

# Trauma-Informed Customer Service Training

The premise of Trauma-Informed Customer Service is to recognize that our past experiences influence our present and ways in which we engage with the world while using empathy to understand others' perspectives. Using a trauma-informed care lens in our interactions with the public acknowledges that their anger and frustration may be impacted by some of their past experiences and allows for us to create some separation from them being angry at the situation instead of being angry at us. This approach is influenced by the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) study conducted in the 90s where it was found that 64% of adults have experienced at least one adverse childhood experience in their lives. Some examples of ACEs are having experienced one or more of the different forms of child abuse and neglect, witnessing violence within the household, having a parent who battled with substance use, and more.



Our Trauma-Informed Customer Service training assists folks by incorporating the basic tenets of Trauma-Informed Care - safety, choice, collaboration, trustworthiness, and empowerment - into their interactions with the public to better support customers in getting their needs met while also maintaining staff wellbeing. Part of this process involves learning how language impacts our interactions and how to transform our usual ways of communicating into trauma-informed ways of engaging. Finally, we dive deeper into the following steps which give us a roadmap for incorporating what we have learned into a practical approach to offering trauma-informed customer service.

## Step 1: Self-Regulation

Process of returning to internal baseline, which can be achieved through grounding (i.e., noticing your feet firmly planted on the ground), breathing (i.e., inhaling for 5 seconds and exhaling for 7), compartmentalizing (i.e., creating some emotional separation from what's been triggered to the present moment), etc.

Compartmentalizing is our ability to create separation between the "here and now" and the "there and there". With this we mean that sometimes certain experiences trigger feelings from the past; yet again, it is important to create a separation between our past experiences from our present ones to be able to effectively tend to what's in front of us at the moment. Additionally, it involves creating space, when possible, to explore and care for the feelings that were triggered in an effort to achieve healing.

## Step 2: Validation

Using statements that acknowledge their concern and empathize with their feelings. Examples: “It sounds like you’re angry and it makes sense considering how this issue is getting in the way of...”; “I hear that this is making you angry and I’m sorry we haven’t found an alternative yet”.

### Active Listening Skills – OARS:

#### Open Ended Questions:

- Could you describe what the problem is for me?
- What would make things better?
- What are you hoping to accomplish?

#### Affirmations:

- We appreciate you having reached out about this issue.
- I can definitely see why this situation would feel frustrating and challenging.
- I would probably feel similarly in a situation like this.

#### Reflection:

- It sounds like you are frustrated at...
- I’m hearing you say... Is that accurate?
- Just to make sure that I’m understanding correctly, the problem is...

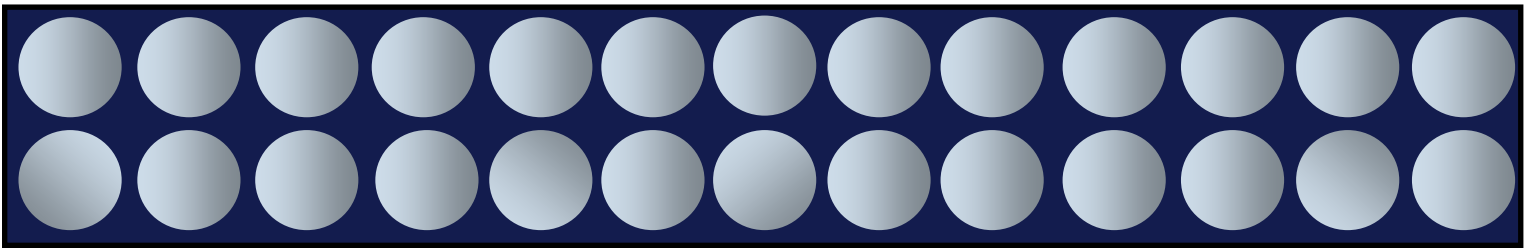
#### Summary:

- To summarize this, you came in/called in about having trouble with... and feeling... After talking through options, we landed on doing... to solve this issue. Would you agree with that?
- A couple of additional skills to use are:
  - Restating what the person just said to confirm your own understanding of the circumstances.
  - Reframing the negative into something positive like: today you came in with this issue and now we have worked on a solution so that it doesn’t happen again.



## Step 3: Problem-Solving

Process of identifying options and executing a solution. Remember to offer choices, follow policies, and script your answer for when similar situations arise.



Finally, always remember to take care of yourself in this process of navigating challenging customer service interactions. Write down a list of things that help you feel grounded and safe; and access those as needed through the process and afterward. This will increase the likelihood of you creating separation from these difficult interactions to continue performing to your fullest.

### Videos to Compliment your Learning



[“How to Talk to Angry People”](#) by Dr. Christian Conte



[“Empathy vs Sympathy”](#) by Brené Brown