

# Trauma-Informed Practice for Military Culture Change

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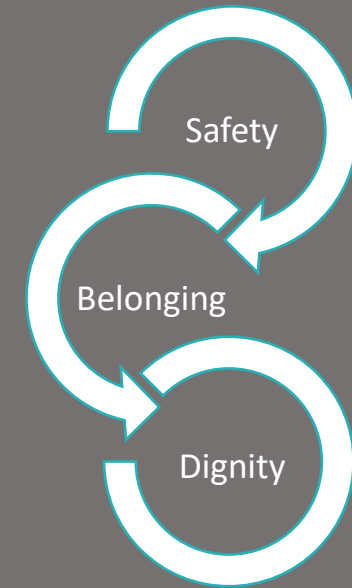
## What is trauma-informed practice (TIP)?

Moves beyond individualizing and pathologizing trauma with a person-centred approach.<sup>1</sup>

Emphasizes mutual responsibility for addressing root causes of trauma by transforming harmful structures.<sup>2</sup>

Frames trauma not as a personal failure but as a systems failure, recognizing social, relational, and historical contexts.<sup>1</sup>

Focuses on empowerment and choice in the process of transformation/healing, seeks collaboration during treatment.<sup>3</sup>



TIP aims to re-establish an individual's feelings of safety, belonging, and dignity – as these external connections are harmed by traumatic experiences.<sup>4</sup>

## Benefits of TIP for Transforming Military Cultures

- Provides restorative engagement and collaboration opportunities for organizations supporting serving members and veterans.<sup>3</sup>
- Places people at the centre of the work, by checking in about capacity, practicing humility, and acknowledging when leaders have limited capacity.<sup>1-2</sup>
- Addresses lack of compassionate response and fear of reprisal in cases of military sexual trauma (MST) and other harm. Employs peer support groups to help dismantle harmful hierarchies.<sup>3-5</sup>
- Acknowledges MST and its associated health impacts as an organization-wide responsibility.<sup>5</sup>

## Further Benefits of TIP for Transforming Military Cultures

- Explores moral injury, which acknowledges the importance of context when examining trauma and military cultures. <sup>1-3</sup>
- Avoids medicalizing moral injury and PTSD in members and veterans. Positions trauma as an entry point into candid and safe conversations surrounding interventions tailored to each individual.<sup>5</sup>
- Focuses on structural change rather than putting the onus on individuals as unable to cope. <sup>3</sup>
- Shifts the culture of the CAF to be mutually supportive through trauma awareness, emphasizing safety for members and providing opportunities to rebuild personal agency and access strengths-based care.<sup>5</sup>
- Engages with systems of oppression and their existence within CAF culture to address how belonging is afforded to CAF members through exclusion of other groups.<sup>1</sup>

### What are some of the challenges?

Difficult to develop a trauma-informed force when asked to engage in violent operations. <sup>1</sup>

Need to consider how Canadian society envisions the military roles and how TIP can inform the related training.

Existing policies often do not examine the micro and macro levels simultaneously, but effective change is both top-down and bottom-up. <sup>1</sup>

TIP requires communication and collaboration between those working at different levels of the organization.

Need for increased avenues for open and critical conversations regarding military culture, without fear of reprisal or harm, such as in peer support groups. <sup>1</sup>

As a foundational pillar of TIP, peer support helps address the hierarchical structure of many civilian and military organizations.

### References

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2. Eichler, M., George, T., & Taber, N. (2023). The Arbour report and beyond. *Canadian Military Journal*, 23(2), 35– 44. <http://www.journal.forces.gc.ca/cmj-article-en232page35.html>
3. Currier, J. M. et al. (2017). Applying trauma-informed care to community-based mental health services for military veterans. *Best Practices in Mental Health*, 13(1), 47-65.
4. Haines, S. (2019). *The politics of trauma: Somatics, healing and social justice*. North Atlantic Books.
5. Kelly, U. et al. (2014). Trauma-informed care: Keeping mental health settings safe for veterans. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 35, 413-419.

This resource builds on the TMC Webinar, *Trauma-Informed Practice for Military Culture Change*. We thank our panelists, Ruth Stanley-Aikens, John Whelan, Tammy George, and Ash Grover. Watch the recording: <https://youtu.be/Azsd6BsYsII?si=71Dg3PM3ogduVEM4>