

Trauma-Informed Care

A Service Provider's Guide to Supporting Survivors of Sexual Trauma & Abuse

Everyone reacts to sexual trauma & abuse in different ways; healing and coping look different for everyone. There are several ways in which you can help the victim-survivor through their individual healing journey.

Trauma-informed care is an approach to engaging people with histories of trauma that recognizes the presence of trauma symptoms and acknowledges the role that trauma has played in their lives.

- Validate their feelings (anger, pain, sadness, fear, shame) and accept the way in which a victim-survivor describes that experience.
- Know your own biases or feelings about rape or sexual assault, and further, understand how this can affect the victim-survivor's experience.
- Allow the victim-survivor to take the lead in their recovery. Let them talk about the incident on their own time and in their own way. If there are protocols or policies that must be followed, explain those to the victim-survivor and answer any questions they might have.
- Trauma survivors sometimes present as “difficult” clients. (i.e. hesitancy to trust people, using drugs and alcohol as coping methods, disconnection from their body and other emotions). These “difficult behaviors” have probably served the survivor well in the past. It is hard to give up a behavior that you believe has kept you safe.
- Understand this event may cause a person to question whom to trust.
- Leave comparisons alone. Everyone heals differently—their own pace, their own time, their own journey.
- Avoid ‘count your blessings’ statements that may be heard as judgmental and possibly trivialize what has just happened such as “it could have been worse” or “you’re lucky weren’t hurt badly”, etc.
- Create a safe environment in which they can count on you—for simply “being there” or even for talking through a moment.
- Encourage the person to get the help *they* feel they need—whether that’s by reporting the crime or seeking out counseling. Advocates can provide information to help victim-survivors decide what the best decision for them is.

The Sexual Trauma & Abuse Care Center
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Considerations for Mandated Reporters

- Know the specific rules, regulations, laws, policy, etc. that require you to report.
 - Know specifically when you are mandated to report
 - Know specifically to whom you are required to report
 - Know specifically what information you are required to report
- Recognize when someone believes they are speaking to you in confidence and use that as an opportunity to clarify your role or your policies.
- Make sure the victim-survivor knows you are a mandated reporter.
- Encourage them to call The Care Center if they would prefer to speak anonymously over the crisis line.
- Personally contact The Care Center, if you have specific questions or need resources to provide support to victim-survivors.

What are some reactions or emotions survivors might experience?

Remember, everyone responds to the aftermath of a sexual assault or abuse in a different way. There is no right or wrong way.

- Anxiety, fear, depression
- Physical health symptoms
- Flashbacks, intrusive and distressing memories of the violence
- Disorientation and difficulty concentrating
- Self-blame, guilt, and shame
- “Shutting down”, avoidance, or emotional numbing

Coping responses: Everyone responds differently to trauma. Survivors may use a variety of coping mechanisms including: alcohol/drug use, social isolation, anger and aggressive behavior toward others, avoidance, cutting, disordered eating, high-risk sexual behaviors, etc.

It's okay for a survivor to have happy experiences! Everyone reacts differently and it's okay for survivors of trauma to still experience joy and happiness. This might be seen as avoidance by others, but every emotion the survivor experiences is real and valid.



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