

Trauma-informed practice - separated refugee and asylum-seeking immigrant children and young people¹

Community Care Live 2024
Dr Wuraola Bolaji

University of
Hertfordshire **UH**



Learning outcomes

2

- Explore trauma and trauma experiences
- Understand how trauma impacts the transition into adulthood of refuge and asylum-seeking children and young people
- Gain practical tips on applying trauma-informed practice to improve your practice

Leaving home

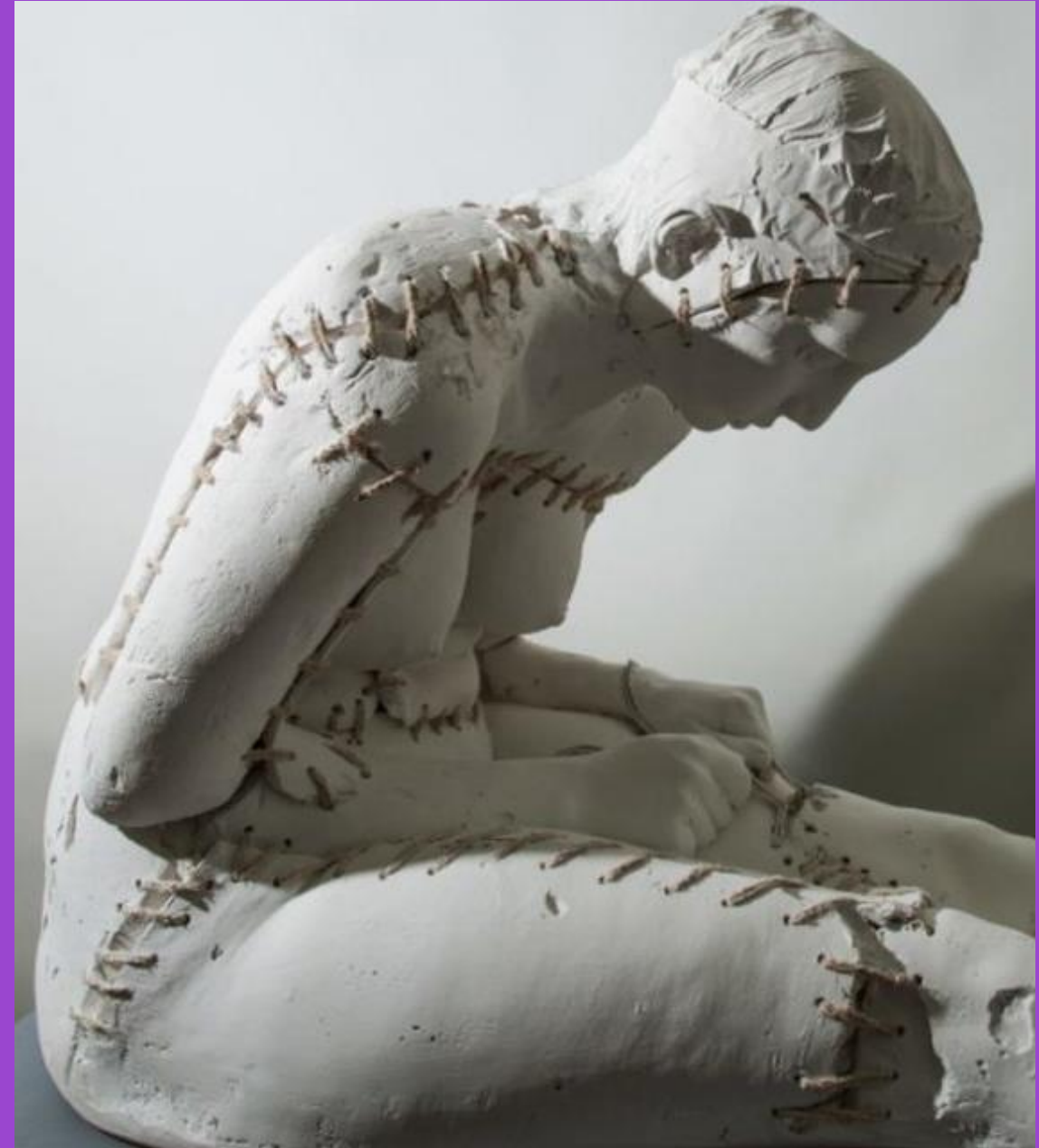
3



Warsan Shire

The 'wounded healers'

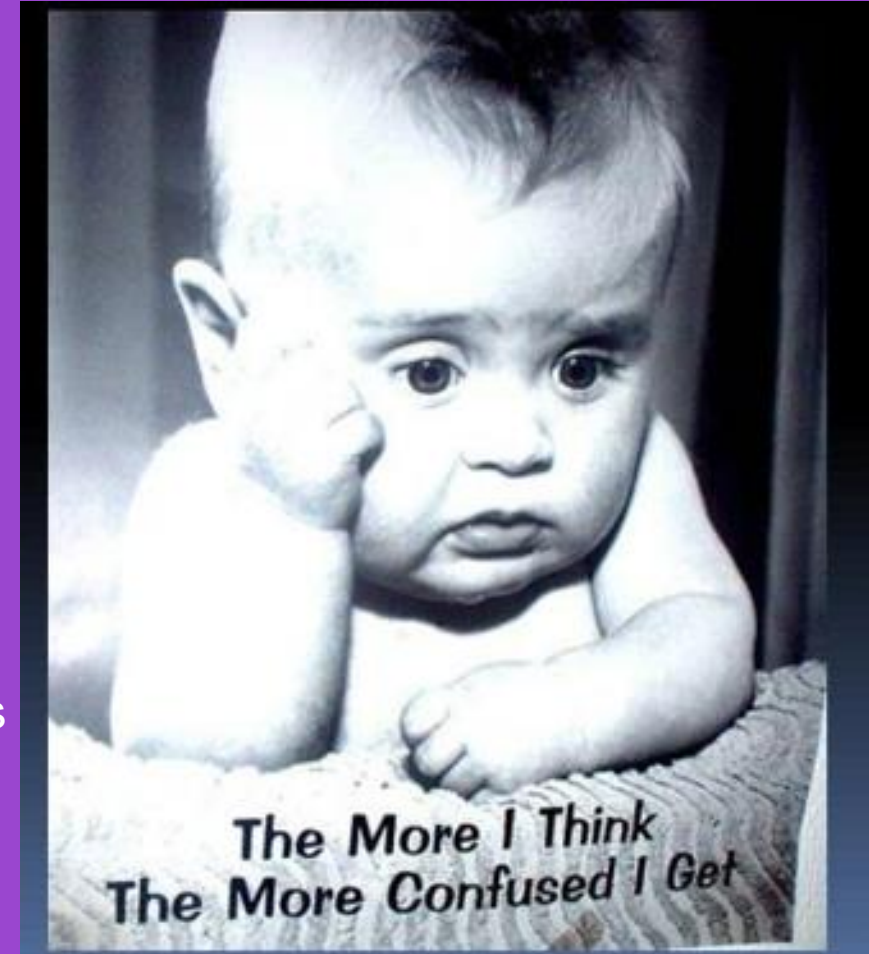
- Driven by a desire to heal their trauma by aiding others (Murphy, 2022).
- High rate of ACE leading to trauma among social work students
- Risk of vicarious trauma affecting all students, regardless of their trauma history Carello and Butler (2015)
- Compounding the issue is the prevalence of trauma exposure among the vulnerable groups served by social workers
- A key recommendation of the final analysis of serious case reviews (2017-2019) is for social workers to understand the impact of trauma



Social work quandaries

5

- Social work recruitment and retention crisis (DFE, 2022).
- 5,335 social workers left the register during the 2021/2022 registration year, and 24.1% of these had only been qualified for less than one year, is a concern for social work education and practice (Social Work England, 2023)
- Social work education faces a profound quandary, of educating a population at high risk of secondary trauma, burnout and a history of personal trauma.
- The new government vision to transform Children social care prioritises the specialist training of social workers, including developing key skills on the impact of trauma and trauma-informed practice (DfE, 2023).



What is trauma?

Event(s) experienced by individual(s) to be highly distressing, emotionally or physically harmful or life-threatening and that have a lasting impact on the individual's well-being, how they function, relate to others and see the world' (Bolaji, 2022)

Not limited to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) / clinically diagnosed trauma

The agency lies with the individual

Trauma can impact different people differently



My Vision of Trauma

- Tiger! Tiger!
- It helped me connect with parts of myself previously unknown and gain a distinctive insight into my participants' trauma.
- It encapsulated the complex nature of living and working with trauma.
- Highlighted the need for practitioner psychoanalytic understanding and an insight into the young people's complex needs

Resource

Tiger! Tiger! What is the experience of trauma and transition into adulthood of African refugee and asylum-seeking care leavers?

<https://repository.tavistockandportman.ac.uk/2584/>



Refugee trauma

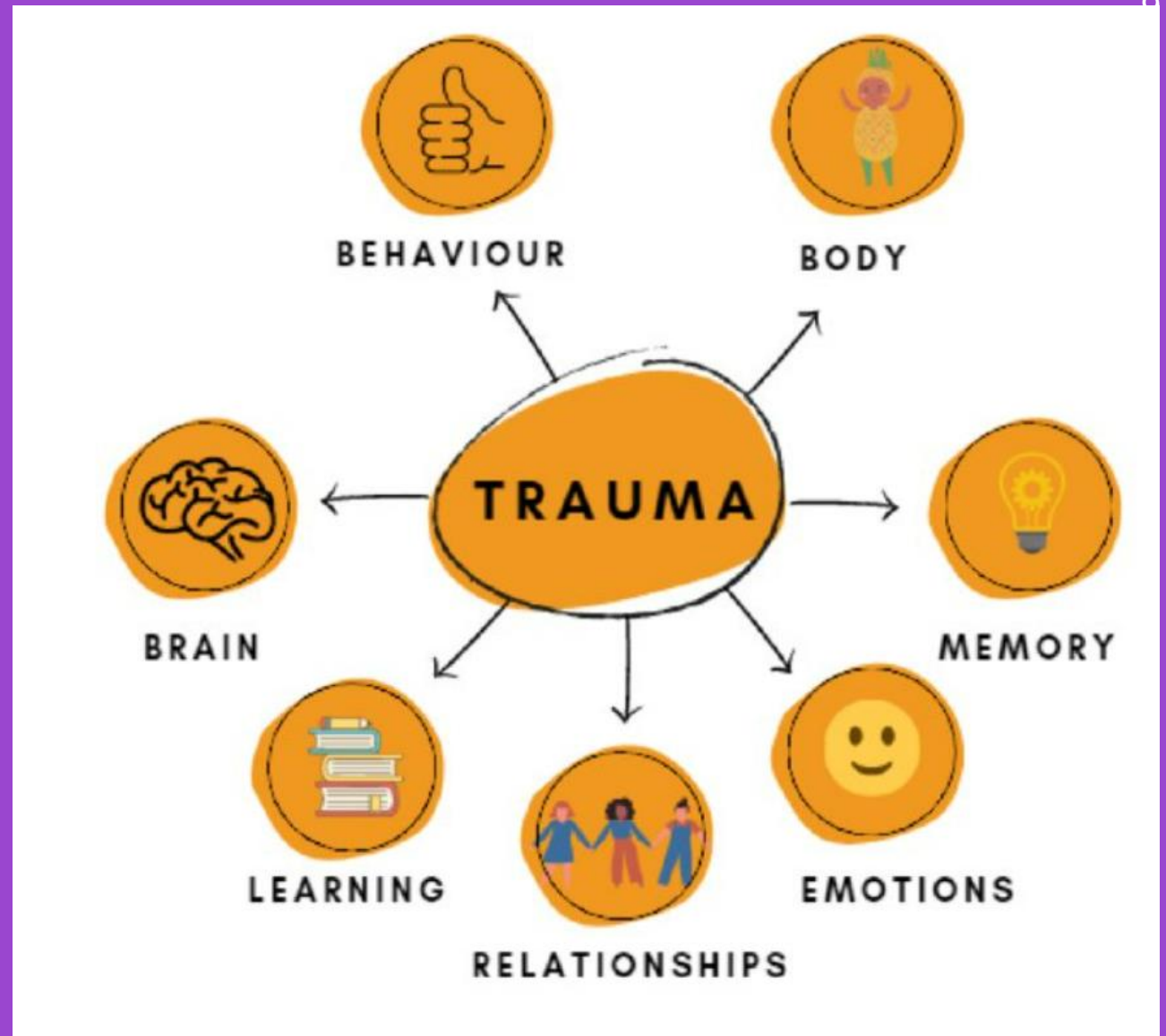
Pre-migration- War, Violence, hardship, loss of families, poverty, lack of access to education, health facilities

Migration- Abuse, including sexual, exploitation, violence, detention, destitution, drowning, other forms of death, modern day slavery, separation from families and friends, life-threatening condition, lack of food, water, shelter

Post-migration- Restrictions by the host country, unstable immigration status, racism, discrimination, loneliness and isolation, mental health difficulties, survival guilt, barriers, uncertainties and



Trauma impact on children and young people



Trauma and transitions to adulthood- the cliff edge

10

- Transitions is impacted by the young people's visible and invisible world
- They are more likely to have poorer outcomes than their counterparts living at home
- More accelerated and compressed transitions to adulthood than their peers with no immigration issues
- The upheaval of migration impacts their mental health
- Transitioning into adulthood within a context of 'unrelenting and restrictive immigration policies and rapidly changing social work practices and policies
- Local authorities do not always understand their complex needs
- Mental health



Trauma impact- Adversity-activated development (AAD)

The trauma grid

<i>Negative effects</i>					
<i>INJURY, WOUND</i>			<i>Neutral effects</i>	<i>Positive effects</i>	
Levels	Psychiatric disorders (PD), PTSD	Distressful psychological reactions (DPR)	Ordinary human suffering (OHS)	RESILIENCE	ADVERSITY-ACTIVATED DEVELOPMENT (AAD)
Individual					
Family					
Community					
Society/culture					

If walls could talk- what would you see ?



Falling off the 'cliff edge'- what now social work?

13

Alexander Tekle, Filmon Yemane, Mulubrhan Medhane Kfleyosus and Osman Ahmed Nur all died by suicide after coming to the UK between 2017 and 2019, aged 18-19.

Alex Tekle- Kent Council (Top left).

Friends told the inquest that Tekle was profoundly traumatised by experiences he had in Eritrea that had prompted him to flee, and also by the long and dangerous journey he had made to the UK.

He was reported to be doing well before his age was disputed, and denied services as a UASC.

Tekle's social worker had a caseload of 25 young people and struggled to find the time to provide the intensive support he needed.

The Coroner concluded that Social workers struggled to provide effective help for Alexander Tekle.





When a flower doesn't bloom
you fix the environment in which it grows,
not the flower.

-Alexander den Heijer-

Trauma-informed practice

15

Trauma-informed practice:

‘a program, organisation, or system that realises the impact of trauma, recognizes the symptoms of trauma, responds by integrating knowledge about trauma policies and practices, and seeks to reduce re-traumatization (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA),

‘ Trauma-informed practice is more than being ‘nice and kind’



Trauma-informed practice – what is

16

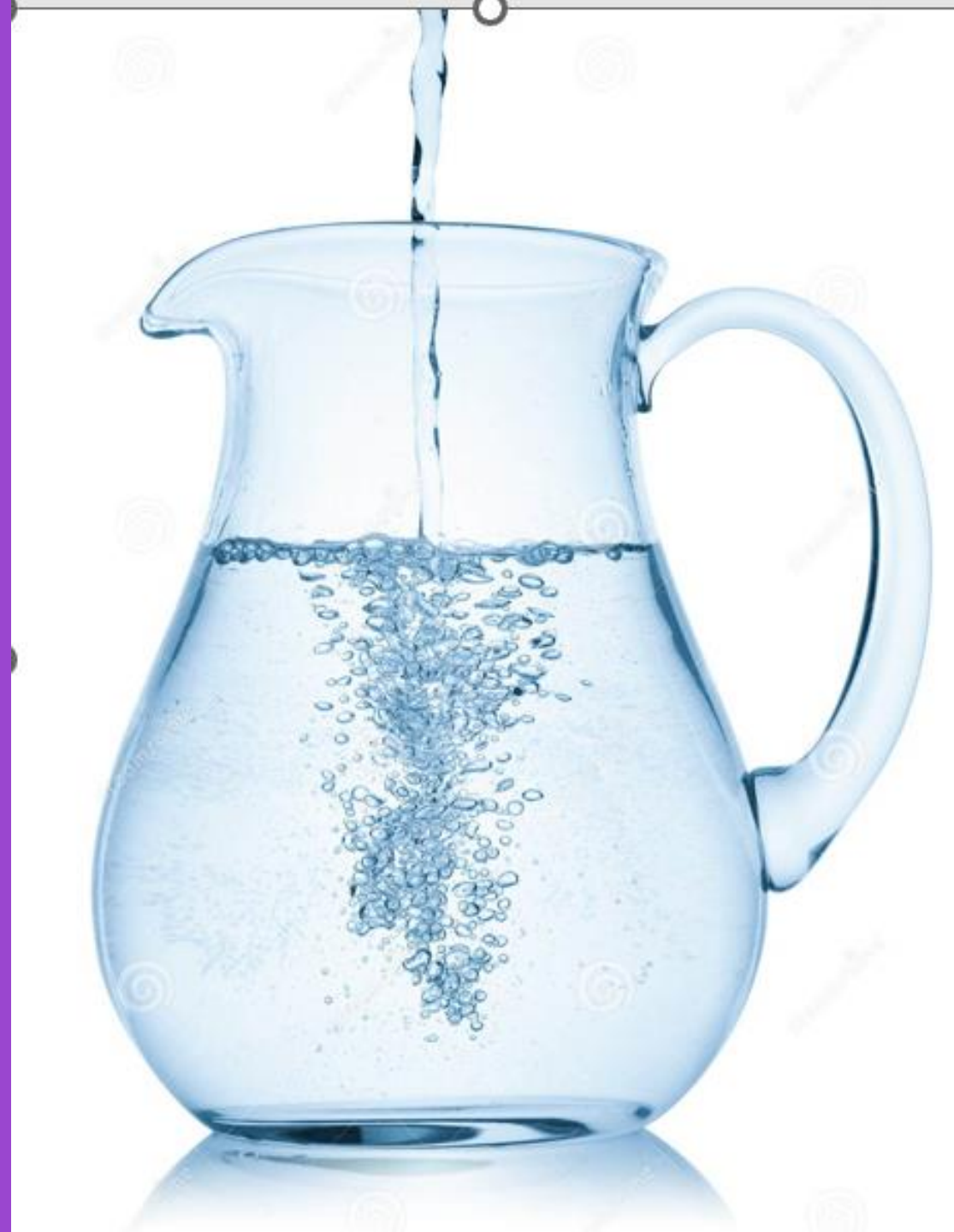


The container contained

Trauma is inherently uncontained

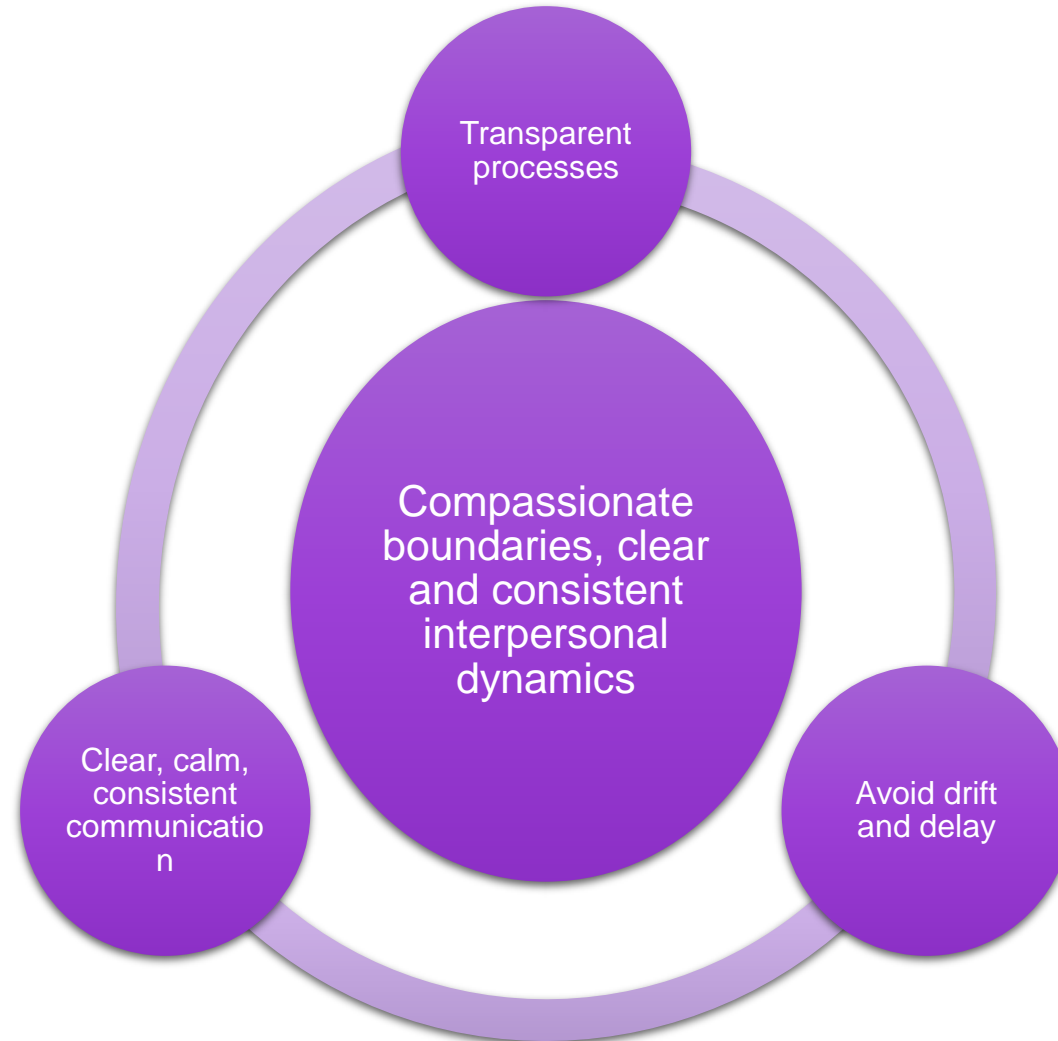
Individuals who have experienced trauma may struggle to regulate their own internal experiences.

Professionals supporting them need to be 'contained'



Fostering a contained environment, safety and regulation

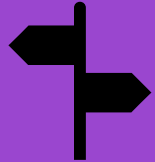
18



Trauma-informed practice – practical tips



Safety- Physical, psychological and emotional safety. For example, create a welcoming environment, anti-discriminatory practice, language that cares, emotional containment



Choice - shared decision-making. Listen and take action on their wishes and feelings. Make the options clear. For example, accommodation, education



Empowerment- Recognise their strengths and skills. Listen to them and take action; validate and affirm; support them to make decisions



Trust- transparency in policies and procedures. Explain in ways they understand. Do what you said you would do and why; clear expectations e.g. asylum application delays



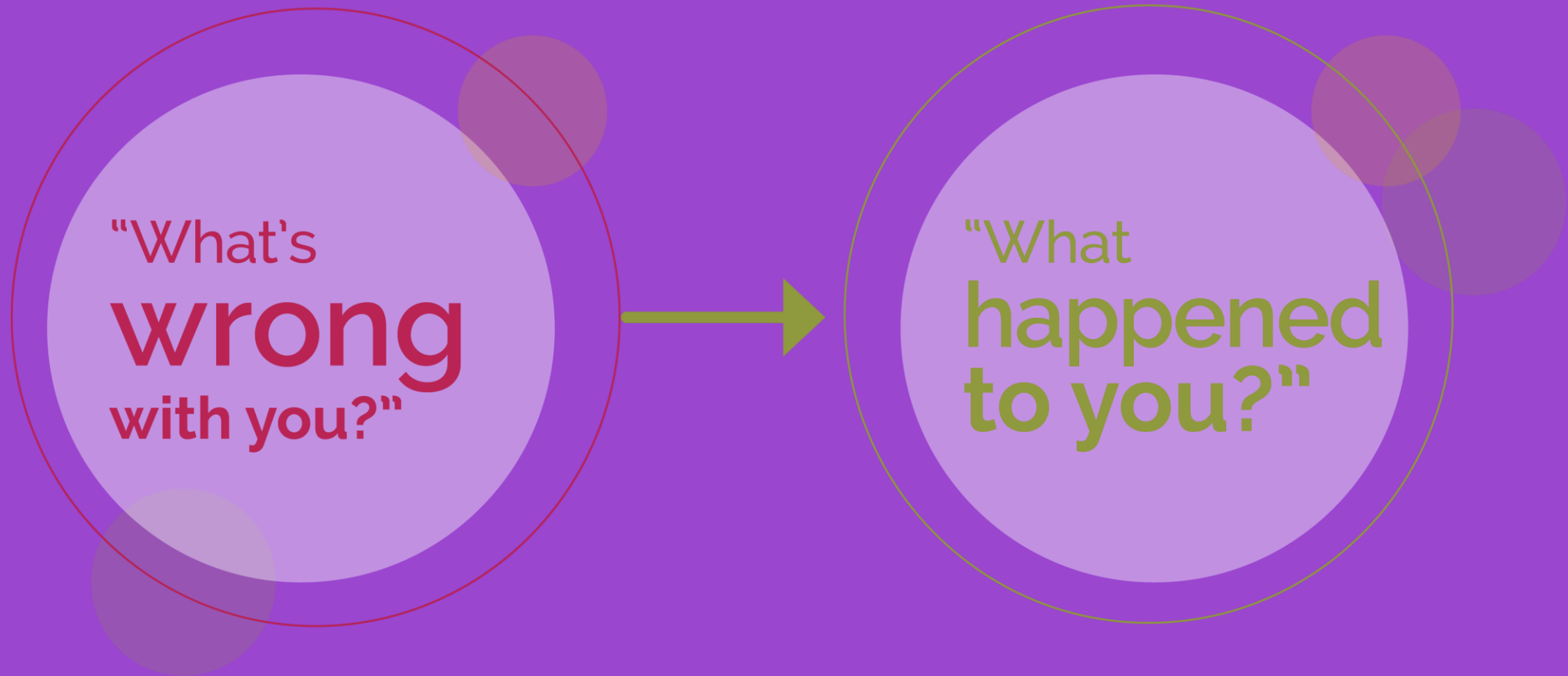
Collaboration: Ask what they need and consider how they can be met. Involve actively in service delivery and consultations. Seek feedback. Acknowledge the power dynamics



Cultural considerations- Policies and procedures that recognise individual cultural needs (e.g. around gender, clothing, food, placement). Value in community connections

Trauma-informed practice is about changing the questions we ask...

20



The still face experiment

21



Conclusions and Recommendations

22

Trauma can be negative as well as positive

Embed trauma-informed practice into social work training and practice

Psychoanalysis to be embedded into training and practice

Anti-racist / anti-discriminatory practice

Strength-based practice

Reflective supervision

Self-care



RECOMMENDATION

Contact details

23

Dr Wuraola Bolaji

Senior Lecturer / International Admissions Lead

University of Hertfordshire

School of Health and Social Work

Email- w.bolaji@herts.ac.uk



Useful resources 1

Bolaji, W., 2022. *Tiger! Tiger! What is the experience of trauma and transition into adulthood of African refugee and asylum-seeking care leavers?* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Essex & Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust <http://repository.tavistockandportman.ac.uk/2584/>)

24

Bolaji, W. (2024). Enhancing Social Work Curricula through Trauma-Informed Pedagogy Towards Potential and Impact. *Blended Learning in Practice*, 9.

Kingsley Publishers. Stein, M. (2015) 'Supportive pathways for young people leaving care. Lessons learned from four decades of research', in Del Valle, J. F., Holmes, L., Whittaker, J.W. (eds). *Therapeutic residential care with children and youth: developing evidence-based international practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, pp.189-203.

Okitikpi, T. and Aymer, C. (2003) 'Social work with African refugee children and their families', *Child & Family Social Work*, 8(3), pp.213-222. doi: 10.1046/j.1365-2206.2003.00286.x.

Papadopoulos, R.K. (2007) 'Refugees, trauma and adversity-activated development', *European Journal of Psychotherapy and Counselling*, 9(3), pp.301-312. doi: 10.1080/13642530701496930.

Stein, M. (2019) 'Supporting young people from care to adulthood: international practice', *Child & Family Social Work*, 24, pp. 400-405. doi: 10.1111/cfs.12473.



Useful resources 2

25

Poem for drop the disorder on trauma-informed organisations .- Karen Treisman

https://www.google.com/search?sca_esv=cca1506e5bb311d6&rlz=1C1GCEB_enGB1029GB1029&tbm=vid&sxsrf=ADLYWIIPzFHiRvAHcX0VrWXC4iBlrvFDHA:1725884413754&q=karen+treisman+trauma+informed+practice&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiNy5677LWIAxXwV0EAHR6vATIQ8ccDegQINhAF&biw=1280&bih=559&dpr=1.5#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:ce4d8632,vid:LRJ9w3jlv0w,st:0

van der Kolk, B. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. Viking.



Thank you