

Trauma-Informed Approach to Promote Healthy and Respectful Work Environments

The California Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CALCASA) is the state organization working on issues of sexual violence in California. CALCASA supports and promotes the voice of the safety net of services for survivors of sexual violence and represents 84 centers throughout all of the counties in California. CALCASA supports employers and workplaces to build transparent and trustworthy policies and protocols that promote positive work environments by interrupting and preventing sexual harassment, sex discrimination and discrimination against other protected classes. CALCASA uses a trauma-informed approach¹ that realizes impact of trauma, recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma, responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and actively resists re-traumatization. We urge the California Legislature to adopt this framework and philosophy in advancing healthy and respectful work environments. To that end, we recommend that the California Legislator consider this policy and protocol recommendations that promote the six principles of a trauma-informed approach: 1. Safety, 2. Trustworthiness, 3. Peer Support, 4. Collaboration, 5. Empowerment, 6. Racial, Cultural, Historical and Gender Issues.

1. Safety: Increase safety for those who are harmed. Promote both physical and emotional safety.
 - a. Have policy for confidential sources of information for persons experiencing harassment. Confidentiality is paramount for safety and for empowering those who are impacted to make choices about their path forward.
 - b. Confidential sources should not cross-report to the employer, but be versed in harassment and violence claims in the workplace, civil and criminal justice systems. Utilizing the local rape crisis center safety net and their client privileged communications protections is recommended.
 - c. Articulate a commitment to investigate and interrupt retaliation in all forms.
2. Trustworthiness: Be transparent and upfront about policy and procedures. Follow through on actions and adhere to policies.
 - a. Have policies clearly posted and accessible (language access, reading level, technology access considered)
 - b. Provide more than one-time trainings on policies. Have the trainings be interactive, live/in-person, with scenarios and role-plays that resonate with the employee-base.
 - c. Show an outward commitment to enforcing the policy and providing a trustworthy process.
 - d. Clearly communicate the limits of confidentiality.
 - e. Clearly communicate the commitment to timely investigations.
 - f. Clearly communicate the commitment to immediate and timely accommodations to interrupt harassment and prevent discrimination.
3. Peer Support: Developing a workplace environment that utilizes peer networks and strengths.
 - a. Do not make all employees mandatory reporters of harassment/discrimination. This inadvertently takes away support from social connections and does not allow those who are harmed to seek support from peers for fear of triggering the reporting process. This creates a culture of fear and chills actual reports of harassment/discrimination.

¹ See <https://www.samhsa.gov/nctic/trauma-interventions>

- b. Provide training on discrimination interrupting/Upstander skills. For example, CALCASA provides a training on using an Upstander Approach—which is the Four D’s: Direct, Distract, Delegate, and Delay. This provides real-life skill building to be an upstander (someone who stands up when something inappropriate is happening) v. a bystander (who witnesses the inappropriate thing and does nothing or supports it).
4. Collaboration: Promote and model interdisciplinary collaborations and multiple forms of community supports.
 - a. Connect with local and state groups that work on social justice and safety issues—including anti-sexual assault experts, anti-domestic violence experts, prevention experts, civil and social justice experts.
 - b. Provide local resources for employees so they can pick the resources that make sense for them for support.
 - c. Have various parts of the legislature (and both branches) provide a united front on response to and prevention of discrimination/harassment—and most importantly a committeeman to a healthy and respectful workplace.
5. Empowerment: Supporting individuals voice and choice.
 - a. Provide for multiple ways for individuals to report and provide information upfront about the limitations of confidentiality, consequences, and set expectations around timing and notice of the final outcome.
 - b. Nondisclosure agreements and arbitration should only be used when the individuals involved can provide free and informed consent, have access to legal counsel, and are not under duress or coercion.
6. Racial, Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues: Discrimination and harassment have roots in imbalances of power and complicated by the layers of a person’s identity and lived experience. Workplaces must acknowledge this complexity and commit to promoting equity and respect.
 - a. Ensure salary levels are equal based on race and gender and experience.
 - b. Commit to building a diverse work environment (diverse by gender, race, cultural background, life experiences, class etc).

CALCASA thanks you for considering these recommendations. Please feel free to reach out to Emily Austin, JD, Senior Policy & Advocacy Associate, eaustin@calcasa.org with further questions.