



TRAUMA REVIEW EXERCISE

educational settings

Creating safe and welcoming spaces reduces potential harm for everyone, especially those most likely to feel unwelcome and unsafe. This exercise will help you ‘walk through’ the spaces where you work. The goal is to think about how these spaces feel for students and visitors. If you find it helpful, you can imagine being a student or visitor. Ideally, you will physically visit all the spaces where your students or visitors could be, but if this isn’t possible, you can do it mentally. Here’s what to do:

1. Enter your space; make sure to visit all student-facing areas, including washrooms.
2. Put yourself in the “shoes” of students and visitors and ask yourself what it might be like for them to be in this space.
3. Use the guiding questions below to think about various aspects of the space.
4. Pay particular attention to things in the environment that might create discomfort, stigma or feeling unsafe.
5. Take some notes about the things that work well, and those that could be improved.
6. Discuss your notes with co-workers or leaders after they’ve also done the walk-through.
7. Invite students and visitors to comment on their feelings of comfort and safety.
8. Co-create a plan for improving the physical, emotional and cultural safety of your space!

1

APPROACHING AND ENTERING THE SETTING

Think about visiting the setting(s) where you work. As you approach and enter, imagine it’s your first visit:

- How easy is it to get here and to find? How much effort have you had to make to get here?
- Is it clear how you are supposed to enter? For example, if there’s more than one door, is it obvious which one is for students and visitors?
- What do you notice as you approach the building? Enter the building? What does this look and feel like?
- As you enter, who is present? What do you observe about people? What do you notice about people’s facial expressions, their posture? What stands out for you? For example, is it loud or quiet? Hectic or calm?
- Who is speaking and with whom? How are people communicating? What is their tone of voice?

Think about it

- What is welcoming or unwelcoming as you enter?
- What tone does the signage convey? Who do you imagine decides about the signage, and how?
- Who would feel welcome or unwelcome here? Do you feel welcome here? Why or why not?
- What things or people in the space might deter people from engaging with who they encounter here?

2

FIRST CONTACT

What would it be like for people to connect with an instructor or administrative staff member, by phone, email or online?

- Is the website or phone system easy to use? Is the telephone often busy or the site down?
- Is the website easy to navigate and understand? Can people's email addresses be found?
- How are people greeted? How do staff begin to establish rapport and trust through a phone call?
- How do staff and faculty communicate via technology (e.g., course websites or email) in a safe way?

Now imagine what the first face-to-face contact is like with a staff member or instructor:

- Is there a reception area? Where is it located? How do you know where it is and how you are supposed to go there? Are there physical barriers between you and staff members (e.g., glass walls)?
- How are you greeted and by whom? Do you know the name and role of the staff member who greets you?
- What messages do staff convey? Consider usual facial expressions, tone of voice, body language, words.
- What makes you feel comfortable, or not, in this first contact? Who would feel most comfortable? Are different people treated differently and if so in what way and by whom? Based on what?
- What questions are you asked and in what order? [Imagine the questions on your intake form if there is one]. What does it draw attention to? From what does it detract attention?

Think about it

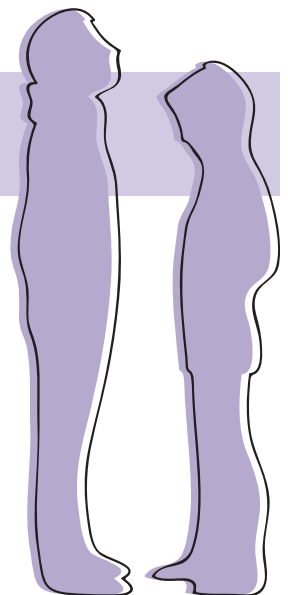
- When instructors and staff engage with students, do they consider how hard it might be get to campus or arrange a meeting time?
- How are various ability limitations taken into account? Is there support for those with various communication or other challenges?
- How do staff engage with people who seem to have trouble focusing on questions being asked?

3

COMMON AREAS

Next consider what common areas are like:

- What is the strongest feeling you have as you walk the hallways? Are the halls clean and easy to navigate?
- Are water and washrooms available, accessible, and easy to locate? Are they clean? How do they smell?
- Are there spaces available for students or visitors to sit (e.g., benches, chairs)? Do they seem comfortable? Are power outlets or charging stations accessible?
- What do you notice about the people walking through here? Do they seem comfortable to you, nervous, excited?



- What might students or visitors perceive when walking through the areas where staff and faculty offices are located? Are all the office doors likely to be closed or open? Are offices (numbers and names) clearly marked?
- Doors leading to staff and faculty offices often lock after certain hours & people must ring the bell for entry. What message might this convey?
- What might people perceive when walking past the staff lunchroom?

4

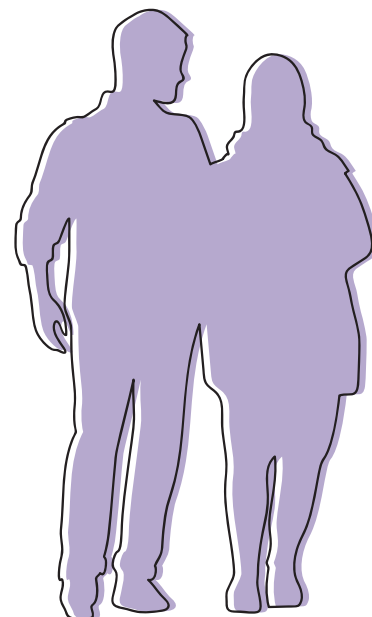
CLASSROOMS, OFFICES, & MEETING ROOMS

Finally, think about what classrooms, offices and meeting rooms are like:

- What is the layout of these spaces? How would you describe the feel — warm, cold, welcoming, sterile?
- Would you feel comfortable in this space? What might make you feel uncomfortable or unsafe?
- Are classrooms accessible for people with mobility or other challenges? How are the lines of sight and acoustics?
- How are staff and faculty offices set up for student meetings? How are student privacy and confidentiality protected in these spaces? How is this balanced with safety (e.g., leaving doors open during meetings)?

Think about it

- Are the classrooms set up to best serve students or instructors?
- Who would feel respected in these spaces? Who would not? Why?
- Is there an expectation of privacy regarding student information in specific spaces, and if so, how is privacy protected?
- What small thing could be changed to make classrooms and offices more welcoming spaces for students?



Providing a safe and welcoming space isn't just a nice thing to do. It also means that people will feel more respected and that they belong, leading to better learning and administrative interactions for everyone!