



Trauma-Informed Leadership Guide for Leaders from All Sectors and Industries

This guide is aimed at supporting leaders navigating the COVID-19 pandemic. It is based on the 6 principles of SAMSHA's [Trauma-Informed Care Approach](#) and adapted by [Kindred Consulting, LLC](#). **This guide is not a replacement for mental health support or treatment.** It is intended to help leaders build or reform their organizational culture to become one that promotes empathy and resilience. It is not comprehensive; it is just a start.

Safety (physical, emotional, psychological)

- Invite your staff to share with you about what safety looks like to them.
- Model vulnerability (share honestly about how you're doing, how your family is doing, how you're coping)
- Carve out time for employees to share how they are doing; don't rush this.
- If you're able, contract with a mental health provider and offer sessions for your staff.
- If you're able, contract with a mental health provider to lead virtual support groups for your team (many nonprofits have mental health practitioners you could work with).
- Remove expectations (explicit or implicit) for employees to "check their personal lives at the door."
- Send routine messages of support, [like these](#).
- Develop "Organizational Agreements" or "Terms of Engagement" about how individuals and teams will engage with one another in a respectful and supportive manner.
- Get as many team members to a remote work model as possible (physical safety).
- For employees who can't work 100% remotely, implement physical distancing requirements, and check in routinely about how it is working.

Trustworthiness and Transparency

- Send a morning email each day, sharing updates. Occasionally send it in video form.
- Share new policies as they are developed (and re-share over time).
- Communicate when you are in the process of *making a decision*, not just once it is made.
- Communicate *how* decisions are being made (i.e. "I'm meeting with each employee individually. I'll consider each perspective before I make X decision.").
- Carve out time and prioritize responding to emails from your employees every day.
- Meet with leadership staff routinely to ensure messaging is consistent and equitably delivered.
- Host weekly calls/video meetings with all staff to share your message.
- Overcommunicate, even when you think it's annoying (it's not; it's helpful).
- When considering layoffs, program cuts, and other tough decisions, communicate with your teams as early as you feel you can. Seek their input when possible.
- Pop into meetings you normally would not attend to offer to answer people's questions and check in.
- Share timely updates or summaries with staff after meeting with the board or other key investors/funders.

Peer Support

- Implement [virtual peer support communities](#) for your teams. Offer them often. Consider requiring participation or emphatically expressing permission to participate.
- Hear from your team how they would like to participate in peer groups (what topics or format, how to break up groups, scheduling, etc.).
- Ensure that each peer group has a facilitator and that there are clear guidelines for the facilitators.
- Develop “Group Agreements” or “Terms of Engagement” about how peer groups will engage with one another in a respectful and supportive manner.
- If you ask an employee to facilitate a peer group, ensure there are offerings for them to participate in other groups in which they are not facilitating.
- Routinely collect feedback from employees about how peer groups are going and how they could be more valuable.
- Consider creating space on a platform like Slack or Microsoft Teams for peers to connect and check in with each other throughout the day.
- Explore with your team if they would like to form affinity peer groups (groups for women, People of Color, parents, etc.).

Collaboration and Mutuality

- Look at your org chart. Make sure each employee at all levels of the org are invited to and participating in conversations and offerings.
- Include opportunities for all staff members to contribute to ideas for promoting a safe and trauma-informed culture (don’t assume accounting or cleaning staff, for example, aren’t interested).
- Invite non-traditional leaders in your organization to lead initiatives.
- Consider which decisions you are making could be brought to your team for input.
- Seek input from your teams before you pitch ideas to the board or funders.
- Share credit with your team for your organization’s successes and resilience publicly and often.

Empowerment, Voice, and Choice

- Ensure each of your staff members [has the tools](#), software, and resources they need to be successful working remotely.
- Offer trainings, tutorials, and webinars during this time; don’t pause investing in your staff. There are a lot of great virtual professional development opportunities out there.
- Consider offering supervisory employees a [leadership coach](#) during this time (and beyond).
- Ask your employees, “What makes you feel empowered here?”
- Shift meeting schedules during this time. Ask your employees to share when they can best manage virtual meetings and conferences.
- Listen to ideas shared by your team and don’t be afraid to test them out.
- Thank your employees for sharing feedback and ideas with you, even when it’s feedback that is tough to hear.

Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues

Please note this section is aimed at organizations who are beginning their equity journey. This list is not comprehensive.

- Begin (or dig deeper into) your own personal learning around social identity and equity. Equity initiatives need to be modelled, lived, breathed and championed from the very “top” of the organization.
- Connect with your leadership team and develop a plan to ensure each of you are learning individually and collectively about leadership practices rooted in diversity, inclusion, and equity.
- Have dialogue with your teams about what an [equity lens](#) looks like for your organization.
- Host a conversation with your teams or do a survey about what kind of learning they need around diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Work with consultants and coaches who operate with an [equity lens](#).
- Start your equity work by looking at your internal structures, systems, policies, and culture. Chip away at making each part of your organization one that embraces equity and inclusion.
- When you feel discomfort, resist the urge to outsource, delegate, or separate/silo this work. Find professional support in working through your discomfort.
- In your equity work, do not overburden your staff from marginalized communities (LGBTQ+, People of Color, immigrants, etc.) by expecting them explain their experiences of oppression to you or your team. And do not expect them to speak on behalf of or represent their entire identity group.
- Be okay with making mistakes along the way. When you do, apologize and move on. Be vulnerable and ask for help.