

# Toolkit for responding to trauma-related abuse

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A guide for addiction, mental health,  
and primary care professionals



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Canada

Condition féminine  
Canada

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Centre de ressources  
et de crises familiales  
**BEAUSEJOUR**  
Family Crisis  
Resource Centre



S'UNIR  
POUR ELLES  
FOR HER.  
BECAUSE OF HER



## About this toolkit

Research has shown that over 80% of female victims of domestic violence experience mental health and/or addiction issues.\* If these issues are not identified as a direct result of trauma, a biomedical approach is often used, which ignores the impact and consequences of abuse-related trauma on a woman's well-being. Mental health, addictions, and primary care providers have begun to realize that a trauma-informed practice may increase the probability of positive health outcomes for female victims.

Victims of intimate partner violence use a variety of entry points to access the help that they need. The purpose of this toolkit is to offer assistance to various service providers on how to create a trauma-informed approach through the use of appropriate screening practices as well as how to refer female victims to both domestic violence and other related services.

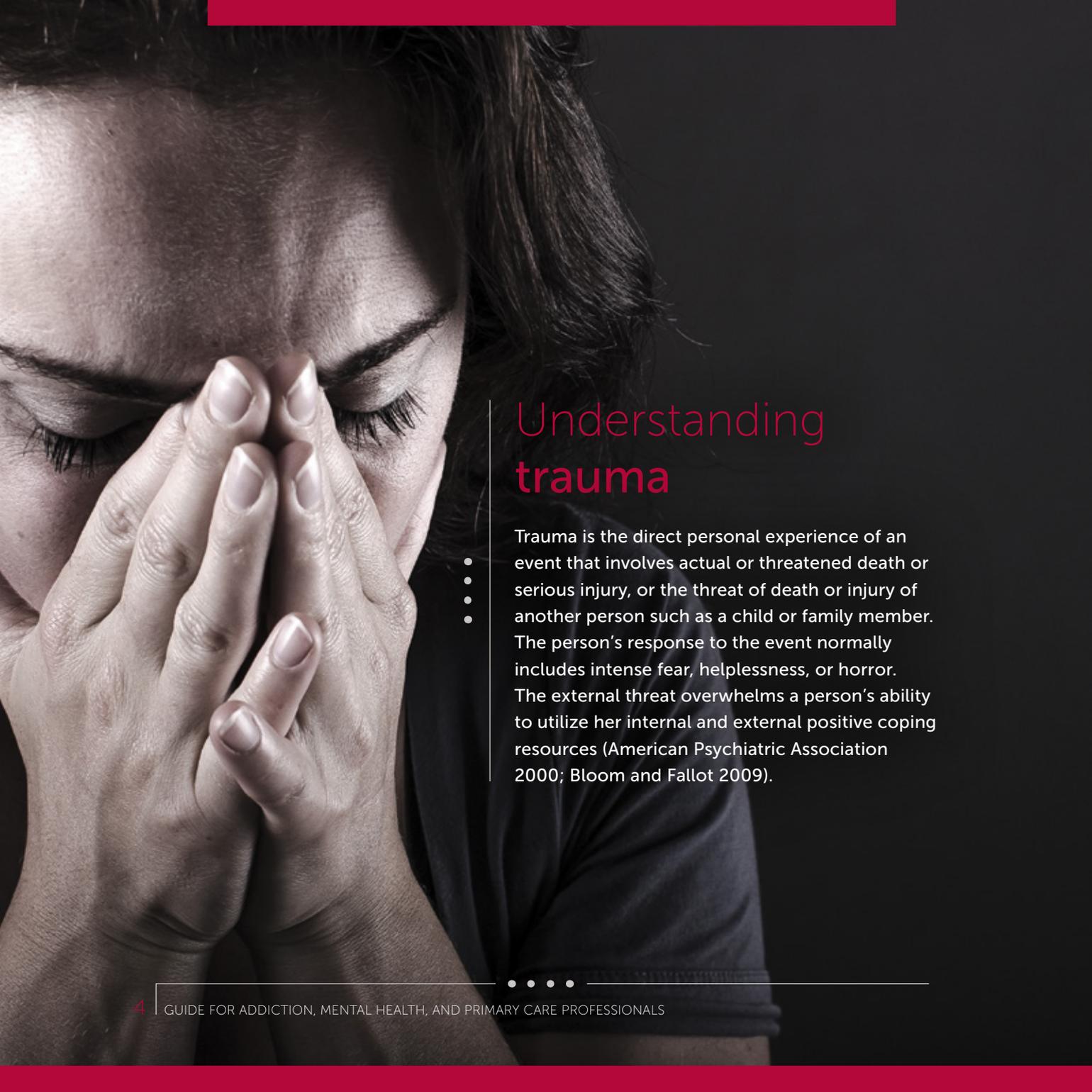
\*Reference: J. Barron, 2005. Women's Aid: Guidance for Mental Health Professionals".

## Their hopes in their words

Women with lived experience have actively participated in creating this toolkit. Female victims participating in this project expressed a number of positive outcomes that they hoped would be the result of this project. These included:

- There will be no wrong door or entry point for female victims seeking help as all service providers will be knowledgeable regarding trauma-specific services in the region.
- All service providers, regardless of sector, will ask women about their history of exposure to violence.
- An understanding across sectors that mental health and addiction issues are often a direct consequence of repeated violence.
- Women will be believed and accepted for where they are at in their healing journey.
- Women will experience less secondary wounding from front-line providers by being directed to the appropriate service earlier in the recovery process.

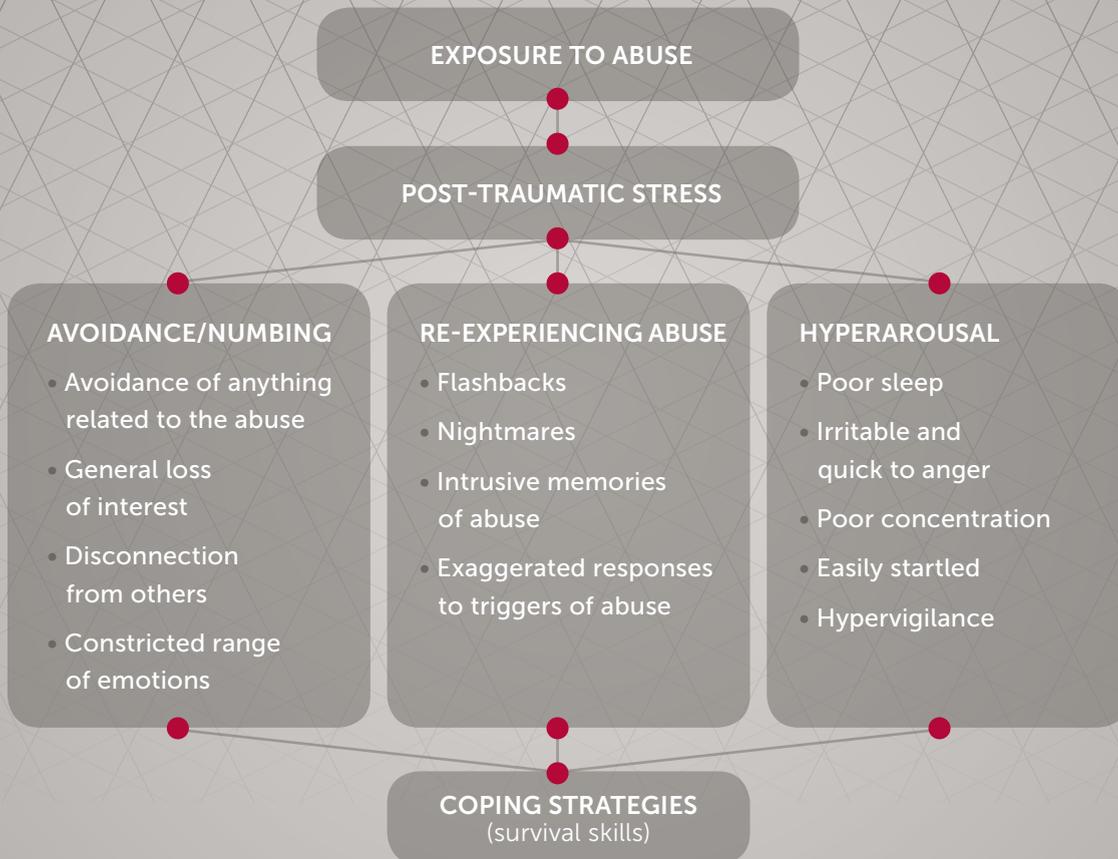




## Understanding trauma

- Trauma is the direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or the threat of death or injury of another person such as a child or family member. The person's response to the event normally includes intense fear, helplessness, or horror. The external threat overwhelms a person's ability to utilize her internal and external positive coping resources (American Psychiatric Association 2000; Bloom and Falot 2009).
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# Effects of abuse-related trauma



Woman Abuse Screening Protocol Project [see <http://www.learningtoendabuse.ca/sites/default/files/Woman%20Abuse%20Screening%20Protocol%20Manual.pdf>]

Reference: Banks, 2001, Relationships & Brain Chemistry, Jean Baker Miller Training Institute.

# Common responses to abuse-related trauma

- Self-harm
- Panic attacks
- Fearing relationships and the male population in general
- Flashbacks of violence
- Depression
- Night terrors
- Memory lapses
- Low self-esteem
- Sleeping disorders (difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep or over sleeping)
- Substance misuse and other addictions (gambling, shopping, etc.)

# Multiple entry points

Female victims use multiple entry points to access services. It is important that no matter which entry point is used, survivors of abuse receive trauma-informed services. A woman's journey to break free from violence is in no way linear.

**MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**

**ADDICTION SERVICES**

**EMERGENCY SERVICES**

Hospital Emergency Personnel,  
After-Hours Clinic  
Doctors/Nurses

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES**

Transition House and  
Outreach Services

**PRIMARY CARE PROVIDERS**

General Practitioner,  
Physician Assistant,  
Nurse Practitioner

**CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROFESSIONALS**

RCMP, Police,  
Crown Prosecutors,  
Victim Services,  
Legal Aid, etc.

# How mental health and primary service providers can offer trauma-informed services

Regardless of the sector in which I work, my role as a service provider is to provide a trauma-informed approach that includes:

1. Universally screening for domestic violence to ensure that an appropriate case management plan is developed.
2. Recognizing the signs of abuse that go beyond the physical forms, such as emotional, cultural, financial, and spiritual violence.
3. Building rapport with my client by using non-judgmental language when seeking information or clarification.
4. Educating women about the relationship between abuse-related trauma and its impact on their mental and physical health.
5. Providing a safe and non-judgmental environment while my client attempts to navigate her own healing journey.
6. Creating a power balance in order to help female victims take charge of their own lives.
7. Connecting women to various programs such as outreach services, transition houses, and other related services.





## A safe and welcoming screening environment

The following is a list of suggestions for how service providers can create a safe and welcoming environment to facilitate disclosure.

- Create a space away from others to screen for domestic violence.
- Make it common procedure to see clients individually to ensure that victims have a safe and private space to disclose their abuse history.
- While it is important to follow procedural documents, create a more human feel while screening by setting aside papers and clipboard. This will allow you to make eye contact with the client in front of you.
- Provide visual signage of relevant domestic violence support services on office walls and on bulletin boards in the event that a client may not be ready to make a disclosure.
- Advise your client that you will be continuing the conversation regarding her personal relationships at subsequent visits. This will send the message that your “door” is always open to discuss unhealthy relationships.



## Framing the **question**

There are many ways to ask women about unhealthy relationships. It is important that you test different approaches in order to find the statements that come most naturally to you. Often, you will begin by explaining that you routinely ask ALL clients about domestic violence. The following are a few samples of statements that you can use:

"Unfortunately, woman abuse is common in many people's lives, so I have made it a routine to ask ALL of my clients."

"I see a lot of women dealing with unhealthy relationships. Many women are too scared to open up about their abuse history, so I have started to ask questions about it with each visit."

"How do you feel about the relationships in your life? I want you to know that this is a safe place to talk about anything that might be going on and to get help."

"From my experience with other clients, I am concerned that some of the issues that you are dealing with may be the result of someone hurting you. Is this happening?"



# Screening

The purpose of this toolkit is not to enforce a one-size-fits-all approach to universal screening, since many service sectors have existing tools built into their intake procedures. The Woman Abuse Screening Tool-Short (WAST-Short) was developed and validated by Brown, Lent, Schmidt, and Sas (2000). It is to be used as a guide to ensure that existing screening practices include the following questions.

## WOMAN ABUSE SCREENING TOOL-SHORT (WAST-SHORT)

- 1. In general, how would you describe your relationship?**
  - A lot of tension
  - Some tension
  - No tension
- 2. Do you and your partner work out arguments with:**
  - Great difficulty
  - Some difficulty
  - No difficulty
- 3. Do arguments ever result in you feeling down or bad about yourself?**
  - Often
  - Sometimes
  - Never
- 4. Do arguments ever result in hitting, kicking, or pushing?**
  - Often
  - Sometimes
  - Never
- 5. Do you ever feel frightened by what your partner says or does?**
  - Often
  - Sometimes
  - Never
- 6. Has your partner ever abused you physically?**
  - Often
  - Sometimes
  - Never
- 7. Has your partner ever abused you emotionally?**
  - Often
  - Sometimes
  - Never
- 8. Has your partner ever abused you sexually?**
  - Often
  - Sometimes
  - Never

## Accepting where she is at

You may attempt to help a female victim disclose her abuse history but she may simply not be ready. As frustrating as this might be, what she needs from you in this moment is to accept her for where she is at and to try to keep an open dialogue during future interactions.

It is not recommended that you continue to probe her with further questions as she may feel that she is being interrogated. In addition, you may hurt any rapport that you have built with your client. In some cases, she may never return if she feels pressured to disclose.

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## From screening to safety

Screening for domestic violence may lead to a disclosure. It is important to remember that this may be the first time that she has trusted someone enough to disclose her abuse history.

There are several safety planning tools that you can offer your client. One of these tools was developed by the Public Legal Education and Information Service of New Brunswick (2017) and can be found by visiting the following link:

**<http://www.legal-info-legale.nb.ca/en/strategies-staying-safer>**. This resource provides a comprehensive guide on helping female victims stay safe while living in, or leaving, an abusive relationship.

### **Your role after a disclosure is to:**

- Acknowledge her journey and the courage it must have taken to share her story with you.

- Assess her immediate safety needs.
- Provide referrals to domestic violence and/or legal services.
- Ensure that she knows that you are a safe person to talk to and that she can reach out to you at anytime.
- The most important thing for her safety is to ensure that she is connected to domestic violence services. In your region, this may include domestic violence and sexual assault outreach services as well as emergency and second stage transitional housing and support services. Domestic violence interveners are best suited to discuss the development of safety plans and can ensure that they follow up with the client on an ongoing basis as her safety changes over time.

# Local and provincial services and supports

The following is a list of various resources that may be helpful to your client. Before giving this to a client, ensure that she has a safe space to store this information that is unknown to her abusive partner.

## Local resources

### EMERGENCY SERVICES

**Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)-Police:** 911

**Shediac Detachment**  
506.533.5151

**Moncton Detachment**  
506.857.2400

**Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Program (SANE)**  
506.869.2996

**Moncton Hospital**  
506.857.5111

**Dr. Georges-L.-Dumont University Hospital Centre**  
506.862.4000

### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT OUTREACH SERVICES

**Beausejour Family Crisis Resource Centre Inc.**  
24/7 sexual assault / domestic violence intervention services for southeastern NB  
506.533.9100

**Coalition Against Abuse in Relationships Inc.**  
506.855.7222

**Kent Centre for the Prevention of Violence**  
506.743.1530

**South East NB Sexual Assault Centre**  
1-844-953-0811

### TRANSITIONAL HOUSING AND SUPPORT SERVICES

**Beausejour Family Crisis Resource Centre Inc.**  
506.533.9100

**Crossroads for Women Inc.**  
506.853.0811

**Kent Centre for the Prevention of Violence**  
506.743.1530

### PROVINCE OF NEW BRUNSWICK RESOURCES

There are many resources throughout the province of New Brunswick. For a comprehensive list of services to support abused women that are available in the province, visit:

[http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/women/Violence\\_Prevention\\_and\\_Community\\_Partnerships/content/Support-Services-for-Abused-Women.html](http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/women/Violence_Prevention_and_Community_Partnerships/content/Support-Services-for-Abused-Women.html)

**Local services in my region include**  
(please fill out for your reference):

**Police/RCMP:**\_\_\_\_\_

**Domestic Violence Outreach Program:**\_\_\_\_\_

**Transitional Housing and Supports:**\_\_\_\_\_