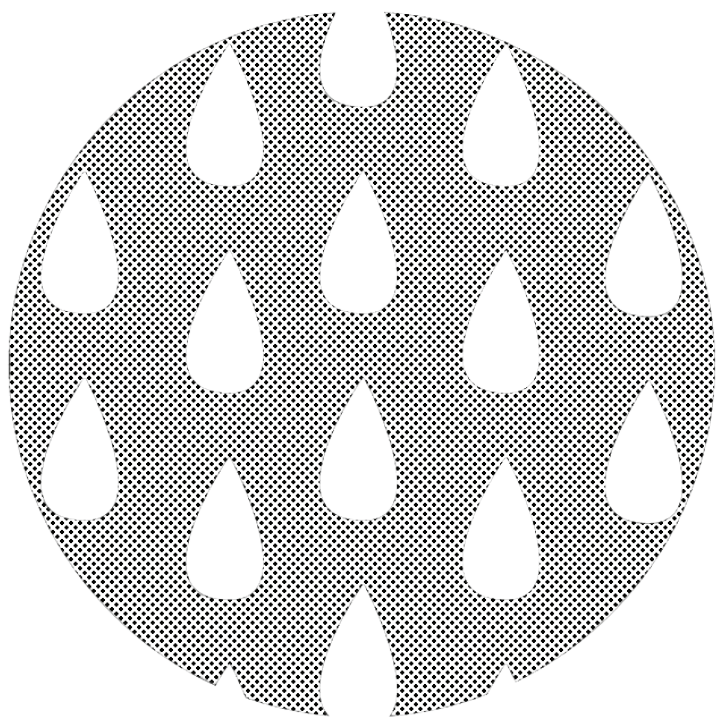


# INTRODUCTION TO TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES



Issue One  
Volume Two





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## Introduction

On April 17th, seed project hosted its second virtual workshop: Trauma-Informed Facilitation Practices. Led by trauma-informed educator and interdisciplinary artist, Candy Gonzalez, participants learned about the effects of trauma on themselves, the people they engage with and how to incorporate trauma-informed practices into their existing work. This workshop brought artists, educators, community leaders and volunteers together.

As a group, we set Community Agreements, or guidelines we agreed on on how to interact with each other, learned how to create safety plans--quick strategies that help us feel calm and secure when we get stressed out, and then dove into definitions and applications of trauma in the world around us.

A huge thank you to Candy for their expertise and grace as they led us through this workshop. The resources, definitions and materials come from their slideshow presentation, which can be found on our website.



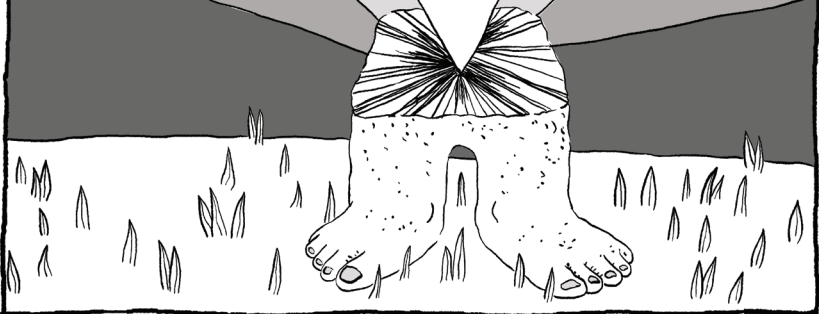
**5** Things You Can See

**4** Things You Can Touch

**3** Things You Can Hear

**2** Things You  
Can Smell

**1** Thing  
You Can  
Taste



5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique Illustration

## Recap: Trauma-Informed Facilitation Practice for Artists

*The following are excerpts from the workshop. "I" are the elements borrowed from Candy's perspective. This is not a full or direct transcript but an edited version of our conversation. A full recording is available on the seed project website.*

### Community Agreements

Community agreements are a way you can set the tone of the spaces or groups that you're facilitating. Usually, when you're meeting with a group for the first time, you don't know everybody intimately. It takes time to build relationships with people. The first few moments of meeting with a group are critical.

Start with an introduction (name, pronouns, role, etc.). Community agreements are an explicit and clear way of setting standards for how you would expect folks to participate and engage. This helps to create some clarity, which tends to put people at ease.

Candy usually goes to their favorite quote from Brene Brown: "Clear is kind, unclear is unkind."

Examples of community agreements can be:

- **Respect yourself/Respect others:** It's important for you to respect yourself, and respect others. It is also important to respect virtual spaces.
- **Honor your body/Take care of yourself:** You can remind participants that they are only here for a short amount of time and everyone should honor their bodies. This is the way that we respect ourselves. If at any moment you feel like you need to turn off your camera, step away, grab water, or use the bathroom, you are welcome to do that. As a facilitator, it is your responsibility to support yourself and others in that.
- **Be Present:** As a facilitator, you can and should acknowledge the external events that might inform how folks enter the space. In our case during the workshop and as of the completion of this zine, we're still in the middle of a global pandemic. And though things feel like we're kind of coming over the hump, there are mixed signals every day. And that is anxiety-inducing. So, as much as possible, remind yourself and your participants to be present, while also not putting pressure on yourself when you feel like yourself drifting away. There's a balance that can be found there.

- **Open mind/Open heart:** Invite yourself and participants to have an open mind and an open heart. A lot of the information in the workshop and zine will be new for some folks. In this particular workshop, we are talking about trauma and it may be hard. Candy shared that there's a tension where they enjoy talking about trauma from a technical aspect and the applications of trauma-informed work are interesting and exciting. Yet, as somebody who is trauma-impacted, it is difficult.
- **Ask Questions and Enjoy yourself:** Enjoy yourself! If you are finding enjoyment in learning and finding clarity that is welcome. There's no room for shame in asking questions. If you are facilitating a space, it is important to make space for folks to ask you questions including requests for repetition or to slow down. Some of this information is hard. As facilitators that is our job, to meet folks where they are. And if there's a gap in knowledge, Candy shares that when this occurs in their facilitation, they will be honest and say "Hey, I can come back to you with a good answer". Not having an answer doesn't mean you are a bad facilitator or that you failed.

There are lots of other agreements that might be more relevant or helpful to other kinds of groups. These are the agreements we held for our workshop.

## Safety Plan

A safety plan is a list of activities individuals can do to soothe themselves, regulate their stress levels, and regain a sense of safety and control. Activities that comfort and calm each person are unique to them. Activities can be:

- **Physical:** moving, tapping, stretching, touching objects
- **Sensory:** smelling, fragrances, sucking on candy, closing your eyes, listening to music
- **Linguistic:** journaling, saying a prayer or affirmation, staying silent for a while
- **Locational:** sitting in a comfortable spot, being near someone you trust, leaving the room

Examples from Candy: *I have fidget toys or little toys around that helped me find grounding. You might want to turn off your computer or turn off your camera for a moment.*

The idea of a safety plan was born from a trauma-informed social worker, Sandra Bloom, who leads the Sanctuary Institute.



## Defining Trauma

Our ideas of trauma are subjective, meaning they're based on our own lives and experiences. Here are some definitions from the field that may be helpful:

**Trauma as defined by The Center for Non-violence and Social Justice:** Trauma is experiences or situations that are emotionally painful and stressful, and that overwhelm people's ability to cope, leaving them feeling powerless.

**Trauma as defined by "Trauma and Recovery":** Traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely. But because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life.

**Trauma as defined by "Trauma Through a Child's Eyes"** states that Trauma happens when any experience stuns us like a bolt out of the blue. It overwhelms us, leaving us altered and disconnected from our bodies, any coping mechanisms we may have are undermined, we feel utterly helpless and hopeless.

**Other ways trauma can be discussed:** According to the ACES (Adverse Childhood Experiences)\* study 60% of people have had at least one traumatic experience as a child. 40% or more have had more than one traumatic experience.

From these definitions, we can see that trauma actually occurs frequently and is not uncommon. It's not necessarily the event, but how the event impacts the human who experienced it. Trauma doesn't necessarily exist in the event, but in the body, in the person that lived through the event.

Other helpful terms are:

**Trauma-Sensitive** is being intentional in the way one interacts with someone they know or suspect has experienced a significant traumatic experience.

**Trauma-Aware** is the degree to which someone is aware that trauma is a reality for many people.

**Trauma-Competent** is the degree to which a person is capable of effectively integrating trauma-informed skills into a specific situation, to better understand the situation and respond to it.

\*This study was conducted by a predominantly white community. If you consider what the impact is in white communities, compared to communities who are oppressed, due to system like racism, then you can even raise that number.

**Trauma-Informed** describes when we move on from being from talking about interpersonal applications of trauma-informed models to systemic applications.

**Trauma-Informed Services** are designed to accommodate the vulnerabilities of trauma-impacted people, and allow services to be delivered in a way that avoids inadvertent retraumatization. These services will facilitate consumer participation in treatment. The goal is always to avoid pre-traumatizing the communities that we're working with.

**Trauma-Impacted Person** is a neutral term that is used to describe people who have in some way been impacted by trauma, without calling them, victims or survivors. When we use the words like victims or survivors, we're making a lot of assumptions about how the person perceives themselves, how they perceive their journey, and where they are on their healing journey. We should not lead with assumptions about the humans we're working with, without giving them an opportunity to share how they feel about their experiences.

### **Kinds of Trauma:**

**Situational:** traumatic events not perpetuated by other people that the person may already know.

**Relational:** interpersonal traumatic experiences, meaning where relationships exist between the individual and those that caused harm. This can be family, professional colleagues, friends, etc.

**Acute:** one-time traumatic events.

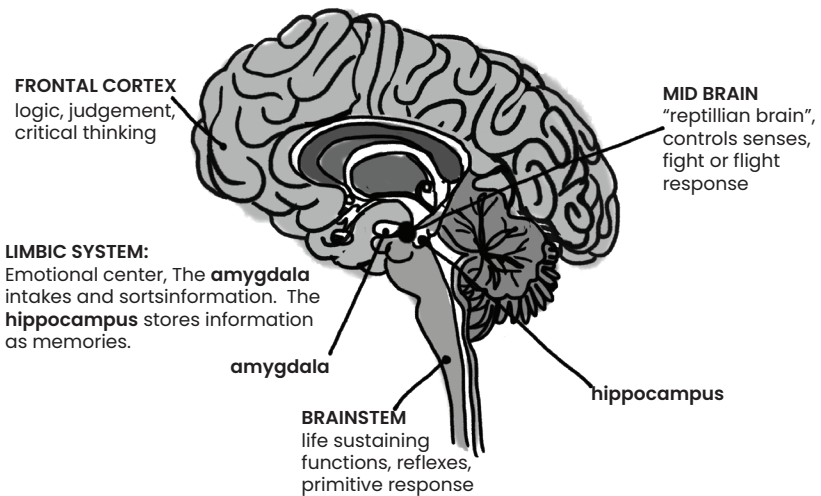
**Allostatic Load:** the impact of ongoing chronic, toxic stress.

**Chronic Trauma:** traumatic experiences that occur repeatedly.

**Complex Trauma:** when there are a variety of traumas making the overall impact even more difficult to assess and understand.

If we think about the global pandemic, it may have started as an acute traumatic experience, but the longer we experience it shifts to become a chronic trauma.

## Trauma and the Body



\*adapted from Bartol Foundation Trauma-Informed Practice for Teaching Artists Workbook

Our brain has different parts that manage different aspects of our basic functions. These interactions happen extremely quickly especially when we're in a calm state. Our brains are connecting across function areas and things are running smoothly. But what happens to the brain when we experience trauma? We are going to discuss just some of the parts of our brain that are directly impacted by trauma.

Trauma lives in the nervous system and the brain is one of the key organs within the nervous system. What is really powerful about this definition, is how it gives us that sensory understanding of what trauma does to us. It's not the event or when we experienced the trauma. It is literally stored in the parts of our brain that deal with sensory memory and sensory information.

Trauma causes us to lose touch with the areas of our brains that are in charge of executive functions, meaning the parts of our brain that deal with language, reasoning, and abstract thinking. When something with traumatic impact occurs, it disrupts our "normal" functions and causes us to feel like we've "lost touch" or there is a block in communication.

Another area of our brain is our survival functions. This area of the brain encompasses the midbrain. This is the area of the brain that we are born with and that regulates sleeping, eating, and basic physiological functions. It is also the area that we sometimes call

the Primal Fear zone. If our executive functions are disrupted by traumatic impact, then our brains rely more heavily on basic survival instincts. These instincts aren't always rational but reactive.

Trauma is like experiential, it's how we feel in our bodies, literally. It's important to consider, how do the memories of our experiences and all of the pain from those experiences impact our ability to lead lives as fully realized humans?

An example that Candy gave is from the TV show Spongebob:

*There is this episode where SpongeBob is being asked to delete all the information in his brain that's not related to fine dining. And, because it's a cartoon they illustrate an exaggerated version of what is happening in his brain. We get the shot of SpongeBob's brain, and it's all of these filing cabinets where his memories and functions are stored. All those files that aren't breathing and fine dining get thrown away. He's performing his job really well until there's this moment where he's asked for his name and he can't find it. So he starts getting really stressed and he has a breakdown and we see another illustration of what is happening in his brain. We see all the filing cabinets combust. It's silly but does such a great job of illustrating our brains under stress.*

The way that our brain processes all information, from the moment that we are born is that it kind of creates, there's kind of like these filing cabinets of all of our first experiences, our first hug, the first words, the first books, and everything that comes after is kind of filed away based on those first experiences.

What happens with trauma, and in the events that cause trauma, is that there's no filing cabinet for it and so our brains are literally stuck there like 'how do we make sense of this?'. It is the inability to make sense of the event that can create a lasting impact. When a person experiences trauma, they're feeling it, they're not thinking it.

## **Trauma and Triggers**

Many traumas remain dormant until triggered. So oftentimes, we'll put the memory of the traumatic experience away, and then we hear something, we smell something, we see a color or maybe a landscape that might remind us of that event, and that is the trigger. That trigger sets off a fear response. Triggers will literally trigger the brain from executive functions to survival functions and manifest differently for each person. Behind each trigger response is a series of physiological effects that remain a part of the person's sensory memory until it is processed.

Candy used a great example from the book “The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog” by Bruce Perry and Maia Szalavitz.

The author talks about a case where a Vietnam Vet who he worked with suddenly started to experience panic many years after his service. This person came back from the war and saw a lot of death but he thought he was okay. He got married, started a family, was working, and was doing well. He thought he was safe from PTSD. He moved to a place where the landscape was reminiscent of where he was deployed. He would drive to work and what started happening is that he would start sweating and hyperventilating. His mood was changing at home. Eventually, his wife suggested that he talk to somebody. The veteran agrees and starts to meet with the author, a clinician. During their sessions, the clinician didn't discover that the vet had been deployed for the Vietnam War until a few sessions in because they didn't think it was relevant. He didn't realize that he was being triggered by the landscape and that those memories were resurfacing. He thought that his service happened over 18 years ago and he was “safe”.

This is a great example of what happens when traumas remain dormant until they're triggered. It can be immediately following an event or eighteen years later.

### **What does Coping look like?**

So far we've discussed definitions and where in the brain and body trauma exists. We can treat trauma through seeking counseling or therapy, but if trauma lives in the body then we also need to consider how we treat our bodies to regulate when we're triggered.

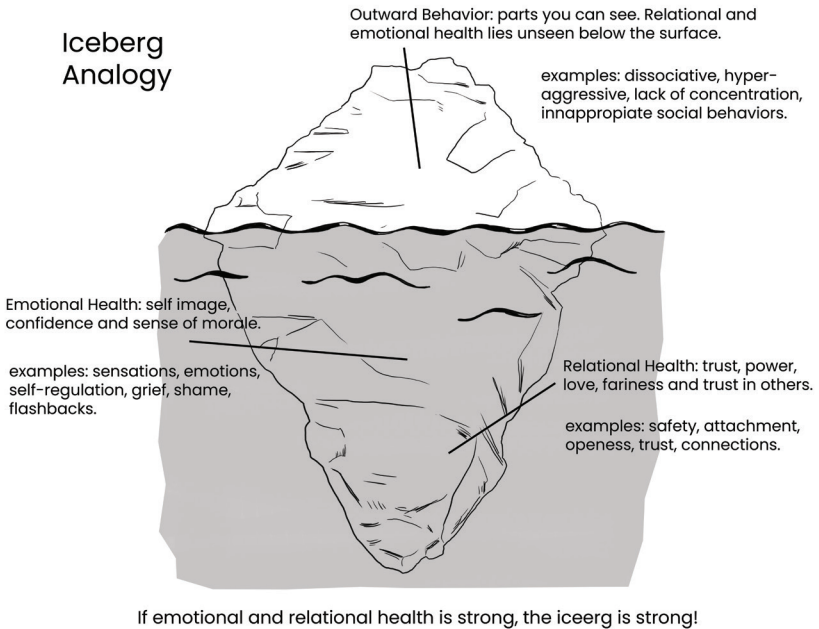
So how do we deal in the moment when we're having a panic attack or having a breakdown? This is called neuro-somatic regulation. This literally means regulating what is happening in your body as a result of a trigger. If you are hyperventilating or having trouble breathing, you might work through a breathing exercise. If you are feeling restless or fidgety, you might take a walk. This can also look like having a glass of water, a stress ball, something to doodle on, or a candle lit prior to a potentially stressful engagement. These are just a few examples of how you can engage your body or senses to co-regulate.

This is also why art is such a great tool for processing and healing. It engages our brains in ways that may be blocked or distracted due to stress and unprocessed trauma. As facilitators, consider ways that you might be able to incorporate sensory tools in your workshop! Maybe guide your group through a breathing exercise or strategically plan breaks to draw, stretch, or play.

# LCI's Iceberg Analogy

Developed by the Lakeside Global Institute

This iceberg, what it shows us, is that the people that we are working with our peers, even our own family, friends, and the communities that we serve can be thought of as an iceberg. What is above the surface is their outward behaviors, and sometimes, those outward behaviors are the only part that we can see. There might be behaviors that affect us, and we take those behaviors personally. This iceberg analogy reminds us that there's a lot that we don't see, and that we don't know, particularly when we are working with communities we are only working for a short period of time, or we're coming in to for the first time. Knowing that we're meeting folks and only seeing a small part of their lives it allows us to engage with compassion and empathy. Because then we realize that some of these behaviors are not about us and we can only work within someone's ability to receive engagement or help.



## The Trauma Continuum

### The Trauma Continuum



Little T trauma

minor/temporary

Big T trauma

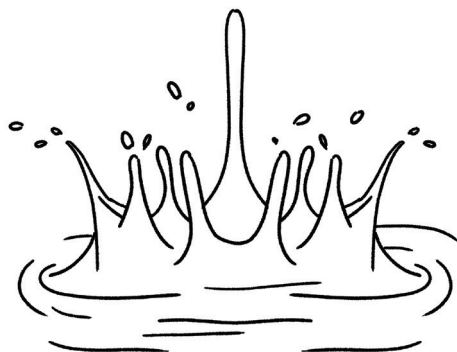
life-altering

The Trauma Continuum is a tool to help you understand where an event can fall as a traumatic experience for an individual. Since trauma is based on a person's perception of an event, it's important to know that the same event could impact two people differently.

Little T trauma is minor and the effects are usually temporary, while Big T trauma is deeply wounding and life-altering.

*Example from Candy: For some people, a car accident may be perceived as Little T trauma, while for others, it may have life-altering effects that can become Big T trauma. There are a lot of factors that go into how an individual may respond to an event.*

Understanding ourselves is key to knowing how stressful events in our lives may register on the Trauma Continuum.





## **Candy Alexandra Gonzalez**

Candy Alexandra González is a Little Havana-born and raised, Philadelphia-based, multidisciplinary visual artist, poet, activist and trauma-informed educator. Currently, Candy's artwork explores themes of body politics, fat phobia and self-healing through photography, poetry, printmaking and papermaking.

Candy received their MFA in Book Arts + Printmaking from the University of the Arts in 2017. Since graduating, they have been a 40th Street Artist-in-Residence in West Philadelphia, a West Bay View Fellow at Dieu Donn e in Brooklyn, NY, a Stockton Rush Bartol Foundation Micro-Grant Recipient and the Linda Lee Alter Fellow for the DaVinci Art Alliance.

Instagram: [candy\\_alexandra1](#)

## **Bibliography and Resources**

For a video recording and links to resources go to: [www.the-seed-projects.com/archive/recap-trauma-informed-facilitation-practices-workshop](http://www.the-seed-projects.com/archive/recap-trauma-informed-facilitation-practices-workshop)

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[www.thesanctuaryinstitute.org/about-us/the-sanctuary-model/](http://www.thesanctuaryinstitute.org/about-us/the-sanctuary-model/)

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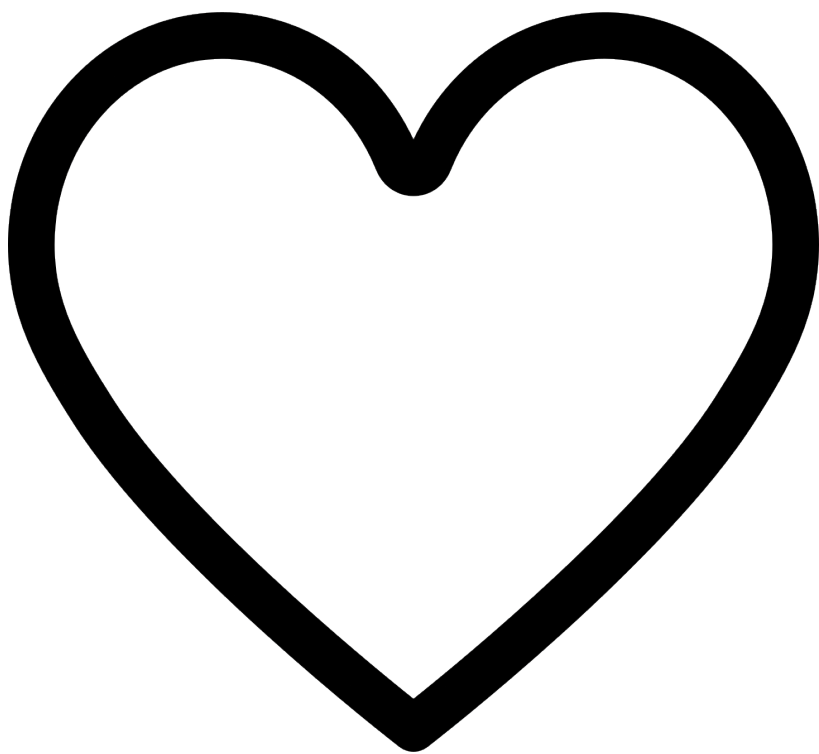
The Boy Who Was Raised By A Dog, by Bruce D Perry and Maia Szalavitz, Basic Books, 2007



## Brain Break

### What color is your heart today?

In the heart below color in with as many colors and shapes you'd like the way your heart feels! This is a great journaling tool to get in tune with your feelings and emotions, check in with yourself, or check in with your peers if you are leading a group.









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