



Trauma-Aware Port Phillip Accessible Toolkit

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City of Port Phillip

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Wominjeka. Council respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the Kulin Nation. We acknowledge their legacy and spiritual connection to the land and waterways across the City of Port Phillip and pay our heartfelt respect to their Elders, past, present, and emerging.

Diversity

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National Relay Service

If you are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment, you can phone us through the National Relay Service (NRS):

TTY users, dial 133677, ask for 03 9209 6777

Voice Relay users, phone 1300 555 727,

then ask for 03 9209 6777.

relayservice.gov.au



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Cover:

Mural by Juzpop. Photo by Yoshi Yanagita.

About the artist:

Juzpop (Justine Millsom) is a Naarm /Melbourne-based artist known for her bold, surreal imagery that merges delicate realism with dreamlike abstraction. Her work explores transformation, identity, and the emotional landscapes of growth—often centering women as symbols of strength, evolution, and self-discovery.

Why Trauma-Aware Port Phillip?

Trauma-Aware Port Phillip (TAPP) is a community-initiated, evidence-informed project designed to strengthen resilience and reduce the impact of trauma and shame in our community. We believe that being trauma-aware is the first step to creating a safer, more inclusive Port Phillip.

TAPP aims to:

- Show the diverse ways trauma shows up in our lives.
- Reduce stigma, judgement and shame in our community.
- Help our community work together better.

Be mindful of triggers: being trauma-aware starts with ourselves and this material can be difficult. So, check in with yourself and take space when you need.

Understanding trauma

Trauma happens when an event, or events, overwhelms us. This makes it hard to manage our emotions, thoughts, and behaviours. This can change how we feel inside, our relationships, and how we connect with our community.

The 3 E's of trauma

Event: the “what happened”. This could happen to us or someone close to us, such as to a family member or a friend, or be witnessed by us.

Experience: the way we see, feel, process and understand the event.

Effect: how our bodies and brains cope with the experience and try to keep us safe.

Adverse childhood experiences are stressful or harmful events that happen when we are young. They include physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, family violence, drugs and/or alcohol abuse, mental health issues in the family, loss of a parent due to separation or divorce, loss due to a death, family member in incarceration (prison).

Prevalence of trauma

- Around 75% of Australians have experienced at least one traumatic event in their lifetime.
- About 1 in 4 Australians live with long-term effects of complex trauma.
- About 1 in 10 Australians experience PTSD in their lifetime.

Prevalence of adverse childhood experiences

- At least 72% of Australians have experienced one adverse childhood experience.
- About 39.6% of Australians have been exposed to family violence in their childhood.
- About 28.5% of Australians have experienced sexual abuse in their childhood.

Within our community, different groups have different experiences and rates of trauma. Among vulnerable groups in our community rates of trauma tend to be higher.

Types of trauma are grouped depending on the event, how often it happened, how many people were impacted, whether the event happened to you or was heard by you. Even within the same type, effects and how long they last vary as much as people do.

How trauma affects our bodies and brains

When we feel safe and calm, we can connect with others and have some control over our thoughts and actions. When our bodies detect the possibility of a threat, connecting and controlling our thoughts and actions can be more difficult. Knowing how our bodies tell us we are unsafe and how they try to protect us can help us manage this.

Our bodies make our heart rate and breathing faster when it thinks there is a possibility of a threat. This tells our brains we are not safe and to prepare.

Our brains alert system turns on when we experience a threat, such as stress or trauma. This turns off the learning, memory, reasoning and impulse control parts of our brain. This makes it hard to socialise or think rationally when this happens.

If we notice our heart rate and breathing are getting quicker, we can try to calm ourselves. Activities like noticing our breathing, calmly talking with friends or family, or calming movements can help. If our heartrate and breathing are very fast, our bodies enter survival mode to keep us safe.

Stage one: flight or fight. This can look like anxiety, aggression or irritability.

Stage two: freeze. This can look like zoning out, feeling numb, withdrawing or feeling depressed.

Trauma can change our brains to make this process bigger and more sensitive. Meaning our reactions might be quicker and more powerful during smaller events. This can mean that we are in an anxious state even when we are safe.

The ways we cope with trauma can look like unsociable or harmful behaviours. Such as alcohol or substance use, self-inflicted harm, hostility or isolation. This leads to people who have experienced trauma being overrepresented in prisons, juvenile detention, child welfare and more. Punishment can tell our bodies that we are not safe. Being unsafe can increase our trauma responses. Changing our behaviour is possible but it is difficult to do alone and is easier when we feel safe in and supported by our community.

Resilience is our ability to come back to ourselves after an adverse, stressful, or traumatic experience. Resilience comes from supportive relationships and environments, including support from family and friends, and feeling safe and supported in our community.

Toward a trauma-informed Port Phillip

Being trauma-informed means putting safety and wellbeing first. It means we take steps to understand trauma, how common it is and its impact. We notice and avoid triggering ourselves and

others. We work together collaboratively so that we feel in control of our own lives. We focus on each other's strengths and being kind and honest.

TAPP values: empathy, safety, dignity, mutual support and cultural safety.

Trauma-aware: the first step. We're learning about trauma, how common it is, how it changes our brains and bodies, and how we cope.

Trauma-sensitive: we are noticing when we might accidentally make our or others' lives harder.

Trauma-responsive: we are learning how to better support ourselves and others.

Trauma-informed: we actively try to support ourselves and others and avoid making others' lives harder. Being trauma-informed means we engage in safe, respectful, and empowering ways. We make sure communication is respectful, clear and understood. We focus on strengths and resilience and we're mindful of triggers.

The 4 Rs of trauma-informed:

- **Realise** how common and impactful trauma is and that healing is possible.
- **Recognise** the signs and symptoms of trauma within ourselves and our community.
- **Respond** by changing the ways we communicate and our practices.
- **Resist** triggering, harming or making others' lives harder.

Understanding shame

Trauma can cause chronic shame. This can happen because of self-blame, labels such as victim, or feeling damaged. Chronic shame means always feeling, or expecting, that others will judge us. Chronic shame can make us feel hopeless or like we are failures. This can create such strong feelings that we enter fight, flight or freeze.

The 3 As of shame sensitivity: acknowledge shame, avoid shaming, address shame

A Trauma-Aware Port Phillip workforce

Trauma can enter work environments through staff's own traumas, workplace stressors or working with people in distressing situations.

Workplace stressors include long or inflexible hours, large or unpredictable workloads, unclear roles or responsibilities. Feeling unsupported or unsafe at work means our bodies will absorb more stress. Feeling safe and supported, we are more likely to be engaged, effective and supportive.

Signs of workplace trauma include high staff turnover, low morale or low productivity.

Engaging with distressing life stories can lead to secondary trauma, vicarious trauma, burnout, or compassion fatigue. Especially if we are unsupported at work.

Self-care can increase our ability to handle stress and maintain our wellbeing. Self-care includes checking-in, self-reflection, self-regulation, self-care activities, and clear boundaries.

