant learning.
Guides:	For a list of activities to incorporate into your training, download Endurance Learning's Training Activity Cookbook .

Training Outline

1 Introduction [10 minutes]

- **Technical Logistics** - Describe how to use Zoom/virtual platform for individuals who may not know how to. Explain accessibility features, such as interpretation, closed captions, and chat features.
- **Icebreaker** - Facilitators introduce themselves and their organization(s), then allow participants to introduce themselves as well. Start the session with an **icebreaker activity** to engage participants early on.
- **Agenda** - Include the timeline for the training session, highlighting the topics, activities, and when breaks will be offered.
- **Learning Objectives** - Introduce the purpose, motivation, and basic goals of the training. Describe what knowledge and/or skills participants will leave the training with.
- **Resources** - Share hotline numbers and local support agencies should anyone be activated by the content and want to speak with a confidential advocate.

2 Context [15 minutes]

- **Explain why this training matters:**
 - Considering the prevalence of DVSASSH, there is a high likelihood that the person you supervise has a history of violence victimization or perpetration.
 - Someone you supervise may experience DVSASSH or perpetrate DVSASSH while working at your organization.
 - Note: Survivors are often driven to victim advocacy organizations; if you are in this field, you are likely to supervise employee(s) who are survivors.
- **Play video for context:** [DV and the Workplace](#)

Facilitate an **Anchor Activity** to get participants bought into the topic of this training. How does it relate to their lived experience?

Examples:

**Poll guided visualization, storytelling,
virtual whiteboard with anonymous sticky notes**

Training Outline, cont.

3 Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, Stalking, and Sexual Harassment (DVSASSH) [15 minutes]

- **Define domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking (DVSASSH):**
 - Refer to the following definitions, as well as those in your state:
DVSAS: [Office on Violence Against Women \(OVW\) Focus Areas](#)
SH: [Enforcement Guidance on Harassment in the Workplace](#)
 - Include definitions for physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, economic abuse, psychological abuse, & technological abuse: [OVW | Domestic Violence](#)
 - Define other terms that participants need to know or have a shared understanding of before proceeding with the training such as “victim” vs “survivor.” Allow time for clarifying questions.
 - Note that legal definitions do not always encompass violent behaviors in their entirety. An individual’s experience of violence or assault is valid and may be traumatizing even if it does not match the definitions listed above or in state laws.
- **Define trauma:**
 - Trauma is a normal response to abnormal experiences.⁸ Facilitators can choose to discuss trauma and its impacts using a variety of frameworks:
 - Types of trauma: Direct, Indirect, Complex, Vicarious, Collective, Historical, Intergenerational, etc.
 - Adverse Childhood Experiences:
 - About 64% of adults in the United States reported they had experienced at least one type of [adverse childhood experience](#) before age 18.⁹ Adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood.¹⁰
 - Neurobiology and trauma: [Trauma and the Brain](#); [The Brain\(s\), The Body, & Flashbacks](#)
 - The 4 F’s of Trauma (Fight, Flight, Freeze, Fawn):
 - Fight-or-flight is an active defense response where in a moment of crisis you fight or flee. Freezing is fight-or-flight on hold, where you prepare to protect yourself. The fawn response, a term coined by therapist Pete Walker, describes (often unconscious) behavior that aims to please, appease, and pacify the threat in an effort to keep yourself safe from further harm.

Training Outline, cont.

- [Fight, Flight, or Freeze: How We Respond to Threats](#)
- [The Beginner's Guide to Trauma Responses](#)

Facilitate an activity or a quiz to assess what participants have just learned thus far. Can they summarize their knowledge? Can they accurately recall and recite each definition?

Examples:

True or false quiz, matching game

4 Break [5 minutes]

5 Workplace Impacts [15 minutes]

- Describe how trauma responses can show up in the workplace and how they may impact a worker, coworker, employer, organization or others (clients/customers).
- Discuss this while noting that all individuals who experience trauma have different symptoms, and that we cannot assume what is and is not a trauma response. The intent is to recognize that due to the prevalence of trauma, supporting an employee looks like checking about their behavior rather than making assumptions, writing them off, or spreading rumors.
- **Common effects of trauma** - List the emotional, cognitive, behavioral, physical, spiritual, societal effects of trauma and how they might impact an employee. (Example: [Common Responses to High Stress and/or Trauma](#))

Rather than delivering this information via lecture, facilitate a **Content Activity**. This will progress participant learning and can also allow space for folks with lived experience to share their story with participants.

Why not lecture?

Solely providing information to participants via a lecture does not allow participants to be actively engaged in their learning. They may disengage

Training Outline, cont.

or begin to multitask if the lecture is monotonous, text-heavy or wordy, slow-paced, uses jargon, or – frankly – is just boring. To execute a lecture effectively, spend no more than 10 minutes lecturing, use concrete examples or real-life anecdotes so participants can see how it applies to their lives and their work, and practice ahead of time to assure content is delivered clearly and concisely.

Examples:

- show a video accompanied with small-group discussion questions, (for example, view or use our [“Domestic Violence and the Workplace” video](#) and its accompanied [Discussion Guide](#))
- find an article or create a case study about trauma’s impact on an individual in your industry,
- invite someone with lived experience to tell their story,
- invite a panel of speakers or experts on the topic to share their insights and answer questions

6 Effective Supervision [15 minutes]

- [Explain the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s \(SAMHSA\) four R’s of a Trauma Informed Approach:](#) ¹¹
 - [Realize](#)
 - [Recognize](#)
 - [Respond](#)
 - [Resist Re-traumatization](#)
- [Consider the CUES method:](#)
 - [CUES](#) is an evidence-based intervention for responding to intimate partner violence in healthcare settings. CUES uses a model – Confidentiality, Universal Education & Empowerment, and Support – that does not rely on nor encourage someone who is experiencing abuse to disclose the details of what is happening or has happened to them in order to receive care. Workplaces can adapt the CUES method by providing all employees with information and support related to DVSASSH. A universal education approach also limits supervisors from making assumptions about who can or can’t be a victim of DVSASSH and imposing their biases or stereotypes on their colleagues.

Training Outline, cont.

Facilitate an [Application Activity](#) where participants can apply what they have learned. This is the most important part of the training. Allow participants to spend time working through the activity. It is also important to offer one or more consecutive training sessions on this topic to encourage more application of the material.

Examples:

- Split participants into virtual breakout groups to analyze a case study in which a supervisor did or did not respond to an employee survivor with trauma-informed principles, and ask them to identify with their group what the supervisor did right or what they did wrong
- Role play: ask participants to partner up in virtual breakout groups with one other person and practice implementing [the CUES method](#) or another trauma-informed approach, with one person as the supervisor and the other as the supervisee. Debrief the activity then have them reverse roles to practice and debrief again.
- Ask participants to brainstorm ways they have in the past or how they would in the future implement the four R's of a trauma-informed approach (listed above). Use a virtual whiteboard to collect and organize their responses. Debrief the responses with the group. For extra impact, invite participants to document when they have implemented the approach and share their experience at a scheduled consecutive training session or booster session.

Resources to share with learners:

- [Guide for Supervisors](#)
- [Federal Supervisors Supporting Survivors of Domestic Violence](#)
- [Supervisors Can Make A Difference video](#)



7 How to Care for Yourself as a Supervisor [10 minutes]

Vicarious trauma is trauma that can occur in response to hearing disturbing stories of someone else's trauma or observing traumatic events. People who work in helping professions or as first responders often experience vicarious

Training Outline, cont.

trauma. Supervisors may also experience vicarious trauma if they are hearing stories of violence from their supervisees and witnessing the impact the violence had on them. It may be especially difficult for a supervisor to support a survivor of DVSASSH if the supervisor is a survivor, too. Discuss how personal trauma and vicarious trauma may intersect and impact employees in a supervisory role.

Facilitate [Future Activity](#) where participants can determine how they will use the knowledge and skills they learned in the training moving forward. What steps will they take to care for themselves and others, or to prevent vicarious trauma?

Examples:

self-reflection, action planning, call to action, large group debrief

Resources to share with learners:

- [Self-Care Interactive Tool](#)
- [Resilience for Advocates through Foundational Training](#)



8 Closing [5 minutes]

- **[Conduct an evaluation:](#)** Evaluations should assess any data that you need to know to enhance the training in the future and improve employee knowledge and skills. This may include asking the participants if the training met their needs, if they learned what they set out to learn, and if they enjoyed it. Avoid gathering data that you do not need or will not use.
- **[Leave time for Q&A:](#)** Answer participant questions.
- **[Share resources.](#)**

Facilitate a closing activity in order to obtain evaluative data. You can also choose to do a survey evaluation that participants can fill out after the session.

References

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11. [1]

Curriculum Development Process

Appendix

PRIOR TO DEVELOPMENT:

1. **Identify your need:** What is the problem you are trying to solve with education?
 - a. Do you have data to support that this is a need? / Do you have data that has identified this problem?
 - b. Have employees requested this support by way of training? (Is a training the best option to meet the need, or just the “easiest?”). Consider what it is that would help employees meet the identified need (knowledge, skills, time, resources, etc.) and if training will be the most appropriate solution.
2. **Identify your audience:** Who is this training for? How many people will be invited and expected to attend?
 - a. If you have a multilingual staff, review [Eleven Steps for Designing a Multilingual Accessible Education Program](#).
3. **Identify your facilitators:** Who has the expertise to deliver this content? Who can deliver exceptional training?
 - a. If you want to enhance your public speaking skills, review tips for [Moving Through the Anxiety to Deliver an Impactful Speech](#)
4. **Identify your location:** Will the training be offered in person or virtually?
 - a. For in person events, consider the process of getting to the event (is there access to parking or public transportation?), the accessibility of the space (are there ramps and elevators? Is it well lit? If the event is during a mealtime, can employees pack and store meals?), time of the event (is it during rush hour or another inconvenient time?), and costs to participants (parking meters, tolls, etc.) as well as costs to the organization (reserving a space, supplying meals, purchasing materials, etc.)
 - b. For online training, consider whether employees have access to stable internet, employee knowledge of the virtual platform and any necessary troubleshooting, confidentiality concerns (if they are attending the training from a space where others can hear what is being said), and whether the virtual platform can host all of the participants and features necessary to carry out the event.
 - i. For guidance, review [Dealing with Virtual Facilitation Challenges](#).

STEP 1: DEVELOP LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Define your goals and objectives. What do you want employees to be able to know (knowledge), think (attitudes), and do (skills) upon participating in the training?

Resources for writing learning objectives:

- [Using Bloom's Taxonomy to Write Effective Learning Objectives](#)
- [A.B.C.D. of Learning Objectives](#)
- [How to Write Well-Defined Learning Objectives](#)



Learning objectives also serve as a way to be transparent and to hold the facilitators accountable; employees should learn exactly what you told them they would learn.

STEP 2: ASSESSMENT & EVALUATION

After developing learning objectives, create a rubric to measure the success of the training.

It is essential to evaluate how effective your training is so afterward you can understand if you achieved the learning objectives. How will you know if the learners have understood what you're trying to teach? How will you know the training was successful?

Assessments can be implemented before, during, and after the training(s), through surveys, quizzes, activities, observations, self-reports, etc.

Review [Evaluate Training: Measuring Effectiveness](#) to learn more about assessment and evaluation.

STEP 3: DEVELOP CONTENT

Use your learning objectives Step 1 to design your training content. Only include information and activities that support your learning objectives.

If your training must be developed internally, read up on how to create a curriculum that is effective and meets your audience's needs:

- [The Accidental Educator's Curriculum Writing Toolkit](#)
- [10 Ways To Organize Instructional Content](#)

Training should be interactive and engaging for the best learning outcomes. Incorporate activities to help employees understand and apply what they learn. Lectures should not exceed 15 minutes at a time. Break up lectures with discussions, stories, scenarios, videos, case studies, etc.

- Make sure all employees can participate in activities if they choose to, including individuals with physical disabilities, cognitive disabilities, and those whom English is not their preferred language.
 - Consider accessibility prior to developing content, rather than waiting until after the training has been finalized to make changes.

Resources for developing engaging activities:

- [Refer to Endurance Learning's Training Activity Cookbook](#)
- [Inclusive and Equitable Teaching](#)
- [WCAG & Neurodiversity: Inclusive Digital Experiences](#)
- [Designing Accessible Resources for People with Disabilities and Deaf People](#)



STEP 4: SCHEDULE THE SESSION(S)

Setting

Consider what setting the training will be offered in. Is it during work hours? During a standing meeting? Will it be scheduled at a busy point in the year where employees have other deliverables to meet?

*Recommendation: Offer the training during onboarding or shortly after a new employee joins the organization. Consider a cohort style where several new employees attend the session together.

Communication

Provide advanced notice of at least 2-4 weeks for invited employees to plan to attend. More notice may be required for in-person events.

Consider any materials participants should read or forms they should complete before the session. Provide advance notice and guidance on when and why to complete any pre-session tasks.

Let participants know what to expect during the session ahead of time. Include whether the training will be a series (recommended) or a one-time session. Include break times as well so employees can plan their day accordingly.

STEP 5. INCENTIVES

You are more likely to get participants in a training session if they are incentivized. How will you motivate employees to attend and participate in the session?

Common incentives:

- A free meal (catered breakfast or lunch)
- Gift cards / raffle prizes
- Certificate of completion, continuing education credits (CEUs)
- Networking opportunities
- Certification (for example, once they complete the training series they can facilitate the training for future employees)
- Invitation to a celebratory gathering/activity during the work day, or the option to leave early on a workday

STEP 6: CONTINUATION

Offer a booster session on the same topic with additional opportunities for practice and skill-building to help employees re-learn and re-engage with the training material. This will ensure learning objectives are met long term. Most information changes over time, so offering supplemental training sessions to educate employees on new research, strategies, and insights will help them improve their work related to the training content.

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