

# What is Trauma and How to Build a Trauma-Informed Workplace

**What is trauma?** Trauma is a level of stress that is so intense that it is overwhelming to manage, and results in a profound sense of:

- Loss of control
- Vulnerability
- Immobilization

**70%**  
**OF ADULTS**

in the U.S. have experienced a traumatic event at least once in their lives.

- National Council for Behavioral Health

Individuals and employees who have survived trauma often experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD) – a type of anxiety which can include startle reactions, flashbacks, and fears related to the traumatic event.

**What is a trauma-informed workplace?** Organizations that utilize a trauma-informed approach promote the understanding of how traumatic experiences impact our lives. Trauma can include exposure to violence, suffering abuse, living through natural disasters, military combat, or childhood adversity. In the U.S., statistics show that five in 10 women and six in 10 men have experienced trauma in their lives.

Trauma-informed organizations understand that people are impacted by events and reactions can be impossible to ignore, whether we know of them or not. As such, a safe and supportive environment is optimal for employees to ensure they can bring their full-self to work.

**The five main components of understanding and handling situations in the workplace as a Trauma-Informed Workplace are:**

- Safety – physical, emotional, and verbal
- Trustworthiness and transparency – in communications and relationships
- Peer support
- Collaboration and mutuality
- Empowerment, voice, and choice

Adopting this approach is an ongoing process that requires long-term attention, awareness, and sensitivity in order to create true cultural shifts at an organizational level. Your role as a leader, supervisor, or co-worker is not to uncover or ask about traumatic events, but rather to know that people around us may be suffering and the best way to provide a sense of control and empowerment to all is to contribute to a supportive workplace.