



**WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:** This table provides examples of how you can reframe challenging behaviors through a trauma lens. The examples in the table are some of the most frequently reported in TIO trainings and include challenging behaviors from service recipients and staff. It also includes challenging environmental features. This table was compiled by TIO social work interns and can be used as a guide to creating your own table based on common experiences in your work. (TIO, 2016)

### TRAUMA LENS EXERCISE

Challenging event SERVICE RECIPIENT	Non-trauma informed response	Trauma-related explanation / Trauma Education Statement	Strategies
Service users not showing up for appointments, not returning calls, arriving late	Service user is avoidant, lazy, irresponsible, doesn't care about their treatment, is disrespectful	<p>What we know about trauma is that survivors frequently experience sleep disturbances and hyperarousal - this can mean that keeping track of appointments or attending early morning appointments may be difficult.</p> <p>What we know about trauma is that many survivors use avoidant coping mechanisms such as numbing, sleeping, or not showing up to reduce the impact of re-traumatization, particularly when they've experienced trauma from our service system.</p>	<p>Provide as much choice as possible about when, where, how often, and how long meetings or appointments take place.</p> <p>Ask what would be helpful in terms of meeting reminders (examples: providing a calendar/notebook, calling or sending a reminder text or email).</p> <p>Ask if the time of the appointment or past negative experiences are impacting meeting attendance. If so, problem solve together around possible options.</p>
Service user showing aggressive behavior, yelling, displaying anger	Service user is dangerous, violent, aggressive, has anger management issues, defiant, difficult, unwilling to follow program rules/policies	<p>What we know about trauma is often times regulating emotions may be compromised once a survivor has been triggered.</p> <p>Being activated can affect a person's cognitive ability to take in information which can lead to experiences of feeling helpless, unsafe, or out of control.</p> <p>Engaging in aggressive behavior may have been an effective way to protect themselves from painful experiences in the past.</p>	<p>Ask if they'd like to move to a more private or quiet space.</p> <p>Conduct an environmental assessment of your organization- look for sounds, smells, space, seating, signage, rules, policies, etc. that might be triggering. Ask service users to do the same with you, and use their feedback to make changes.</p> <p>Review intake or early engagement procedures to see what may cause triggers, and solicit feedback from service users during the process.</p> <p>Be explicit, clear, and transparent about the conditions you and the service user are experiencing; offer alternative options.</p>

<p>Service user repeating requests, asking multiple staff members for the same services/resources</p>	<p>Service user is lying, manipulative, splitting staff, triangulating, acting entitled, working the system</p>	<p>What we know about trauma is that ambiguity can often heighten feelings of anxiety, mistrust, and confusion for survivors - people may keep asking for what they need until they get a direct answer or get their needs met in that moment.</p> <p>What we know about trauma is that survivors have often had to work very hard to get their needs met or to have their voices heard in the past.</p> <p>What we know about trauma is that historical and collective experiences with systems impact current engagement practices.</p>	<p>Be transparent and consistent about what the agency does/does not offer in terms of client resources.</p> <p>Provide clear information and adequate training to staff regarding agency policies and procedures to reduce miscommunications.</p> <p>Provide accurate information about other community resources so both staff and service users know alternate options.</p> <p>Use a trauma lens to remind yourself and co-workers why someone may be in a situation where they may need to exhibit these behaviors.</p> <p>Ask service users about their experiences with your organization - find out what they need to know about the system, and connect them to resources as needed.</p>
<p><b>Challenging behavior/event</b> <b>SERVICE PROVIDER</b></p>	<p><b>Non-trauma informed response</b></p>	<p><b>Trauma-related explanation / Trauma Education Statement</b></p>	<p><b>Strategies - workplace and workforce</b></p>
<p>Service provider displaying mood swings, defensiveness, outbursts, blaming others</p>	<p>Not a team player, unprofessional, snappy, needs medication, difficult to work with, bossy, control freak</p>	<p>Often time's service providers are trauma survivors themselves or have experienced vicarious trauma due to the nature of their work - this can impact their ability to regulate emotions, process difficult situations, or cope with stress.</p> <p>Organizations can sometimes create conditions/dynamics similar to those which service users have experienced. This can lead to experiences of burn out, vicarious trauma, and stress.</p>	<p>Provide ongoing trainings on vicarious trauma, secondary traumatic stress, and compassion fatigue.</p> <p>Provide opportunities for regular and predictable peer support and supervision.</p> <p>Be creative and flexible about staffs' ability to vary their work or caseloads.</p> <p>Be aware of where parallel process might be happening - are there dynamics among co-workers and leadership that mirror the issue you're trying to work to help?</p> <p>Take workforce wellness seriously - ask staff what they need to feel safe both in and outside of work and conduct an organizational assessment to learn how this can be accomplished.</p>

Challenging environmental features	Non-trauma informed response	Trauma-related explanation / Trauma Education Statement	Strategies
<p>Chairs in the lobby too close together, location of building, locked doors that slam or require buzzes to get through.</p>	<p>Limited agency budgets, limited space, old/used furniture is the norm, our décor has nothing to do with this, building sites can't be controlled, doors locked for safety of staff.</p>	<p>What we know about trauma is that experiences of hypervigilance can cause increased sensitivity to environmental factors that others may not even notice (such as sounds, lighting, style of chairs, etc.) - locked or buzzing doors can remind those with incarceration histories of jail/prison; survival responses may kick in.</p> <p>Services may be in a location, building, or part of town that may be triggering to service users or may be the very site of past, generational, or collective trauma.</p> <p>What we know about trauma is that being in close proximity to others can be re-traumatizing or can cause stress or discomfort, especially if they have to share space with their perpetrator.</p>	<p>Work with service users to identify environmental triggers within the organization and adjust accordingly.</p> <p>Discuss environmental factors that cannot be controlled (preferably before their visit) so people know what to expect.</p> <p>Ensure people have adequate personal space, direct access to exits, and know where to find important facilities within the building (bathroom, water fountain, etc.)</p> <p>Ask what you need to know about the neighborhood, its history, and the placement of your building / agency within it.</p> <p>Ask what you need to know about peoples' experiences with your space historically or generationally.</p>