

Steps and Ideas of Becoming a Trauma-Informed Faith Community

Pulled from: NC Council of Churches Sacred Series, Becoming a Trauma-Informed Faith Community Toolkit. Expanded and tailored for faith communities from the “Six Key Principles of a Trauma-Informed Approach” by SAMSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Association). Consider the following:

1. **Safety:** This includes physical, emotional, and relational safety. Do people who have experienced trauma feel included within the worshipping community? What structures are in place to protect a person’s boundaries? Consider power dynamics in your faith community, and how it might feel to be vulnerable in your community, or feel vulnerable. Everything from pastoral visits, to divorce counseling, to child care, to being in need of money, food, or resources.
2. **Trustworthiness and Transparency:** Is authenticity and vulnerability valued highly within your community of faith? Are confidences kept? Does unintentional sharing of information happen, even with good intentions such as the example of a prayer chain, prayer requests?
3. **Mutual support:** Does the church go beyond being friendly to being a place someone can make friendships? Does your place of worship cultivate genuine shared vulnerability? Where can a person seek help without dealing with repercussions or power systems? Can this happen both in large group and small group settings? Are ministry leaders modeling self-care through their personal practices?
4. **Collaboration and Mutuality:** Is there a culture of learning and growth, where ego does not hinder new and healthier ways to do ministry? Does the church prioritize listening and being with those who have been deeply hurt by life?
5. **Empowerment, Voice, and Choice:** Are those who are ministered to also given the opportunity to share and teach? Is there an understanding that people with lived experiences of trauma bring value and wisdom to the worshipping community? Are they fully integrated into the life of the church and given a voice for self-advocacy?
6. **Cultural, Historical, and Self-Identity:** Does your faith community recognize the unique cultural issues often bound up with trauma? Examples of this include gender, race, nationality, and more. Is there room for the expression of faith and practice in ways that honor the unique cultural and historical backgrounds, and self-identity backgrounds, of those you seek to serve?