

CATHOLIC TEACHERS' **SAFER SPACES SERIES**

# Being a Trauma-informed Release Officer

This resource is intended to provide a trauma-informed framework for OECTA leaders, to ensure that all members, regardless of identity, feel empowered to bring forward concerns related to discrimination and prejudice in the workplace. Association events and interactions with members should actively foster safer and braver spaces. If these concepts are new to you, please review [Catholic Teachers' Safer Spaces Series: Safer Spaces? Braver Spaces? – Our Collective Responsibility](#), which includes self-reflection tools.

## OECTA's Guiding Principles of Trauma-informed Care

OECTA is actively working to move past systemic discrimination, cultural stereotypes, and bias – striving to offer trauma-informed values that promote healing and the restoration of relationships. When OECTA leaders do not use a trauma-informed approach, the possibility of triggering or exacerbating trauma symptoms and re-traumatizing increases. Non-trauma-informed services often mirror the power and control experienced in the abusive relationships that caused the past trauma, making recovery difficult, and the risk of re-traumatization real. A trauma-informed framework recognizes the impact of power differentials, maximizes self-determination, supports autonomy, and empowers members to take responsibility for managing their response to the event.

OECTA's Protocol Committee employs the principles of safety, choice, collaboration, trustworthiness, and empowerment. Likewise, release officers can implement these principles through the suggestions below.



| PRINCIPLES                         | PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE  |
|------------------------------------|---|
| <p><b>Safety</b></p>               | <p><b>Prior to interview/meeting with a member:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure a comfortable, quiet, and private space for discussions, and have water and tissues available.</li> <li>• Let the member gain a sense of control by allowing them to choose where to sit.</li> <li>• Have a pen and paper or a “fidget object” for the member to hold, if helpful.</li> <li>• Offer members the opportunity to bring a support person with them.</li> <li>• Create a clear outline/agenda for meetings that is also flexible enough to adapt to members’ real-time needs (i.e., providing additional time if necessary).</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Foster Understanding</b></p> | <p><b>At the beginning of the interview/meeting:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin with simple questions regarding the person’s role or background that will allow them to observe your interview style before you begin to discuss more difficult topics.</li> <li>• Ask how the person is feeling about being interviewed and acknowledge the difficult situation the person is involved in without expressing your opinion.</li> <li>• Tell the person that they can take a break whenever they need it.</li> <li>• Rather than leading with “start at the beginning,” release officers can say, “Start where you feel comfortable” or “Tell me what you remember.”</li> </ul> <p><b>During the interview/meeting and throughout the process:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide clear and appropriate messages to the member about their rights and responsibilities.</li> <li>• Offer members a choice in decisions that affect them, in a way that is purposeful and goes beyond just your ethical requirements.</li> <li>• Ask the member what their desires might be with respect to the potential outcome.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Collaboration</b></p>        | <p><b>Throughout the process:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make every reasonable and possible attempt to make decisions in collaboration with the member.</li> <li>• Recognize that healing happens in relationships, and everyone has a role to play.</li> <li>• Be aware of power differences – as the release officer, you have a position of power.</li> <li>• Be patient with yourself and your member. Handling member concerns can be complex, stressful, and challenging, even under the best of circumstances.</li> <li>• Give yourself and the member the space to make mistakes, learn, and grow together over the course of your representation.</li> </ul>   |

| PRINCIPLES             | PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE   |
|------------------------|--|
| <b>Trustworthiness</b> | <p><b>Throughout the process:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empathy, patience, consistency, transparency, and reliability are crucial for establishing a trusting relationship with a member who has experienced trauma.</li> <li>• Be fully transparent with the member about their case – even if the outcome may not be positive.</li> <li>• Be clear about boundaries, expectations, possible outcomes, and what to expect from their relationship with you.</li> <li>• Preview for the member what is to come, both in the relationship and during the broader processes.</li> <li>• Follow through on commitments and appointments. Do not make promises you might break.</li> <li>• Tell members when they can expect to hear from you and how long tasks will take.</li> <li>• If you make a mistake, own it. Explain what happened and explain how you will rectify the error, if possible.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Empowerment</b>     | <p><b>Throughout the process:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Every person’s experience is unique and requires an individual approach.</li> <li>• Provide an atmosphere that allows members to feel validated and affirmed through their contact with you.</li> <li>• Describe the potential outcomes and keep the member fully informed throughout the process.</li> <li>• Ask members who have survived trauma and accessed union resources how these could be improved for future members.</li> </ul>  |

## » Additional Resources

See other resources in the Catholic Teachers’ Safer Spaces Series, including:

- [Understanding Trauma](#)
- [Safer Spaces? Braver Spaces? – Our Collective Responsibility](#)
- [Moral Elements of Care](#)
- [Reflection Tool - Checklist for Safer Spaces](#)

See other resources in the Catholic Teachers’ Mental Health and Wellness Series, including:

- [Understanding Stress](#)
- [Strategies to Promote Mental Health and Wellness](#)
- [Understanding Anxiety and Depression](#)

**Information you obtain engaging with members may result in a grievance, a human rights complaint, and/or filing a harassment complaint through your Board’s harassment protocol. Refer to the [Release Officers’ Guide to Member Human Rights Concerns and Complaints](#) for more details.**

### References:

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