

THE SANCTUARY MODEL

The Sanctuary Model is a blueprint for clinical and organisational change which, at its core, promotes safety and recovery from adversity through the active creation of a trauma-informed community. A recognition that trauma is pervasive in the experience of human beings forms the basis for the Sanctuary Model's focus not only on the people who seek services, but equally on the people and systems who provide those services.

The Sanctuary Model originated in the Philadelphia area in the early 1980s, created by Dr. Sandra Bloom and her colleagues. Over time, the model has been adapted for use in a wide range of human service programs across the U.S. and abroad. The Sanctuary Model is comprised of three primary components:

1. A philosophy for creating safe environments through community adherence to the Seven Commitments
2. The trauma-informed problem solving framework represented by the acronym S.E.L.F., which stands for the four categories Safety, Emotions, Loss, and Future
3. A set of practical tools, known as the Sanctuary Tool Kit

The Sanctuary Model identifies the experience of trauma along a wide continuum that includes both discrete events and ongoing, cumulative and perhaps intangible experiences like racism and poverty. Trauma theory suggests that many of the behavioural symptoms that we see in individuals are a direct result of coping with adverse experiences. In order to intervene effectively, we must move from a position of blame to one of questioning; Sanctuary recommends changing the central

question we ask about the people we serve from “What’s wrong with you?” to “What’s happened to you?” as the first step in recognising the influence of the past on current behaviours and functioning.

Sanctuary also recognises that just as human beings are susceptible to adversity, organisations themselves are equally vulnerable. This understanding is reflected in the recognition that there is a parallel between the traumatic symptoms we see in the people we serve and those that we see in an organisation. Just as we see individuals who have experienced trauma responding with isolative behaviour and withdrawal from the community, we also see organisations facing financial or political stressors responding with isolationism, rigidity and autocratic decision-making. Intervening in this parallel process requires shifting behaviours and thinking to align with trauma-informed practices. Sanctuary provides the blueprint to accomplish this alignment.

When an organisation makes the commitment to implement Sanctuary, trains its staff in the philosophical underpinnings, embraces the language of S.E.L.F., and uses the Sanctuary tools, its members can expect to see improved outcomes for clients, improved staff retention and satisfaction, and decreased violence. While many models address the individual and group treatment needs of vulnerable clients, Sanctuary is unique in that it instructs leaders and community members not only in providing service to their clients, but also in creating safer, better-functioning organisations.