

Trauma-informed service delivery

What is a trauma-informed approach to work?

The Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman, in handling reports of serious abuse within its Defence Force Ombudsman jurisdiction, operates from a trauma-informed service delivery approach. This approach builds on respectful practices and service standards already valued by staff in our Office.

The approach recognises how trauma can affect people who have experienced serious abuse in the Australian Defence Force. In particular, it recognises how trauma may affect reportees' behaviour or communication with our Office in a range of ways. Individuals who have experienced trauma typically find it hard to trust others. For this reason, the Defence Abuse Liaison Team work closely with reportees to establish respectful relationships that enhance feelings of safety and trust.

The key principles of a trauma-informed approach are safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration and empowerment.

Key principles

Safety – physical and emotional

Liaison Officers act as the main point of contact for reportees to help create consistency and work within clear guidelines regarding privacy and confidentiality. Liaison Officers work sensitively to establish a safe and welcoming environment, by remaining calm, courteous and responsive during all contacts with reportees. Liaison Officers work to ensure reportees are given clear explanations about what is happening with their report of abuse and to maintain transparency in regard to all processes.

Trustworthiness – clarity, consistency and interpersonal boundaries

Liaison Officers recognise that trust often develops slowly through consistency of response, by encouraging reasonable, safe and appropriate behaviour, maintaining transparency and ensuring reportees are provided opportunities to give informed consent about matters that affect them. All phone contact with reportees is made in private phone rooms due to the sensitive nature of discussions.

Choice – maximise choice and control

Choice means a focus on involving reportees in the process as much as possible, supporting them to communicate as often, or as little, as they are comfortable with. Reportees are asked their preferred communication method (for example phone, email or posted letter) and whether they prefer a male or female Liaison Officer. Liaison Officers assist and support reportees to consider the available options, which may include counselling and/or the Restorative Engagement Program.

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The Ombudsman has offices in:

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- » Brisbane
- » Canberra
- » Melbourne
- » Perth
- » Sydney

Collaboration – maximise collaboration and sharing of power

Collaboration means treating the reportee as the expert on their life, their trauma and what they believe will improve their quality of life. Liaison Officers work alongside reportees as equals and respect reportees' preferred pace of disclosure and expressed wishes. Collaboration also requires maintenance of professional boundaries in order to facilitate a healthy, collaborative relationship.

Empowerment – self-determination

A crucial aspect for maximising empowerment is a recognition that the reportee is a survivor of abuse and not simply a victim. Liaison Officers aim to acknowledge reportees' innate personal strengths, resilience and coping strategies. They also aim to build an understanding of the impact each reportee's experience has had on their life. Empowerment may involve supporting, encouraging and exploring options to build on reportee's existing coping mechanisms and life skills

More information is available at ombudsman.gov.au.

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