

Chapter 2
Definition of Trauma

Three quotes on trauma:

“It’s not mental illness per se... It doesn’t have its roots in clinical understanding and brain chemistry science.”

Mary Blake,

Trauma Peer Expert Meeting, July 2008

“I didn’t experience trauma, and not all the people I work with did, either, so how is this relevant?”

A Certified Peer Specialist –

Trauma-Informed Peer Support, 2009

“Trauma is a social and community issue, not an individual issue; one that impacts community development and the quality of our communities...it confounds meaning of universal experience...love, hate, happiness, justice...how we see each other. Trauma and healing are profoundly social events.”

Susan Salasan,

CMHS Dare to Transform, 2008

What is Trauma?

When we talk about trauma, we are talking about something that happens to the individual that overwhelms one's sense of self, others and the world. Usually these events are shocking or terrifying.

There are a number of terms relating to trauma-informed change. Following is an explanation of these from the Trauma TIP:

Trauma: In this text, the term "trauma" refers to experiences that cause intense physical and psychological stress reactions. It can refer to a single event, multiple events, or a set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically and emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.

Secondary trauma: "Secondary trauma" is trauma-related stress reactions and symptoms resulting from exposure to another individual's traumatic experiences, rather than from exposure directly to a traumatic event. Secondary trauma can occur among behavioral health service providers across all behavioral health settings and among all professionals who provide services to those who have experienced trauma (e.g., healthcare providers, peer counselors, first responders, clergy, and intake workers).

Discussion Questions:

- Were there words or phrases you were not sure you understood?
- These definitions list a number of events that are considered traumatic events. Were there any that surprised you – events you never thought of as traumatic?

- What other types of events do you consider to be traumatic?
- At what point in a person's life do traumatic events take place?
- What would you say to a person who told you that something you experienced as trauma wasn't really trauma?

Concepts:

- Validation
- Consumer as expert of his/her experience
- Consumer voice/consumer perspective