



# Looking through a trauma-informed lens

**From a Governor's perspective, Robin Eldridge explains why trauma-informed practice is vital for both women and staff in prison**

I am convinced that if we truly embrace the principles underpinning the concept of becoming trauma informed (BTI) our relationships with those in our care will be enhanced; the experience of imprisonment will be more positive (and less damaging) and prisoners will be more engaged with the services and interventions offered.

Ultimately this can only increase the likelihood of a successful resettlement and reduced risks – to individuals themselves and to society.

Whilst the core elements of running safe, secure and decent prisons are well embedded in the women's estate, BTI will enable us to also see through a trauma-informed 'lens' and become more aware of how our actions can impact on others, whether they have suffered significant trauma or not and whether they are a prisoner or a member of staff.

This enhanced awareness of the impact of trauma will allow us to adopt techniques which are most appropriate to the circumstances and will hopefully lead to more meaningful and productive working relationships between staff and prisoners.

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I anticipate us becoming more attuned to identifying the indicators of past trauma e.g. accepting that challenging behaviour may not simply be a case of an offender being 'bad' or displaying an adverse reaction to a negative decision against them but may be the result of significant circumstances that have greatly affected the manner in which she will behave in certain situations.

Nor will we erroneously pre-judge behaviour because of a diagnosis the offender may have been given. In other words we change the question 'what is wrong with her' to 'what has happened to her?'

This increased consciousness will also encourage us to allow women the 'space' to disclose and share information and having done so to make their own choices about how they wish to deal with the emotional content of the disclosure.

In summary, I believe this exposure to Dr Covington's experience and the BTI material will enhance what staff already know and allow them to adapt this knowledge to be even more effective in their jobs. I also think it will align well with most staffs professional and personal values.

Becoming trauma informed dovetails neatly with our focus on decency, safer custody and latterly the development of Enabling Environments.

As Governor, BTI has also sharpened my appreciation of how past trauma may be impacting on staff, either vicariously or as a result of their own experiences.