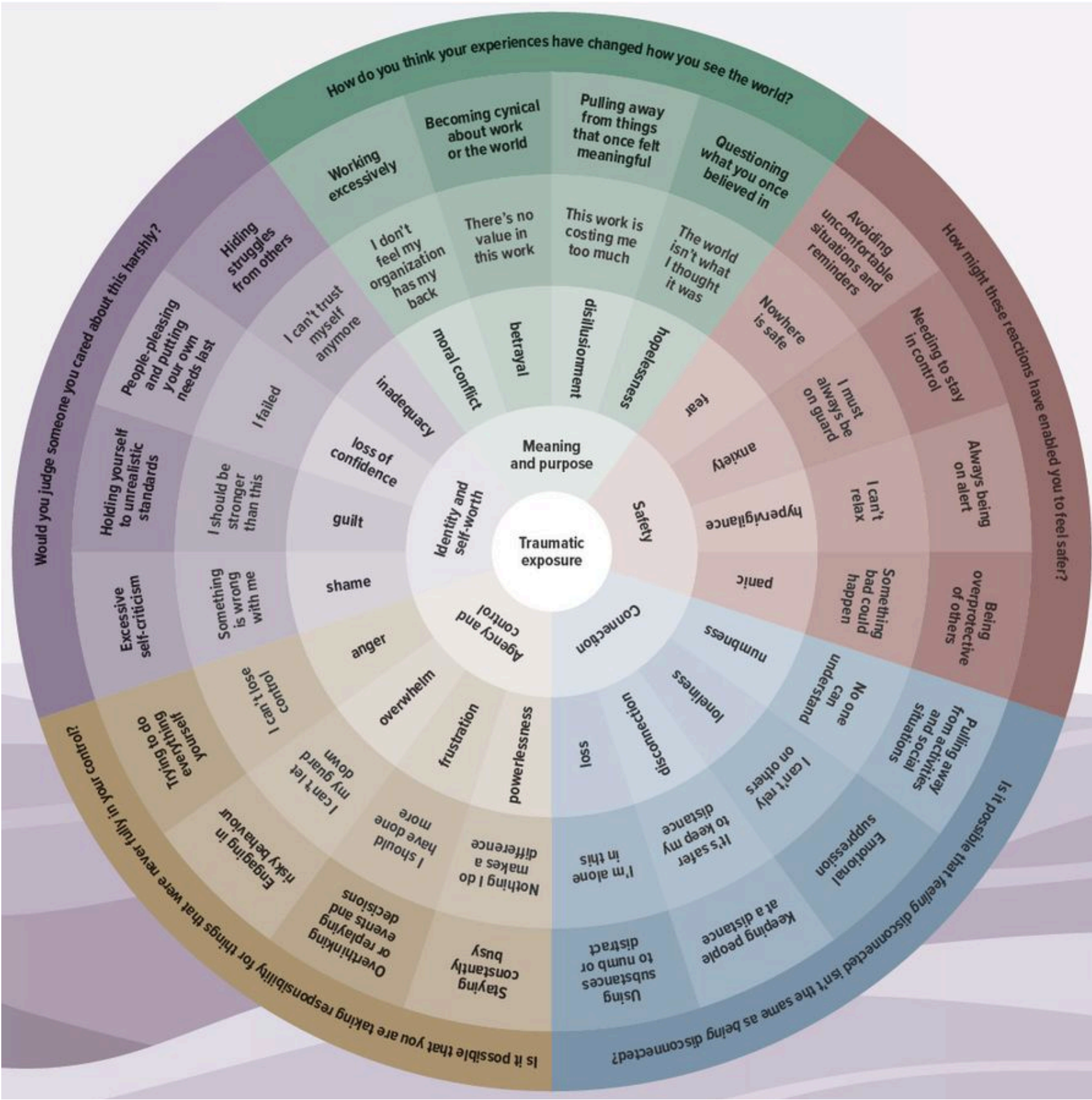


Exploring responses to trauma

**A reflective tool for exploring how trauma
may influence the way we experience
ourselves, others, and the world around us**





Trauma and public safety personnel

Public safety work can involve repeated exposure to traumatic, morally challenging, and highly stressful experiences. These experiences can affect mental health and well-being in many different ways. Sometimes those impacts are obvious. Sometimes they are more difficult to recognize – or may not seem connected to trauma at all.

Over time, trauma can influence how we understand ourselves, other people, and the world around us. In some cases, trauma can become a lens through which we interpret our lives and day to day experiences.

These kinds of responses are common following repeated exposure to potentially traumatic and highly stressful events. They may be signs that important aspects of your life have been affected by those experiences.

WHY THIS WHEEL?

Trauma-related experiences, responses, and emotions can be difficult to identify and make sense of. For some, these responses can feel confusing, overwhelming, or difficult to put into words. Others may feel emotionally numb, detached, or 'not themselves.'

This wheel is designed to support reflection and self-understanding by helping users explore how trauma may affect important aspects of life, including one's sense of safety, connection, control, identity, and purpose. It may also help identify and make sense of emotional experiences, self-beliefs, and coping responses that may be connected to trauma exposure.

Research suggests that being able to identify and understand emotions more clearly can help people better understand their experiences, communicate them to others, and respond more effectively to stress and other challenges. While this wheel is not a diagnostic tool or treatment, it may serve as a starting point for reflection, self-awareness, and seeking out additional support when needed.

How to use this reflective tool

There is no right or wrong way to use this tool. But as you move through the wheel, you might try approaching your experiences with curiosity rather than judgment.

You may find it helpful to ask yourself:

- What experiences stand out to me?
- What emotions do I notice most often? What might they be telling me?
- What beliefs or assumptions may be connected to those feelings?
- How might those beliefs be influencing my behaviours, relationships, or well-being?
- Are there other ways of understanding what I am experiencing?

RING 1: WHAT HAPPENED?

Key experience(s)

The innermost ring represents experiences that may have had a lasting impact, including potentially traumatic, morally challenging, or highly stressful events.

RING 2: WHAT AREAS OF LIFE MAY HAVE BEEN AFFECTED?

Core areas of impact

This ring explores five important areas of life that can be affected by trauma exposure:

Safety – including one's perceptions of danger, trust in one's environment, and the ability to feel secure

Connection – including one's relationships, intimacy, belonging, trust, and feeling understood by others

Agency and control – including confidence in one's ability to meaningfully influence situations and external events, manage emotions, make decisions, and navigate challenges

Identity and self-worth – including one's feelings of competence, one's values, occupational identity, and beliefs about oneself

Meaning and purpose – including one's worldview, sense of purpose, values, beliefs about one's role in the world, and one's outlook on the future

RING 3: HOW MIGHT THIS FEEL?

Emotional experiences

This ring contains emotions and emotional states that may arise when one or more of these core areas of life have been disrupted by traumatic or stressful experiences. This may include fear, anger, shame, guilt, loneliness or a range of other emotions.

Sometimes several emotions may be present at once. This may make it difficult to identify exactly what you are feeling. This ring is intended to help put words to emotional experiences that may otherwise feel confusing, unclear, or difficult to describe.

RING 4: WHAT MIGHT I BE TELLING MYSELF?

Common beliefs and assumptions

This ring explores some of the thoughts, beliefs, and assumptions that can develop in response to trauma exposure and emotional distress. These beliefs often reflect attempts to make sense of difficult experiences. Over time, they can influence how we view ourselves and the world around us, sometimes in ways that are not immediately obvious.

RING 5: HOW MIGHT I BE RESPONDING?

Coping strategies

This ring explores common ways people attempt to cope with, manage, or protect themselves from distress. Emotional withdrawal, avoidance, staying constantly busy, or remaining constantly on guard are all examples of understandable adaptations to difficult experiences. While these responses may serve a protective purpose, they can sometimes create challenges over time.

RING 6: WHAT ELSE MIGHT BE TRUE?

Considering other possibilities

The questions in this ring are intended to encourage curiosity and reflection about whether trauma may be influencing our experiences, relationships, and daily lives. These questions invite consideration of other possibilities and perspectives that may be fuller, more compassionate, and less defined by trauma alone.

Reflection, support, and next steps

**The goal of this tool is not to judge your responses,
but to better understand them.**

As you reflect on the wheel, you may notice patterns in your emotions, beliefs, behaviours, or coping responses. These patterns are predictable and understandable responses to difficult experiences. The patterns may offer insight into how trauma has affected important areas of your life.

If it feels helpful, discuss your reflections with a trusted peer, loved one, mental health professional, or other support person. Having language to describe our experiences can sometimes make them easier to understand and communicate.

If you feel that trauma-related experiences are affecting your well-being, relationships, quality of life, or day to day functioning, you may find it helpful to seek additional support. Speaking with your primary care provider is often a good first step. They can help assess your concerns, discuss available supports, and connect you with additional resources if needed.

Scan the QR code below for references and additional resources.

Please note that reflecting on traumatic experiences and their impacts can sometimes bring up strong emotions or distressing memories. If reflecting on these experiences becomes overwhelming, consider pausing and returning to the resource at another time or with the support of someone you trust.

This resource is not a diagnostic tool. Instead, it is intended to support reflection on your responses to trauma or potentially traumatic experiences and may be a helpful first step in considering whether additional information or support might be beneficial.

- If you are in immediate danger or experiencing a mental health emergency, call 9-1-1.
- If you are having thoughts of suicide or self-harm, call or text 9-8-8 to reach Canada's Suicide Crisis Helpline, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- If you are experiencing ongoing mental health concerns, consider reaching out to a primary care provider or a qualified mental health professional.



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