

# Trauma-informed Websites

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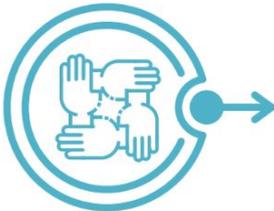
# 6 GUIDING PRINCIPLES TO A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH



1. SAFETY



2. TRUSTWORTHINESS  
& TRANSPARENCY



3. PEER SUPPORT



4. COLLABORATION  
& MUTUALITY



5. EMPOWERMENT  
VOICE & CHOICE



6. CULTURAL, HISTORICAL,  
& GENDER ISSUES

## Newer settings for applying trauma-informed principles

### Physical



### Digital

- Hospitals/clinics
- Schools
- Housing
- Workplace
- Prisons
- Yoga

- Websites
- Mobile apps
- Software
- Social media
- Online forms
- Artificial intelligence and machine learning





**Every use of your web site or  
mobile app is a conversation  
started by your website visitor.**

Ginny Redish  
*Letting Go of The Words*

# Treat people how you would in person



*(Images by Humaaans by Pablo Stanley)*



## 988 Lifeline Chat and Text

[Ready to Chat?](#)

[What Happens When I Chat or Text with the 988 Lifeline?](#)

[Helpful Resources](#)

[Chat and Text FAQ](#)

[Troubleshooting Tips](#)

[Read Stories Of Hope & Recovery](#)

# 988 Lifeline Chat and Text

SHARE



988 Lifeline Chat and Text is a service of the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline), connecting individuals with crisis counselors for emotional support and other services via web chat or texting 988.

All chat and text centers in the 988 Lifeline network are accredited by either the American Association of Suicidology or the International Council for Helplines. 988 Lifeline Chat and Text is available 24/7 across the U.S. and certain territories.

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is committed to providing individuals in emotional crisis with support, which can include connection to specialized services for different populations. [Click here to learn more about these options.](#)

[Click here](#) to access chat in Spanish.

[Haga clic aquí](#) para acceder al chat en español.

## Ready to Chat?

To start a text conversation instead, send a text to 988. Your conversations are free and [confidential](#).

After you complete the short survey and agree to the [terms of service](#), we will connect you to a crisis counselor. There may be a wait time to connect. To speak to a crisis counselor now, please call the 988 Lifeline at 988.

① Please note if you are using an iPhone browser to chat with us you must remain on the browser chat screen to stay connected. If you navigate away from the chat or access a different iPhone application your connection may be lost. Thank you.



## Pre-Chat Survey

Fields marked with an asterisk (\*) are required.

## Ready to Chat?

To start a text conversation instead, send a text to 988. Your conversations are free and [confidential](#).

After you complete the short survey and agree to the [terms of service](#), we will connect you to a counselor. There may be a wait time to connect. To speak to a counselor now, please call the Lifeline at 988.

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### Pre-Chat Survey

Fields marked with an asterisk (\*) are required.

Zip Code: \*

Name/Alias: \*

Age: \*

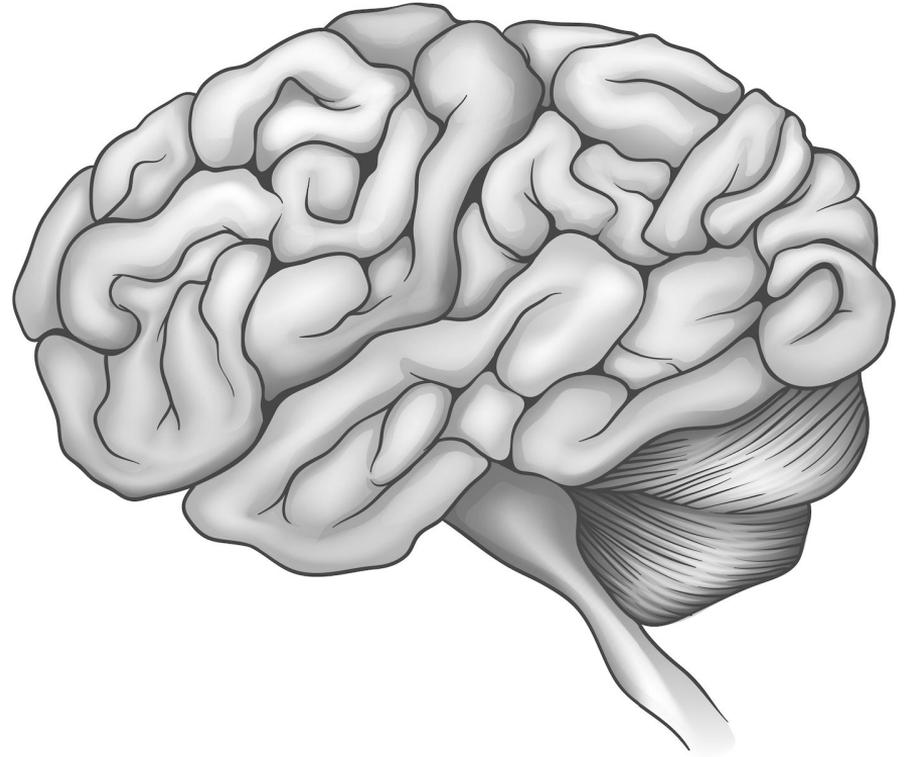
What is your gender identity (how do you define yourself)? \*

Girl/Woman

Boy/Man

## Cognitive impacts of trauma

- Misinterpreting neutral situations as dangerous
- Intrusive thoughts and memories
- Flashback
- Difficulty concentrating
- Memory
- Planning
- Problem-solving

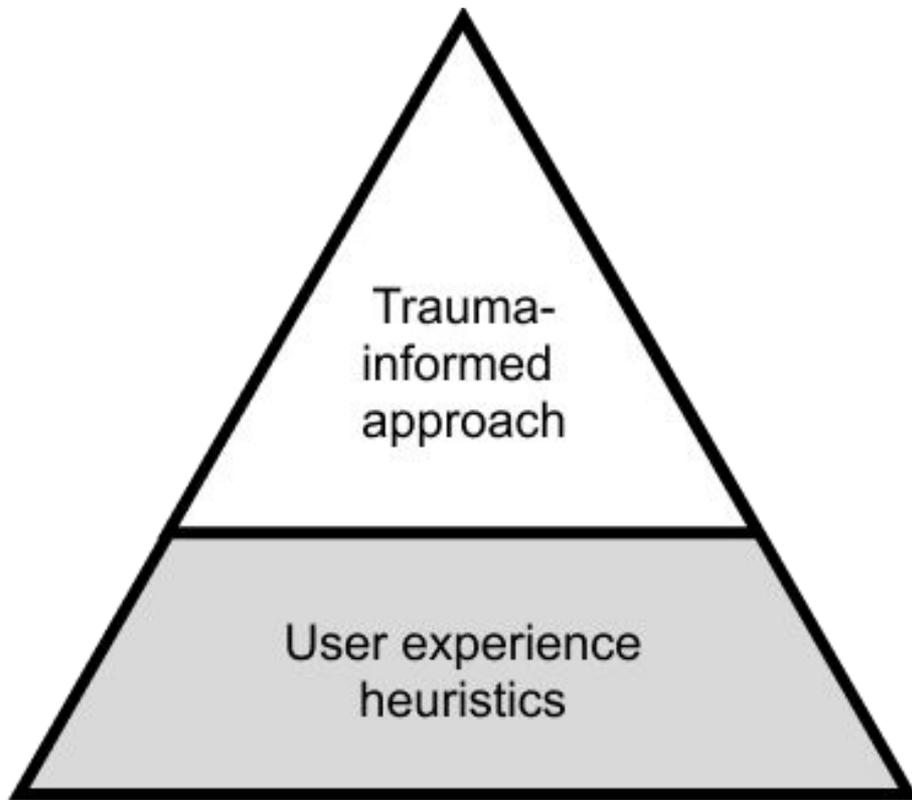


(Hayes et al., 2012, Van Der Kolk, 2014; Ford & Courtois, 2020)



**I get tired just looking at it.**

- Participant in one of Melissa's usability testing sessions



# Jakob's Ten Usability Heuristics

## 1 Visibility of System Status

Designs should *keep users informed* about what is going on, through appropriate, timely feedback.



Interactive mall maps have to show people where they currently are, to help them understand where to go next.

## 2 Match between System and the Real World

The design should *speak the users' language*. Use words, phrases, and concepts *familiar to the user*, rather than internal jargon.



Users can quickly understand which stovetop control maps to each heating element.

## 5 Error Prevention

Good error messages are important, but the best designs *carefully prevent problems from occurring in the first place*.



Guard rails on curvy mountain roads prevent drivers from falling off cliffs.

## 8 Aesthetic and Minimalist Design

Interfaces should not contain information which is irrelevant. Every extra unit of information in an interface *competes* with the relevant units of information.



A minimalist three-legged stool is still a place to sit.

## 3 User Control and Freedom

Users often perform actions by mistake. They *need a clearly marked "emergency exit"* to leave the unwanted action.



Just like physical spaces, digital spaces need quick "emergency" exits too.

## 6 Recognition Rather Than Recall

*Minimize the user's memory load* by making elements, actions, and options visible. Avoid making users remember information.



People are likely to correctly answer "Is Lisbon the capital of Portugal?".

## 9 Recognize, Diagnose, and Recover from Errors

Error messages should be expressed in plain language (no error codes), precisely indicate the problem, and constructively suggest a solution.



Wrong-way signs on the road remind drivers that they are heading in the wrong direction.

## 4 Consistency and Standards

Users should not have to wonder whether different words, situations, or actions mean the same thing. *Follow platform conventions*.



Check-in counters are usually located at the front of hotels, which meets expectations.

## 7 Flexibility and Efficiency of Use

Shortcuts — hidden from novice users — *may speed up the interaction for the expert user*.



Regular routes are listed on maps, but locals with more knowledge of the area can take shortcuts.

## 10 Help and Documentation

It's best if the design *doesn't need* any additional explanation. However, it may be necessary to provide documentation to help users complete their tasks.



Information kiosks at airports are easily recognizable and solve customers' problems in context and immediately.

Steve Krug



**DON'T  
MAKE  
ME  
THINK**

*revisited*

*and Mobile*  
A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability

# Trauma-informed website heuristics

- Created by communication design researchers at Michigan State University as they were creating a university resource website
- Developed iteratively with feedback from students and design colleagues
- Based on definitions published by The Institute on Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care (ITTIC)

Table 1: List of research and design heuristics

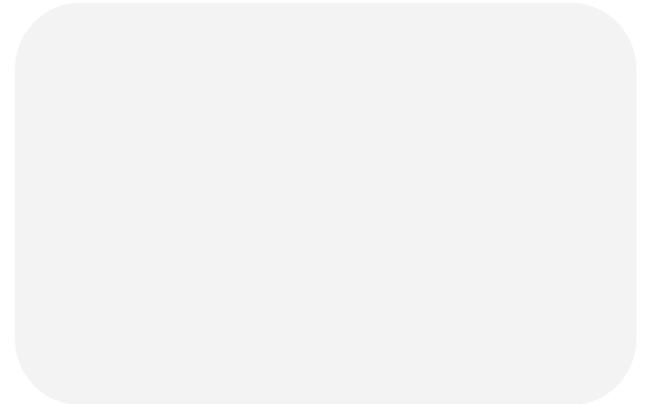
Heuristic Name and Definition	Ratings and Reasons
<b>Empowerment</b>	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Recognizes and builds on individual strengths/skills.</li><li>● Presents choices about what information to share with the website.</li><li>● Communicates the parameters of existing support available.</li><li>● Fosters an atmosphere that allows users of the website to feel validated and affirmed during contact.</li><li>● Avoids dark patterns and design techniques (unnecessary or unethical persuasive techniques).</li></ul>	(no problem) (severe problem) Reasons for your rating:
<b>Safety</b>	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Includes the physical and emotional safety of all individuals who visit the website.</li><li>● Emotional safety recognizes users may react differently to the available information.</li><li>● Physical safety refers to the appearance of the site itself, including the use of cookies to track browsing history or collect personally identifying data.</li></ul>	(no problem) (severe problem) Reasons for your rating:
<b>Trustworthiness</b>	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Provides clear information about what will be done, by whom, when, why, and under what circumstances (including role clarity, rules, and expectations).</li><li>● Maintains respectful and professional boundaries, prioritizes privacy and confidentiality, and ensures interactions and rules are consistent with an emphasis placed on follow-through.</li></ul>	(no problem) (severe problem) Reasons for your rating:
<b>Choice</b>	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Centers how much voice individuals have in the system (care received, how to address a task or a need, how to get a support process started, who to contact for more information, etc.).</li><li>● Provides clear and appropriate messages about individual rights and responsibilities.</li></ul>	(no problem) (severe problem) Reasons for your rating:
<b>Collaboration</b>	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Creates an environment of doing with rather than doing to or for someone by flattening the power hierarchy.</li><li>● Creates opportunities for users to have a significant role in planning and evaluating their care/services.</li><li>● Solicits confidential feedback from users to inform responsive and accessible services.</li><li>● Conveys the message that individuals are the experts in their own lives.</li></ul>	(no problem) (severe problem) Reasons for your rating:
<b>Cultural, Historical, and Gender/Sexuality</b>	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Avoids language and design approaches that directly states or assumes and/or harmfully generalizes cultural, historical, and/or gender/sexuality, including individual backgrounds, experiences, and/or identities.</li></ul>	(no problem) (severe problem) Reasons for your rating:

## Trustworthiness

- Provides clear information about what will be done, by whom, when, why, and under what circumstances (including role clarity, rules, and expectations).
- Maintains respectful and professional boundaries, prioritizes privacy and confidentiality, and ensures interactions and rules are consistent with an emphasis placed on follow-through.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7  
No problem Severe problem

Reasons for your rating:





A BOOK APART

*Brief books for people who make websites*

NO

18

**Eric Meyer &  
Sara Wachter-Boettcher**

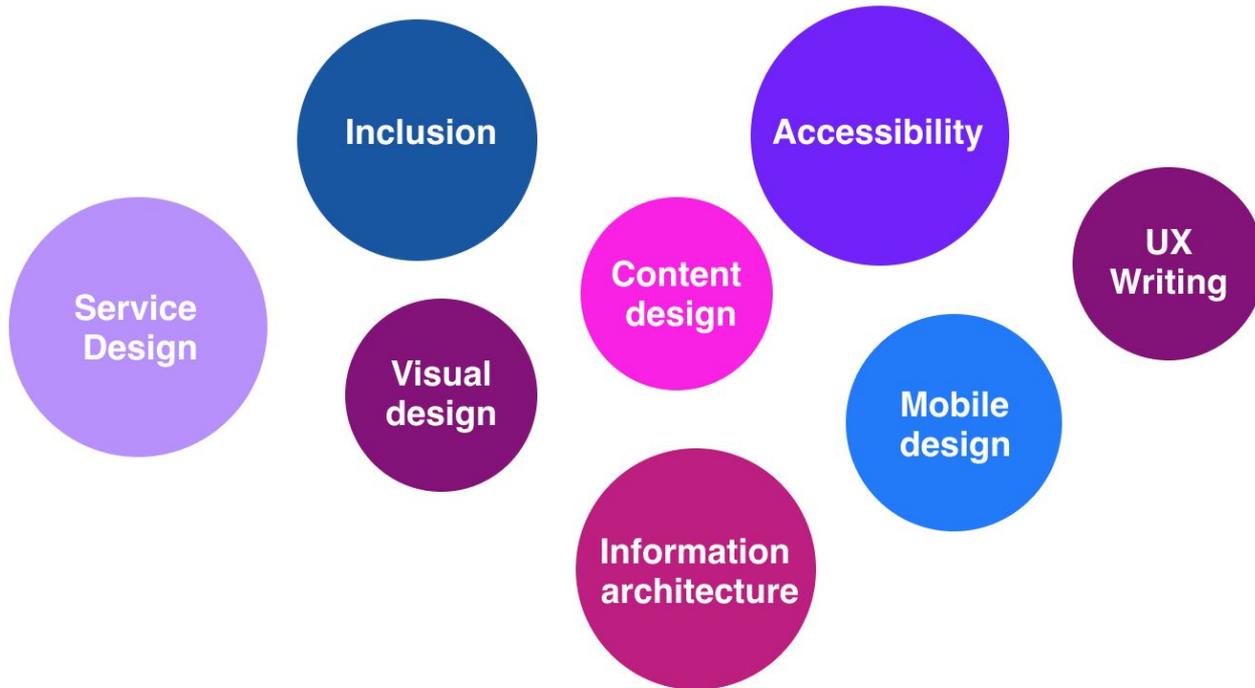
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# DESIGN FOR REAL LIFE

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FOREWORD BY Anil Dash

Any of these help websites become more trauma-informed



# Thank you!

Please reach out with questions or needs.  
Reach me at [melissa@birdcallux.com](mailto:melissa@birdcallux.com)