

# Working with Young People Who Have Experienced Trauma

## Personal and Professional Contexts



All practitioners have personal and professional contexts which influence their work. The individual identities and personalities of practitioners affect their practice. It can help to reflect on the contexts that frame practitioner interactions to distinguish between the personal and the professional.

**To gain insight into a person's professional context, you may want to ask:**

- Where do they work?
- What is their professional role?
- What is the nature and frequency of their interactions with young people?
- What are their responsibilities to themselves, their colleagues, the wider community and the young people in their care?

'Reflective practice' supports the practitioner in developing their awareness of self and others. It encourages the (re)consideration of personal and professional boundaries whilst acknowledging the existence of power structures that influence their work.

## Factors that Can Affect Professional Roles and Actions

- **Social ecology** represents the embedding of individuals in families or relational contexts. These family or relational contexts are nested within larger community or neighbourhood contexts, which are nested within larger socio-political environments<sup>1</sup>.
- **Social norms** refer to rules of behaviour in groups and societies, which influence and shape how people act and set a standard for understanding the (un)acceptable within a given social context<sup>2+3</sup>. However, social norms vary and have different functions across different cultures<sup>4</sup>. It is useful for the practitioner to consider cultural sensitivities and appropriateness in their work.
- **The systems and structures** that people are a part of can support or challenge their capacities to thrive. The socio-political landscape provides the backdrop for professional practice. Sectors, institutions and organisations present power structures that affect (facilitate or hinder) practitioners and the communities within which they operate.
- **Organisational culture** refers to an organisation's values and aims, which influence the tone and operational framework for professional practice.
- **The role of support** for practitioners on the frontline is key to setting a standard for quality of practice. A practitioner in a work environment that is people-centred, prioritises well-being and has clear accountability parameters, has more opportunity to feel safe and supported in their role and offer the same to the young people in their care.

## What Practitioners Can Do

**There are key questions a practitioner can ask themselves and young people in practice.**

*Examples:*

When a child or young person displays behaviour that communicates they may have experienced trauma, a practitioner can do the following:

- Consistency is key; it is important for practitioners to follow-up on interactions with young people and do what they say they are going to do
- Support for both the young person and the practitioner is essential for facilitating a nurturing environment and safe space. For the young person, this could be about the boundaries of their relationship with the practitioner, the tone and the nature of their interactions.
- For the practitioner, support could include managerial supervision, reflective practice and a work culture centred on well-being.

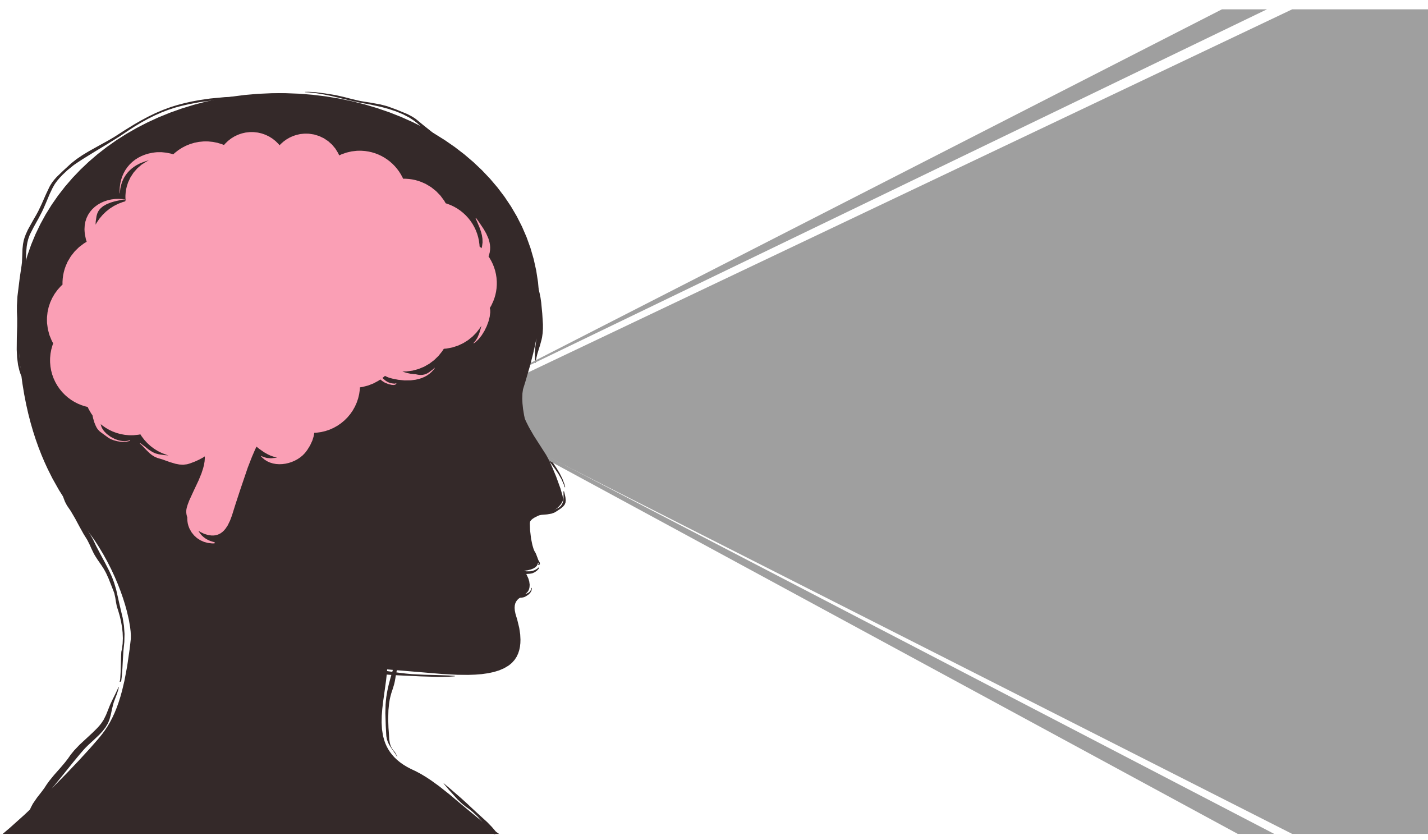


### **Safe Space(s)**

A safe space provides clear boundaries and protection from emotional or psychological harm<sup>5</sup>.

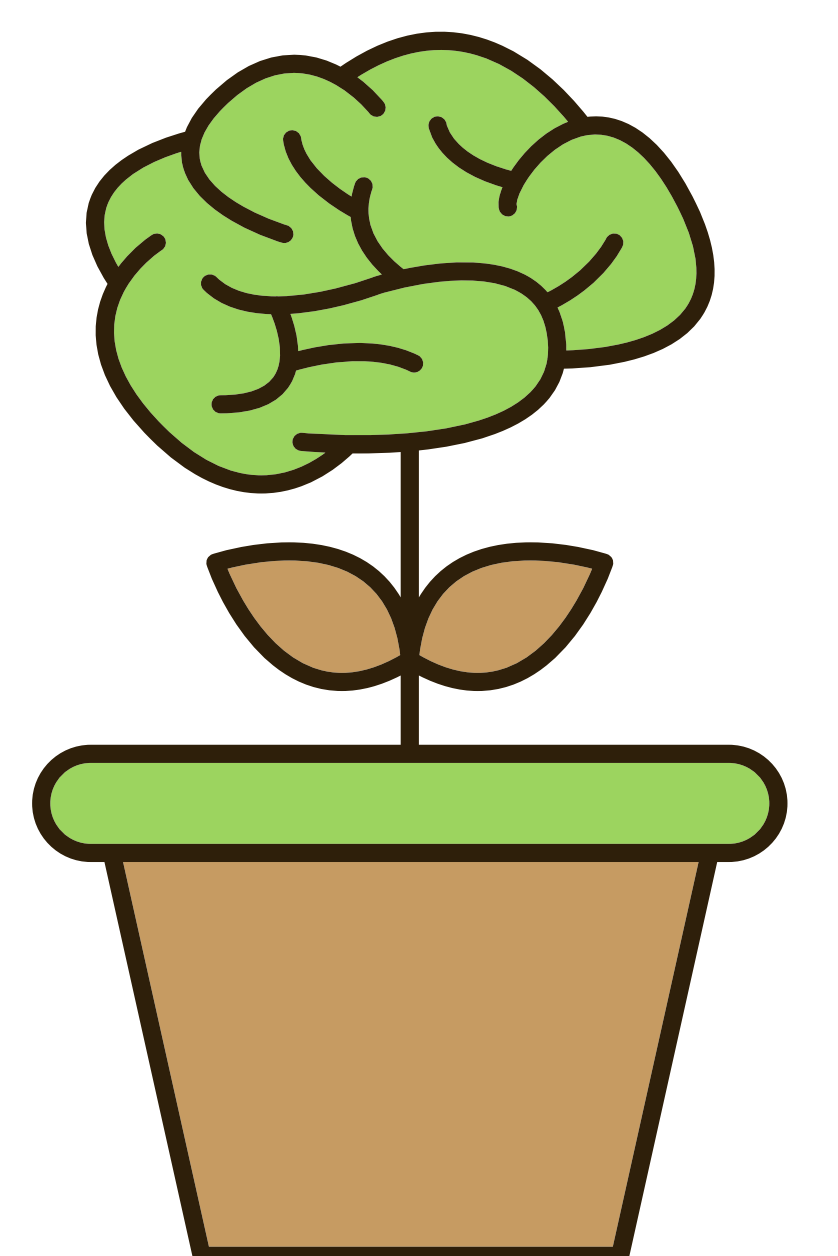
Its purpose is to offer the opportunity to feel secure within a sense of community, facilitating certain kinds of conversations or interactions.

## The Impact of Perceptions



Social and cultural norms intersect with individual identities and can influence perceptions of people and situations. There are (in)visible elements within cultures and societies and unconscious biases that affect how people assess situations and navigate their environments.

Awareness and care with language is the key to creating welcoming spaces for interaction. A word, tone or physical gesture can affect a person's perception of themselves and others. The same message repeated multiple times can create narratives that embed themselves, affecting dominant (often inaccurate) perceptions in cultures and societies.



One person can make a difference. Every interaction that is perceived as positive or negative can affect how a child or young person sees themselves. Research shows that a critical protective factor for children (exposed to a traumatic experience) is the presence of a consistent and nurturing adult<sup>6</sup>.

The individual perception of an experience can set the tone for how that experience is interpreted and internalised. The perception of that experience can also set the tone for future interactions with the self and the external world, influencing thoughts, emotions and behaviours.

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# Reference List

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