



Trauma-Informed Leadership Competency Guide



Leading Self

builds self-regulation and awareness



Leading Others

builds relational and interpersonal safety



Leading Systems

builds organizational culture and collective healing



Leading with Sacred Hope

embodies the belief that God's love can transform wounds into wisdom



Turnsole
Leadership • Strategy • Culture

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○ Leading Self: *Practices Awareness & Regulation*

Definition:

Trauma-informed leaders cultivate self-regulation, reflection, humility, and awareness of their own trauma triggers and nervous system states so they can lead from grounded presence rather than reactivity. Healing the self becomes the foundation for healing others.

Aim For

Patterns That Support Safety

- Notices body cues, emotions, and triggers early.
- Uses reflection, supervision, prayer, or grounding to stay centered.
- Sets boundaries around rest, limits, and energy.
- Normalizes stress responses without shame.
- Regulates tone and pacing in difficult moments.
- Approaches leadership with humility and curiosity rather than certainty.

Patterns That Deepen Impact

- Models emotional steadiness even in moments of high anxiety.
- Names internal experience calmly and transparently.
- Practices deep self-compassion and models rest as a leadership discipline.
- Uses their own settled presence to help settle others.
- Leads from healing rather than hurt, drawing wisdom from “scars, not wounds.”

Watch Out For

Overdone Patterns

- Over-reflecting or over-processing instead of acting.
- Humility drifting into self-doubt or over-apologizing.
- Over-disclosing internal states in ways that burden others.
- Using calmness to avoid conflict or responsibility.

Underdone Patterns

- Impulsive or defensive reactions.
- Taking on others’ pain as their own responsibility.
- Ignoring signs of burnout or secondary trauma.
- Using control or intensity instead of centered presence.

Ask Yourself

What stories or wounds are shaping my leadership right now?

How do I return to center when I feel overwhelmed?

What helps me lead from my scars rather than my open wounds?

Learning Pathways

Knowledge That Strengthens This Area of Leadership

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and the impact of early adversity and resilience on development
- Basic neurobiology of trauma and nervous system activation.
- Somatic awareness and regulation practices.
- Common signs of burnout, compassion fatigue, and secondary trauma.
- Personal triggers and over-functioning tendencies.
- Mental health literacy: anxiety, depression, PTSD, grief.
- Referral literacy: when pastoral or spiritual care is appropriate, and when a therapist should be involved.

Insights & Ideas

Leader Insights

- “My nervous system is my first leadership tool.”
- “My unprocessed pain can distort perception and reaction.”
- “Self-regulation is an ethical practice that protects others.”
- “My capacity to stay grounded influences whether conflict escalates, gets avoided, or resolves.”
- “Compassion for myself strengthens my compassion for others.”

Ideas for Practice

- Take a breath and slow down before responding when things feel tense.
- Set aside weekly time to reflect through journaling, supervision, or prayer.
- After a hard conversation or heavy day, take time to ground yourself before moving on.



Leading Others: *Cultivates Safety & Trust*

Definition:

Trauma-informed leaders create relational and psychological safety in groups. They understand behavior as communication, respond with curiosity and steadiness, and maintain a non-anxious presence in conflict and difficult conversations.

Aim For

Patterns That Support Safety

- Creates emotional and psychological safety in meetings and relationships.
- Names emotion and invites meaning-making.
- Sets clear expectations and boundaries, balancing freedom and accountability.
- Responds to conflict with curiosity rather than blame or urgency.
- Uses consent, pacing, and transparency in shared work.
- Keeps communication steady during difficult conversations.

Patterns That Deepen Impact

- De-escalates tension without shame or pressure.
- Frames conflict as a doorway to insight, intimacy, and repair.
- Restores relationship after rupture with clarity and care.
- Helps groups stay grounded when emotions run high.
- Advocates for vulnerable or marginalized voices with strength and tenderness.

Watch Out For

Overdone Patterns

- Over-accommodation of emotions.
- Excessive gentleness that avoids conflict.
- Rescuing others or taking responsibility for their feelings.
- Slowing decisions to avoid discomfort.

Underdone Patterns

- Using shame, pressure, or urgency to gain compliance.
- Spiritualizing pain to avoid difficult conversations.
- Avoiding conflict entirely.
- Equating niceness with safety while suppressing truth.

Learning Pathways

Knowledge That Strengthens This Area of Leadership

- How trauma presents interpersonally (fight, flight, freeze, fawn).
- Psychological safety and belonging needs.
- Basics of conflict skills: naming, containing, repairing.
- How to hold freedom and accountability together.
- Power dynamics in ministry and spiritual authority.
- Boundary-setting, consent, pacing, and agency.
- Culturally informed care and trauma expression across identities.
- Active listening skills and trauma-sensitive communication.

Insights & Ideas

Leader Insights

- “All behavior communicates something important.”
- “Safety is experienced before it is understood.”
- “My presence affects whether others open up or shut down.”
- “Conflict can be holy work when held with tenderness and truth.”
- “Accountability without compassion feels like punishment; compassion without accountability becomes enabling.”

Ideas for Practice

- Gently name what you notice in the room: “It feels tense; let’s pause.”
- In hard conversations, use a simple structure: “Here’s what I heard... how it felt... what I need next.”
- At the start of a meeting or group, make shared agreements about how you’ll communicate and handle conflict.

Ask Yourself How do I help others feel safe enough to be honest?
When conflict arises, do I listen first or fix first?
How do I honor both empathy and accountability?



Leading Systems: *Embeds Healing & Justice in Culture*

Definition:

Trauma-informed leaders extend healing beyond individuals to the systems they steward. They design structures, rituals, policies, and communication patterns that cultivate safety, equity, transparency, collaboration, choice, freedom, and accountability.

Aim For

Patterns That Support Safety

- Integrates trauma-informed principles into structures and practices; designs processes that honor voice, agency, and psychological safety.
- Uses restorative rather than punitive approaches to accountability.
- Communicates consistently and transparently.
- Includes diverse voices in decision-making.
- Builds partnerships with mental health providers and community resources.

Patterns That Deepen Impact

- Shapes culture that reliably communicates belonging and builds structures that distribute leadership and power.
- Names and addresses systemic or historical harm with honesty and courage.
- Designs rituals of lament, blessing, celebration, and repair.
- Uses accountability to repair relationships rather than exclude people.

Watch Out For

Overdone Patterns

- Over-functioning as “the fixer,” sidelining others.
- Designing overly complex processes in the name of safety.
- Using policy or process to avoid conversation.
- Overemphasizing collaboration until decision-making stalls.

Underdone Patterns

- Prioritizing efficiency over empathy.
- Ignoring or minimizing systemic inequity or harm.
- Maintaining rigid hierarchies that silence people.
- Withholding information in the name of protecting harmony or reputation.

Ask Yourself

How does our system communicate safety and belonging?
Whose voices are missing or marginalized in our decisions?
What structures reinforce fear/control instead of trust/empowerment?

Learning Pathways

Knowledge That Strengthens This Area of Leadership

- Core trauma-informed principles at the systems level: safety, trust, choice, collaboration, and empowerment.
- How systems retraumatize through secrecy, inconsistency, punitive discipline, or speed.
- Basics of systems change and adaptive leadership.
- Freedom and accountability as structural commitments, not interpersonal preferences.
- Restorative practices for group repair and accountability.
- Organizational rituals that support healing, memory, and belonging.
- How decision-making structures affect psychological safety.
- When to involve clinical, community, and cross-sector partners.

Insights & Ideas

Leader Insights

- “Policies preach louder than sermons.”
- “Culture is shaped by what we repair and what we tolerate.”
- “Safety and belonging require intentional design.”
- “Healing becomes sustainable when it is shared.”
- “Accountability and compassion must coexist for justice to take root.”

Ideas for Practice

- Every few months, review one policy or ministry and ask, “Does this help people feel safe and included?”
- When change is happening, share: “Here’s what we know, what we don’t know, and how we’ll update you.”
- When harm occurs, guide those involved in naming what happened, repairing what’s possible, and agreeing on next steps.



Leading with Sacred Hope: *Embodies Resurrection & Possibility*

Definition:

Trauma-informed leaders nurture sacred hope: an active, embodied trust that God is present, healing is possible, and the future can be co-created with courage and imagination. Sacred hope resists despair, passivity, or nostalgia and invites communities to join God's ongoing work of renewal.

Aim For

Patterns That Support Safety

- Speaks truthfully about pain while staying rooted in possibility.
- Names and honors both wounds and healing in worship, meetings, and community life; holds space for grief without rushing people toward positivity.
- Uses language of “we can repair, we can grow” rather than shame or despair.
- Frames challenges as invitations to collective learning.

Patterns That Deepen Impact

- Helps people imagine a future shaped by love, inclusion, and restoration.
- Celebrates small signs of repair and renewal as evidence of God's presence.
- Creates rituals that honor resilience: testimonies, gratitude moments, embodied symbols of healing (candles, prayer, storytelling).
- Practices gratitude and spiritual discernment amid uncertainty.
- Models paradox (grief + gratitude, fear + faith, wounds + healing) as a path to maturity.

Watch Out For

Overdone Patterns

- Using hope to bypass grief or silence lament.
- Casting vision too quickly without readiness.
- Overpromising outcomes or certainty.
- Pressuring others into hope before they feel safe.

Underdone Patterns

- Avoiding hopeful imagination to prevent disappointment.
- Getting stuck in despair, nostalgia, or cynicism.
- Withholding vision because conflict feels risky.
- Allowing discouragement or anxiety to shape direction.

Learning Pathways

Knowledge That Strengthens This Area of Leadership

- The theological foundations of hope—resurrection, grace, and redemption.
- Psychology of post-traumatic growth and the human capacity for resilience.
- How despair, burnout, or cynicism signal the need for reconnection and meaning-making.
- The role of lament and communal grief in trauma healing.
- Narrative leadership: how stories shape imagination and possibility.
- Trauma-informed communication: naming honesty + offering grounded possibility.
- How spiritual practices (prayer, discernment, gratitude, ritual) anchor communities during uncertainty.

Insights & Ideas

Leader Insights

- “Hope grows when pain is named, not avoided.”
- “My presence can help others hold both grief and possibility.”
- “Imagination is a spiritual discipline that opens what's possible.”
- “Honesty builds trust, and trust makes hope believable.”
- “Small signs of life matter—they soften fear and open the door to change.”

Ideas for Practice

- Pair lament and possibility in a meeting or service: “What have we lost, and what might now become possible?”
- Name one small sign of healing, grace, or renewal each week and connect it to God's ongoing work.
- Use a future-oriented prompt: “If God's restoration were unfolding right now, what would we notice first?”

Ask Yourself

What does hope look like here: not as a feeling, but as a practice?
How do I model faith in the possibility of healing while being honest about harm?
What signs of life or renewal is God already placing in front of us?