

Understanding Trauma & Sexualized Violence

Things to keep in mind...



"Trauma Informed Practices" are a set of flexible "Guiding Principles" rather than a rigid model.



The idea is to reflect on the Guiding Principles **AND THEN** respond and take action accordingly.



The goal is to increase the **inclusiveness** of our services and allow space for greater **individuality** in those we serve.

Factors to consider

What makes someone vulnerable?

Exploring far beyond the "date rape" drug

- Prescription medication, alcohol, and other substances
- History of abuse
- Gender, race, socioeconomic factors, ect.

Substance Use

Shifting from "responsibility" to "vulnerability"

The experience of sexualized violence is not a consequence of substance use.. In fact, it often follows it.

Substance use is often seen as a "negative" coping mechanism

Negative VS Positive

However, we can reduce the stigma and judgment associated with substance use by using the terms below:

Short term VS Long term

These terms recognize that their substance use was a useful survival strategy that helped them cope up until this point while still recognizing that it may not be as useful and/or damaging in the long term.

Self-Blame

Many victims/survivors of sexualized violence blame themselves, at least partly, for what happened to them. **How can we shift this?**

It's about planting the seeds of reversal of self-blame:

- Be careful not to convey the message of hopefulness when discussing the fact that victims/survivors do not have control of or choose to be in the situation of experiencing sexualized violence.
- Shift responsibility to the perpetrator by exploring their motives; **"What do you think he was thinking there?"** or **"Why do you think he did that?"**
- Address retrospective thinking; Share information and normalize responses to a threat: **ie. Freezing is a common response to danger.**
- Make neutral statements that do not specifically target the individual, such as, **"Assault is never the fault of the victim".**

Sex vs Sexualized Violence

Many victims/survivors, especially those with a history of abuse, have trouble making this distinction.

Sex and violence may have gone hand-in-hand for them in the past.

- Explore the dynamics of consent.
- Name behaviors and feelings that arise within the individual.
- Identify ways to create safety in sexual situations.
- Discuss the right to a sexual life on their own terms as a human right.

Always ask permission before delving into these subjects. It is important that the individual be in control of these conversations.

Helpful therapeutic strategies that anyone can use in their work with victims/survivors

- **Be transparent:** About procedure, organizational policy, purpose of asking difficult questions, etc to build and maintain trust.
- **Neutralize power imbalances;** Give the individual a voice in the team by providing opportunity for choice, asking questions, taking breaks, etc.
- **Accept responses by the individual;** Allow space for them to be upset, agitated, or uncomfortable (as long as you are safe). These responses do not always mean they have been re-traumatized.
- **Evaluate and balance distress;** Have a few quick and easy grounding exercises ready to use when the individual becomes distressed.
- **Emphasize strengths and supports:** Normalize responses to trauma and recognize the tactics that helped them to survive until now.
- **Create safety within the environment;** This should be safety as defined by the individual, be careful to avoid making assumptions about what safety looks like to others.
- **Shift your language;** Instead of "Were you raped/abused?", use language that is less triggering: "How is your relationship going?" "Has anything upsetting happened lately?" "Are there things in your life that are worrying you?"