



## STRENGTHS-BASED CONVERSATIONS

### Skills for Trauma-Informed Practice

Skill-building and empowerment are at the heart of trauma-informed practice. Strengths-based conversations help to create an organizational culture of hope, change, and resilience. By focusing on strengths, rather than deficits, service providers:

- Acknowledge the ability of all people to survive and even grow from adversity
- Recognize the resilience that it takes for people to thrive despite numerous challenges in their lives
- Emphasize that people can and do heal from experiences of trauma

Strengths-based conversations can occur in all levels of an organization, from how staff answer the phone, to making referrals, to report writing, to program planning and evaluation. Trauma-informed practice requires everyone in an organization to ask new questions. Rather than framing discussions with “what is wrong with this person?” we begin to ask “what has happened to this person?” By talking about responses to trauma as adaptations and survival skills, we avoid emphasizing

problematic behaviors and symptoms of medical diagnoses and labels and can focus on what is already working in an individual's life and identify opportunities for positive change.

Asking about an individual's strengths, such as their interests, survival strategies, practical skills, spirituality, and community connections, is one way that service providers can highlight resilience, support the development of new skills, and create relationships based on respect and understanding.

Incorporating Inuit Qaujimajangit:

- 1) Tunnganarniq, fostering good spirit by being open, welcoming and inclusive
- 2) Inuuqatigiitsiarniq, respecting others, relationships and caring for people

Some approaches to add to your tool kit of resources:

- Be neutral with no assumption
- Listen, be present where they are at
- Have the mind of a servant
- Learn two words in Inuktitut or Inuuinaqtun 1) add "yunga" to your name 2) qannuipit?
- Probe using only on key words heard and understand we all need to reach out
- Share your value of confidentiality
- Make room for silence to allow for digesting their own thoughts and what they have heard
- Leave a pamphlet or resources for them to follow up on their own and at their own pace

Here are some examples of questions that can help service providers initiate strengths-based conversations.

- How have you managed to get through the tough times in your life?
- What/who are your supports?
- What is your source of strength?
- What are some of the ways you've succeeded in making positive changes in your life?
- What would your friends say are your biggest strengths?
- What keeps you going?
- What are your hopes for the future?
- What are some of your interests or passions?
- What has kept you going, even when you weren't sure you could?
- What are you already doing to look after yourself (family, children etc.)?

Once trust is built, below are some follow up example questions, depending on their level of interest and involvement in s culture.

- How would you describe your connection with your culture? Are you interested in learning more about your culture or getting involved in more cultural activities?
- What name were you given at birth and how was this person who you are named after? This subject is very personal and depending on how well they knew the person will warm their heart and will hold special meaning and appreciation for their namesake.

"Strengths-based approaches are at the heart of *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* .... Every individual is recognized for the strengths he/she possesses, and each family or community group is also recognized for the contributions they make to enhancing the common good."

Shirley Tagalik

*Inuit Quajimajatuqangit: The Role of Indigenous Knowledge in Supporting Wellness in Inuit Communities in Nunavut*, National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, p.5.

## Discussion Questions

1. How do you contribute to a sense of hope when working with your clients? How can using strengths-based language and approaches help foster change and growth?
2. What policies and practices within your organization support a focus on strengths? What about those that seem more focused on deficits? Some areas to consider include program entry requirements, intake procedures and organizational values. What are some first steps for helping to shift your organization towards being more strengths-based?
3. How might responses to trauma and resilience vary for different populations, e.g., youth, men, women, Elders? What are some of the strengths of each group?
4. How do principles of trauma-informed practice align with Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (Inuit knowledge)? How can these perspectives each contribute to supporting individual and community wellness?

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