

## Root of The Matter: Trauma-Informed Care

### CDHBC Dental Hygiene Advisors

Dental hygienists in BC have a professional and ethical obligation to provide safe, competent, and appropriate care to all clients without prejudice or discrimination. The [CDHBC Code of Ethics](#) provides overarching principles for the dental hygienist to apply during the provision of care. Clients must be treated with respect for their individual needs and values, and dental hygienists must hold paramount the health and welfare of those served professionally. Dental hygienists work closely with clients, both in physical space and through communication and collaboration. However, they may not always be aware of an individual history of trauma that a client has experienced. It is not necessary to know the details of past trauma that has occurred, but rather to provide care that does not inadvertently re-traumatize the client. Due to this, it is important for dental hygienists to develop the knowledge and skills to incorporate a trauma-informed care (TIC) approach in practice. This article provides an overview of the principles of trauma-informed care. For many, this may be the beginning of understanding this important aspect of care. The College encourages all registrants to complete further learning related to TIC, for example: [Alberta Health Services Trauma Informed Care Modules](#).

**Trauma** is defined as experiences that overwhelm an individual's capacity to cope.<sup>1</sup> TIC understands and considers trauma and promotes an environment of healing and recovery to prevent practices and services that may re-traumatize a client.<sup>2,3</sup> This approach emphasizes understanding, respect, and appropriate responses to the effects of trauma at all levels, and assumes an individual is more likely than not to have a history of trauma.<sup>2</sup>

CDHBC has adopted five guiding principles of trauma-informed care (Figure 1). These principles build on the Code of Ethics, while including a focus on cultural safety and humility along with gender diversity and inclusion. These principles provide a framework to assist in making decisions with a trauma-informed care approach.

Trauma affects an individual on numerous levels from their sense of self, sense of others, and their beliefs about the world; these beliefs can directly impact an individual's ability or motivation to connect with and utilize support services.<sup>1,2</sup> Being aware of the signs and symptoms of trauma can help minimize situations that may re-traumatize the client. Re-traumatization can happen in any situation or environment that resembles an individual's trauma either literally or symbolically. This could then trigger difficult feelings and reactions associated with the original trauma: specific smells, sounds, or types of interactions can cause re-traumatization.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 1

Table 1 provides a definition of each principle and a few examples of how these might be applied in dental hygiene practice.

TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE IN DENTAL HYGIENE PRACTICE <sup>2, 3, 4</sup>		
PRINCIPLE	DEFINITION	DENTAL HYGIENE PRACTICE EXAMPLE
<b>Safety</b>	Creating an environment that is physically and emotionally safe.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect privacy</li> <li>• Display a Pride flag</li> </ul>
<b>Choice</b>	Ensuring each client has the autonomy and control to make an informed choice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask permission before performing a procedure</li> <li>• Emphasize the client has a choice</li> </ul>
<b>Collaboration</b>	Working together with each client, considering their input, and sharing in the decision making.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask the client their pronouns if trust has been built</li> <li>• Include client in goal setting for care plan</li> <li>• Ask preferences for oral self care options</li> <li>• Allow client to be involved with decision rather than telling them what might be best</li> </ul>
<b>Trust</b>	Maintaining professional boundaries and being respectful and non-judgmental.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respond in a calm and clear manner with consistent messaging</li> <li>• Explain what you are about to do before you start</li> </ul>
<b>Empowerment</b>	Supporting the client with education and information allowing them to have more power to control aspects of their care.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate stress management to reduce anxiety</li> <li>• Validate past experiences</li> <li>• Provide information and education related to oral health in order to make decisions</li> </ul>

**Table 1**

The College encourages registrants to reflect on their current practice to evaluate how and if these TIC principles are currently being integrated. If some or all are not currently being applied, reflect on how you can begin incorporating these TIC principles into the dental hygiene practice setting. Adopting a trauma-informed approach is not accomplished immediately or through any single technique. Dental hygienists have a professional obligation to become informed of the need to obtain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to incorporate TIC into practice with empathy, sensitivity, and caring awareness.<sup>4</sup> Dental hygienists are responsible for providing inclusive and culturally sensitive and competent care in a safe environment while taking into consideration how trauma may impact a client's dental hygiene experience. Consider completing the [Alberta Health Services Trauma Informed Care Modules](#), which are designed to educate health professionals to incorporate TIC as part of their client-centred care.<sup>5</sup> Registrants who complete these modules may claim hour-for-hour continuing competency (CC) credits.

## References:

1. BC Provincial Mental Health and Substance Use Planning Council. Trauma-informed practice guide [Internet]. BC, Canada: Centre of Excellence for Women's Health; 2013 May [cited 2021 July 21]. Available from: <https://bccewh.bc.ca/2014/02/trauma-informed-practice-guide/>
2. University at Buffalo. What is trauma-informed care? [Internet]. Buffalo, New York: Buffalo Center for Social Research; 2021 [cited 2021 July 21]. Available from: <http://socialwork.buffalo.edu/social-research/institutes-centers/institute-on-trauma-and-trauma-informed-care/what-is-trauma-informed-care.html>
3. BC Mental Health & Substance Use Services. Trauma-informed practice [Internet]. BC, Canada: Provincial Health Services Authority; 2021 [cited 2021 July 21]. Available from: <http://www.bcmhsus.ca/health-professionals/clinical-professional-resources/trauma-informed-practice>
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Infographic: 6 guiding principles to a trauma-informed approach [Internet]. 2020 Sept 17 [cited 2021 July 21]. Available from: [https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/infographics/6\\_principles\\_trauma\\_info.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/infographics/6_principles_trauma_info.htm)
5. Alberta Health Services. Trauma informed care (TIC) information for health professionals learning series [Internet]. Alberta, Canada: Alberta Health Services; 2021 [cited 2021 July 21]. Available from: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/page15526.aspx>