

**A Trauma-Informed Workforce:  
Analysis of Interviews with  
Victims and Witnesses**

Key Themes

## What Staff Should Know

Understanding trauma and its impacts	There needs to be greater <b>understanding and awareness of trauma and its impacts</b> especially in relation to the fear that people can feel, the inhibiting effects of trauma and the way that trauma can impact on daily functioning. Staff should show an <b>understanding of the impacts of traumatic incidents on day-to-day life.</b>
Understanding different perceptions of risk and fear	Justice professionals need to acknowledge and understand differences in perceptions of risk and fear and, in particular, try to <b>better understand how risk and fear are perceived and experienced by victims and witnesses.</b> This includes not trivialising incidents and taking all reported incidents seriously. If victims and witnesses feel that they are not taken seriously, this may result in failure to report future incidents.
Understanding and normalising triggers and responses	Professionals in the justice sector need to <b>know what might trigger trauma</b> when interacting with victims and witnesses, as well as to <b>understand and identify trauma responses.</b> Importantly, staff need to know that reactions may be physical as well as psychological and people should not feel a need to compensate or apologise for their responses. There is <b>no such thing as a 'normal' trauma response.</b>
Understanding the negative effects of re-telling	It is essential to understand the <b>re-traumatising effects of having to retell experiences</b> on multiple occasions to different professionals in the justice system. This can make victims and witnesses feel violated and over-exposed. <b>Reducing the number of times and the number of people with whom victims and witnesses need to share their experience is key.</b>
Understanding the importance of support	Understand that <b>victims and witnesses should be offered support</b> from the very start of their justice experience and throughout. Support should be <b>personalised, non-intrusive and flexible</b> (including formal, informal and peer support options). <b>Regular and ongoing support</b> from independent third parties is key.
Understanding the importance of having someone on your side	Victims and witnesses need to feel, at all stages, <b>reassured that there is someone on their side.</b> Justice professionals should be able to <b>effectively signpost victims and witnesses to appropriate support</b> at every step of their journey to reduce feelings of being alone.

## What Staff Should Do

Showing compassion, empathy and humanity	<b>Lack of compassion in the way that staff communicate must be eradicated.</b> An ability to show <b>empathy</b> is essential to better reassure victims i.e. being able to ‘walk in someone else’s shoes’ and to provide <b>individualised and sensitive responses.</b>
Avoiding stereotypes, labels and assumptions	A key contributor to showing humanity in interactions is the <b>avoidance of labels and stereotypes.</b> Being given a label of victim may make people feel ‘not in control’. Treating all victims and witnesses as a single homogeneous group is also not appropriate. Professionals being <b>non-judgmental</b> and <b>non-patronising</b> is key.
Managing communications	<b>Appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication</b> used by justice professionals when working with victims and witnesses is essential. Poorly managed language can be retraumatising (including use of flippant remarks). Staff should <b>avoid jargon to make conversations more accessible.</b> Use of <b>appropriate body language</b> is often equated with whether or not interactions are perceived as sufficiently compassionate and sensitive.
Listening, understanding and believing	Staff should understand the fundamental <b>importance of victims and witnesses being (and feeling) believed.</b> Being doubted by professionals can lead to feelings of self-doubt, fear and anxiety. A key consequence of not being listened to or heard is disengagement with the system.
Being patient and taking time	Victims and witnesses must be given <b>more time</b> when sharing their experiences with justice professionals, to allow them to both accurately express what they want to say and also process the emotions and responses that they may feel at the time.
Demonstrating professionalism	Staff should <b>demonstrate professionalism</b> to help reassure individuals and make them feel in ‘safe hands’.
Delivering on promises	Several participants stressed the importance of following through on promises as a means of fostering and maintaining trust in professionals.
Acknowledging limits and offering apologies	Professionals should be clear in <b>explaining where mistakes may have been made,</b> acknowledging personal errors as well as the constraints of the system to help victims and witnesses manage expectations.
Ensuring victims and witnesses are appropriately involved	All decision making in relation to a case should be explained to victims and witnesses to aid understanding and help them feel more in control. This includes explaining the <b>implications of decisions</b> for victims and witnesses. Allowing victims and witnesses to be involved in key decision making wherever appropriate was urged.
Ensuring that victims and witnesses know their rights	Victims and witnesses must be <b>advised of their rights</b> at all time. Always <b>seeking personal consent</b> from victims and witnesses for relevant actions is key to allowing them to remain empowered and in control.

## How the System Should be Changed

Explaining the system, processes, procedures and rationales	Processes must be in place so that victims and witnesses <b>have the justice system explained</b> to them, both generally but also at specific points in their journey. <b>Better understanding the system would help reduce unpredictability</b> in the minds of victims and witnesses which, in turn, may prevent unnecessary trauma.
Better preparing people for the court room experience	<b>Explaining the operation of the court room</b> is something which should be provided as standard. Giving victims and witnesses an opportunity to <b>view and familiarise themselves with the court room</b> ahead of their case being heard in court is also key to reducing potential secondary trauma.
Keeping victims and witnesses informed	<b>Victims and witnesses must be kept informed</b> , including being made aware of progress at all stages of a case. <b>Information must be timely, accurate and offered proactively</b> instead of victims/witnesses having to ask.
Fostering a culture of truth and honesty	The system must be designed to <b>remove instances of inaccurate, misleading or contradictory information</b> being provided to victims and witnesses by different parties/organisations. Justice professionals must always be <b>truthful, honest and realistic about what the justice journey may or may not entail</b> .
Providing single points of contact	Victims/witnesses should be offered a <b>consistent single point of contact</b> to assist them in their justice journey.
Balancing efficiency and effectiveness	<b>Better balancing of targets and delivering person-centred services</b> is required with strategic decisions being less influenced by gaining convictions 'at any cost' and more influenced by delivering person-centred justice.
Routinely offering third party support	Victim/witnesses to be <b>routinely offered independent support at all stages of the criminal justice journey</b> .
Having specialist roles	The system should recognise the importance of having <b>specialist instead of generalist staff</b> available to work with victims and witnesses when addressing potentially traumatic incidents. One size does not fit all.
Balancing accused and victims' rights	A need to address <b>system design features</b> which may, at present, be perceived by victims and witnesses as favouring perpetrators. Any measures which <b>reduce feelings of self-blame</b> would be constructive, it seems.
Providing comfort, safety and security	Victims and witnesses <b>need to feel physically comfortable and safe</b> , particularly at court (e.g. separating victims/witnesses/their supporters from perpetrators, accommodating mobility preferences/needs, safeguarding before and after cases appear at court and providing safe spaces when giving statements).
Improving and enhancing training	More training is needed in relation to trauma, especially as it relates to emotional abuse, post-traumatic stress, depression and anxiety. Training to understand triggers, responses and dissociation was also encouraged. <b>People with lived experience should be involved in delivering training for greatest impact.</b>