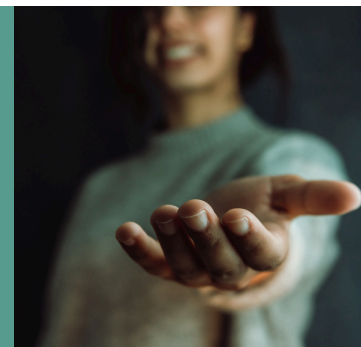


TRAUMA AND ADDICTION

EXPLORING THE CONNECTION



Trauma and addiction are closely linked, shaping one another in a cyclic relationship that poses challenges to the addiction recovery process. Understanding how past traumatic experiences can increase the vulnerability to substance dependence is important for the development of comprehensive treatment strategies.

73%

People with a history of childhood abuse have a 73% greater risk of substance use disorder in their lifetime than other people. (Keyser-Marcus, et al., 2015 as cited by NIDA)

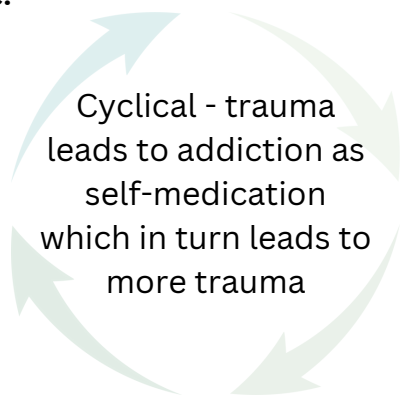
trauma
addiction

Trauma refers to an experience that is mentally and/or emotionally painful or stressful that can result in long term mental, physical and/or neurological consequences

Addiction refers to an individual becoming dependent on a substance or behaviour to the point it often becomes habitual to engage with it

HOW DOES ADDICTION RELATE TO TRAUMA

Many individuals who experience trauma turn to substances as a way to cope.



Trauma affects vulnerability to addiction by disrupting emotional regulation, altering brain function, and impairing coping mechanisms

PREVENTION/INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

PREVENTION	STRATEGIES TO CHANGE THE CONDITIONS THAT LEAD TO TRAUMA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• EDUCATION ON THE IMPORTANCE OF NONJUDGEMENTAL ATTITUDES• PROMOTING WELLNESS PROGRAMMING
INTERVENTION	STRATEGY TO CHANGE BEHAVIOUR	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• TRAUMA-SPECIFIC SERVICES (ART THERAPY, GROUNDING TECHNIQUES, BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY)

Three Types of PTSD Related to Addiction

Internal intrusions

unwanted and upsetting memories, nightmares, flashbacks and emotional upset

Hyperarousal

a state of excessive and persistent alertness

Change in mood/cognition

alteration in cognitive processes such as memory, attention planning and problem-solving which can impact negative emotionality



There are many factors that influence if an individual will be traumatized by an event or not. (Keyser-Marcus, et al., 2015 as cited by NIDA)

“With the recognition that large numbers of men and women receiving services in the mental health and addictions systems are the survivors of sexual and physical abuse, practitioners need to become informed about the dynamics and the aftermath of trauma” (Harris & Fallot, 2001)

RECOVERY & HEALING THROUGH A TRAUMA-INFORMED LENS

A trauma-informed approach is essential for understanding and treating addiction.



Effective recovery approaches must address both trauma and addiction simultaneously.

REFERENCES

- Basedow, L. A., Kuitunen-Paul, S., Wiedmann, M. F., Roessner, V., & Golub, Y. (2021). Self-reported PTSD is associated with increased use of MDMA in adolescents with substance use. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 12(1). <http://doi.org/10.1080/2008198.2021.1968140>
- Becker, T. D., Castañeda Ramirez, S., Bruges Boude, A., Leong, A., Ivanov, I., & Rice, T. R. (2024). Interventions for prevention and treatment of substance use in youth with traumatic childhood experiences: a systematic review and synthesis of the literature. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 33(10), 3419–3438. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-023-02265-x>
- Bowen, E. A., & Murshid, N. S. (2016). Trauma-informed social policy: A conceptual framework for policy analysis and advocacy. *American Journal of Public Health*, 106(2), 223–229. <http://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2015.302970>
- Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (US). Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services. Rockville (MD): Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (US); 2014. (Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) Series, No. 57) Exhibit 1.3-4, DSM-5 Diagnostic Criteria for PTSD. Available from: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207191/box/part1_ch3_box16/
- Covington, S. S. (2008). Women and addiction: A trauma-informed approach. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 40(5), 377–384. doi: 10.1080/02791072.2008.10400665 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19248395/>
- Csiernik, R. (2021). Substance Use and Misuse: Everything matters (Third edition.). Canadian Scholars.
- European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction. (2009). Addiction neurobiology: Ethical and social implications. In ECMDA Monograph. https://www.eudam.europa.eu/system/files/publications/545/ECMDA-monograph9_161697.pdf#page=23
- Family First Intervention. (2025, January 9). What is an intervention? Family First Intervention. <https://family-intervention.com/resources/what-is-an-intervention/>
- Goodman, R. (2017). Contemporary trauma theory and trauma-informed care in substance use disorders: a conceptual model for integrating coping and resilience. *Advances in Social Work*, 18(1), 186–201. <http://doi.org/10.1086/021312>
- Government of Alberta. (n.d.). Social-emotional learning. Alberta.ca. <https://www.alberta.ca/social-emotional-learning>
- Greene, A., Korchmaros, J. D., & Frank, F. (2024). Trauma Experience Among Women Who Have Substance Use Disorders and are Homeless or Near Homeless. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 60(2), 233–243. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597-023-01162-6>
- Halpern, S. C., Schuch, F. B., Scherer, J. N., Sordi, A. O., Pachado, M., Dalbosco, C., Fara, L., Pechansky, F., Kessler, F., & Von Diemen, L. (2018) Child Maltreatment and Illicit Substance Abuse: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Longitudinal Studies. *Child Abuse Rev.*, 27: 344–360. <https://doi.org/10.1002/car.2534>
- Harris, M., & Fallot, R. D. (2001). Envisioning a trauma-informed service system: a vital paradigm shift. *New Directions for Mental Health Services*, 89, 3–22. <https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.23320018903>
- Hlavinka, E. (January 27, 2025). Addiction treatment often overlooks trauma. That's a major hurdle in stopping the overdose crisis. *Salon.com*. Retrieved from: <https://www.salon.com/2025/01/27/addiction-treatment-often-overlooks-trauma-thats-a-major-hurdle-in-stopping-the-overdose/>
- Hunt-Stone, K. (2024). Truth or dare? Rethinking school drug education in America. *Boston University Law Review*, 104(5), 1479–1513. Retrieved from: <https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/bulr104&div=50&id=8page=>
- Interior Health. (2023). Safety first: A guide for educators. [PDF]. <https://www.interiorhealth.ca/sites/default/files/PDFS/safety-first-educators-guide.pdf>
- Klinic Community Health Centre. (2013). Trauma-informed: The trauma toolkit, 2nd edition. Retrieved from <https://www.nccih.ca/en/publicationsExternalview.aspx?sortcode=2.21.0.0&id=2276>
- Levin, Y., Lev Bar-Or, R., Forer, R., Vaserman, M., Kor, A., & Lev-Ran, S. (2021). The Association Between Type of Trauma, Level of Exposure and Addiction. *Addictive Behaviors*, 118, 106889. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2021.106889>
- Livingston, N. A., Farmer, S. L., Mahoney, C. T., Marx, B. P., & Keane, T. M. (2022). The role of PTSD symptom clusters and criterion in predicting future high-risk drug and alcohol use among returning veteran men and women. *Psychological Services*, 19(2), 386–395. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ser0000538>
- Meyers, L. (2024). “Walk a Mile in My Shoes”: stories of recovery in art therapy. *International Journal of Art Therapy*: Inscape, 29(4), 221–229. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17454832.2024.2347903>
- Our New Tomorrow. (n.d.). Treatment. Our New Tomorrow. <https://ournewtomorrow.ca/treatment/>
- Pistone, I., Blomberg, A., & Sager, M. (2020). A systematic mapping of substance use, misuse, abuse, and addiction prevention research: Current status and implications for future research. *Journal of Substance Use*, 25(3), 231–237. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14659891.2019.1684583>
- Saraiya, T. C., Jones, A. C., Lopez-Castro, T., Hood, C. O., Flores, J., & Badour, C. L. (2024). Trauma-related shame predicts daily non-medical prescription opioid use among individuals with PTSD symptoms. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 171, 171–176. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychires.2024.01.041>
- Sistad Hall, R. E., Stevenson, B., Bovin, M. J., Kleiman, S., Nelson, D., Hagedorn, H. J., & Kehle-Forbes, S. (2025). A network analysis of clinician-rated posttraumatic stress disorder and substance use disorder symptom clusters in a sample of veterans seeking outpatient treatment. *Addictive Behaviors*, 163. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2025.108249>
- Straussner, S. L. A., & Calnan, A. J. (2014). Trauma Through the Life Cycle: A review of current literature. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 42(4), 323–335. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-014-0496-z>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2014). KAP keys for clinicians: Trauma-informed care in behavioural health services. <https://library.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/sma14-4420.pdf>

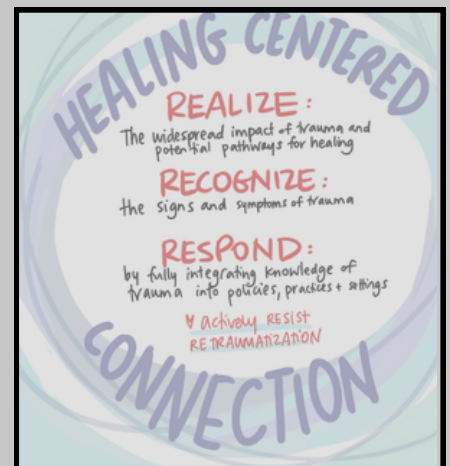
EVIDENCE-BASED RESOURCES

Safety First: Real Drug Education for Teens.
<https://drugpolicy.org/resource/safety-first/>

Seeking Safety.
<https://www.treatment-innovations.org/seeking-safety.html>

A New Tomorrow.
<https://ournewtomorrow.ca/>

SAMHSA’s Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioural Health Services.
<https://library.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/sma14-4816.pdf>



50%

in a survey of 600 people with a substance use disorder, 50% reported suffering physical sexual abuse, with women reporting much higher rates of both. (Keyser-Marcus, et al., 2015 as cited by NIDA)