


Understanding Trauma and Enhancing Trauma-Informed Responses to Survivors of SDV

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Exercise



What is trauma?

Experiences that are emotionally painful, intense and distressing and that overwhelm an individual's capacity to cope.

- ▶ One person's trauma is another person's irritating event.
- ▶ The powerlessness that a person experiences is a primary trait of traumatization.
- ▶ The adverse impact of trauma may be obvious or hidden, immediate or delayed and can last for days, weeks, months, years or a lifetime.


Types of Trauma

<p>"Big T" Trauma</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ War, exposure to combat ▶ Natural disasters ▶ Plane, train or serious auto crash ▶ Sexual or physical abuse ▶ Rape or other sexual assault ▶ Robbery ▶ Death of a loved one ▶ Witnessing injury of another <p>Major events, usually causing one to fear for their personal safety or the safety of others.</p>	<p>"Small t" Trauma</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Divorce, significant breakup ▶ Loss of job or business ▶ Bullying, chronic emotional abuse ▶ Betrayal by family member or friend ▶ Financial insecurity ▶ Abrupt or frequent relocation ▶ Chronic mental or physical illness ▶ Loss of a pet <p>More common, scary and/or upsetting events; not life-threatening but still feel significant. These events are not often viewed as "traumatic."</p>
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How much is too much?



It's all relative.

- ▶ Internal capacity
- ▶ External resources
- ▶ Co-occurring life events
- ▶ Time span between events



Small traumas can develop into BIG trauma storms when there is no time or means to process them...and The Body Keeps the Score.

Neurobiology of Trauma

Study of the effect of trauma on the brain and body.

- ▶ Blood flow
- ▶ Electrical energy
- ▶ Release of hormones

Neurobiology of Trauma

During a traumatic incident, the brain responds differently than at other times and in turn the body responds differently as well.

Responses to Trauma

What are Four responses to Trauma?

Fight Response



PsychCentral

Flight Response



PsychCentral

Freeze Response



PsychCentral

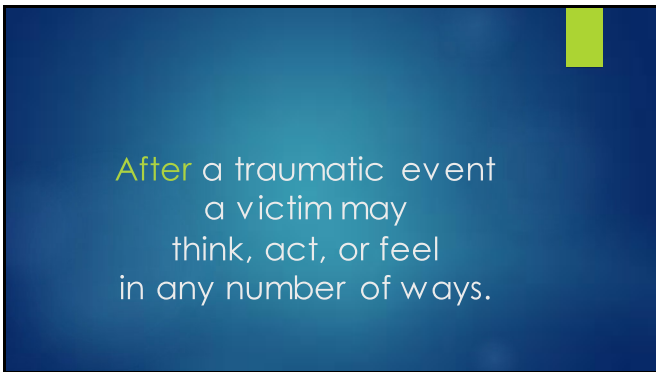
Fawn Response




PsychCentral







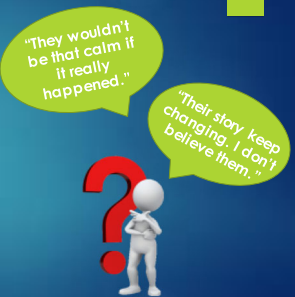
Trauma-Informed Concepts



Asking...	Treating...
...not "What is wrong with you?" but rather, "What has happened to you?"	... victims in ways that are opposite of how they were treated by their abuser.

SYMPTOMS

- ...Hyper
- Irritable
- Depressed
- Laughing
- Crying
- Confused
- Indifferent
- Lack of Affect
- Explosive...




"They wouldn't be that calm if it really happened."

"Their story keep changing. I don't believe them."

"When people are in a state of terror, attention is narrowed and perceptions are altered. Peripheral detail, context, and time sense fall away, while attention is strongly focused on central detail in the immediate present."

FRISVOLD, J.L. CRIME AND MEMORY. BULL AM ACAD PSYCHIATRY LAW VOL. 22 NO. 1, 1994

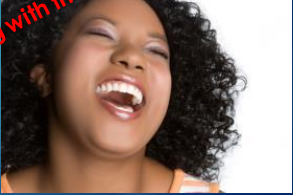
Survivors may be able to remember keen details of an element of the threat, yet they may not remember the assailant's face.



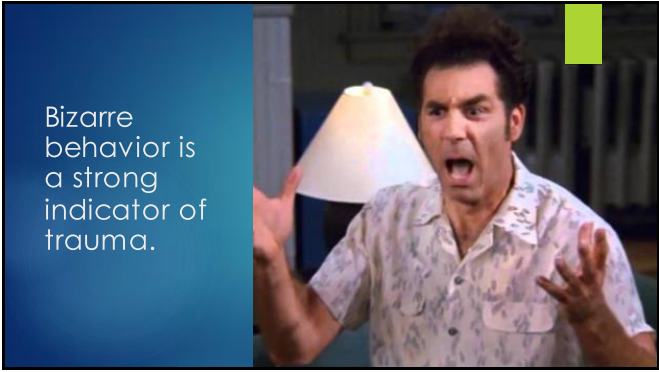
Understanding this,
a victim's behavior
should have no bearing
on their believability.

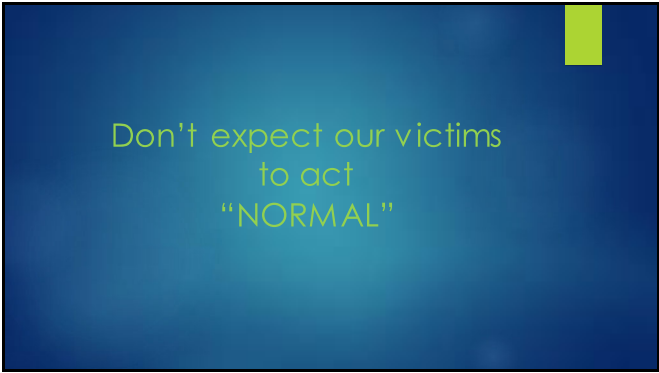
Rape Survivor Laughing

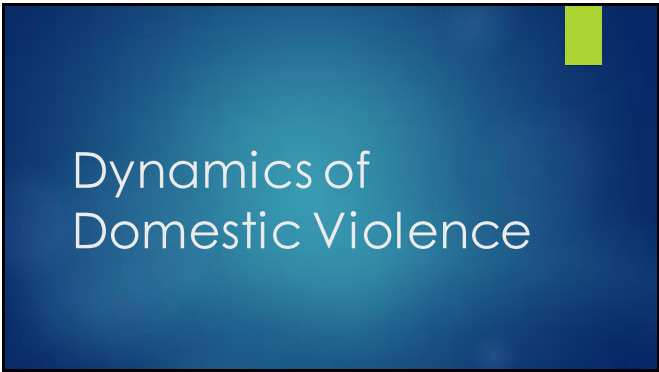
What's wrong with this picture?

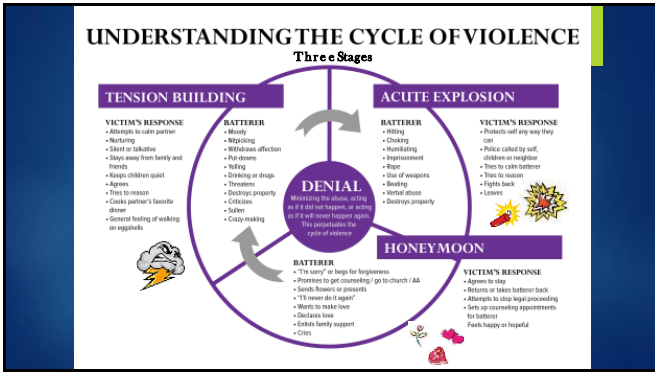


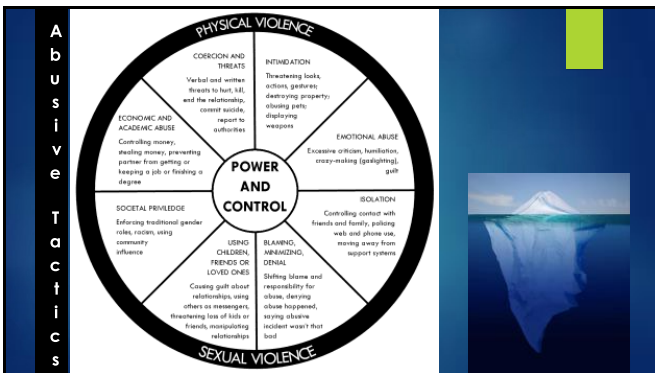
Our Beliefs & Expectations











Why do they stay?

- ▶ Fear
- ▶ Belief that abuse is normal
- ▶ **LOVE and HOPE**
- ▶ Lack of financial resources
- ▶ Trauma bonding
- ▶ Disability
- ▶ No job skills
- ▶ No affordable housing or shelter available
- ▶ Promises of change
- ▶ Prior court involvement/Fear of the system
- ▶ Cultural norms
- ▶ To keep the family together
- ▶ Safer to stay
- ▶ Shame and embarrassment
- ▶ Language barrier/immigration status
- ▶ No transportation
- ▶ Fear of being outed
- ▶ Substance use
- ▶ Need for childcare while she works
- ▶ Fear the **children** will be taken
- ▶ Family says she's "Too picky!"
- ▶ Friends say, "He's a good guy!"
- ▶ He says, "No one will believe you."
- ▶ Her faith believes "Till death do you part!"

TRAUMA
is the context
in which we do our work.

A Not-So-Hypothetical Interaction with a Trauma Survivor

YOU are ready to meet and gather information to assist them...

THEY may get agitated, appear unwilling to answer your questions, won't sit down, want to get some air...

Yikes!

A common response might be, "Please calm down. Have a seat so I can get some information. We'll make this quick."

That is **OUR** comfort zone not theirs.

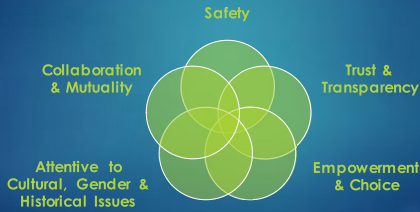
Restoring Power and Control

Treating victims in ways that are opposite to how they were treated by their abuser.

- ▶ Avoiding practices that may trigger and re-traumatize
- ▶ Integrating practices that offer physical and emotional safety



So, what do trauma-informed responses look like?




Trauma-Informed Responses



- ▶ Empathize: "I'm sorry this happened to you."
- ▶ Acknowledge the difficulty of the situation
- ▶ Validate: "Freezing is a baked-in response." "You showered? It's okay."
- ▶ Help ground dysregulated survivors
- ▶ Be aware of your non-verbal messages
- ▶ Be flexible with where you meet, seated or standing, door open or closed...if possible
- ▶ Offer transportation to safety, including hearings


Trauma-Informed Responses



Trust & Transparency

- Allow uninterrupted "free-flow" narrative
- Don't ask "Why" rather, "Tell me what you remember," "Tell me more about..."
- Ask sensory-based question
- Commend for reporting
- Clarify what you can / cannot help with
- Have a consistent point of contact


Trauma-Informed Responses



Empowerment & Choice

- Involve in decision-making, when possible
- Inform of the Victim Bill of Rights
- Offer warm referrals to supportive services

Trauma-Informed Responses



Attentive to Cultural, Gender & Historical Issues

- Be aware that cultural differences and similarities between people exist w/o assigning them a value
- Be aware of divides caused by racism, sexism, homophobia, historical trauma and other "isms"
- "People are trapped in history and history is trapped in them."
- Involve/refer to culturally specific supportive services

Trauma-Informed Responses

Collaboration & Mutuality



- Communicate with timely information throughout their care
- Make tasks clear
- Offer realistic expectations/outcomes
- Avoid surprises

Benefits of Trauma-Informed Responses

- ▶ Supports healing and recovery
- ▶ Builds trust and rapport
- ▶ Empowers with information and decision-making opportunities
- ▶ Increases preparedness for engagement

TRAUMA AND THE BRAIN

Video

