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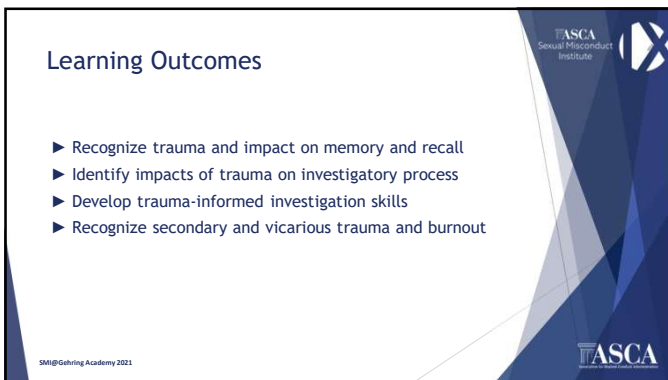
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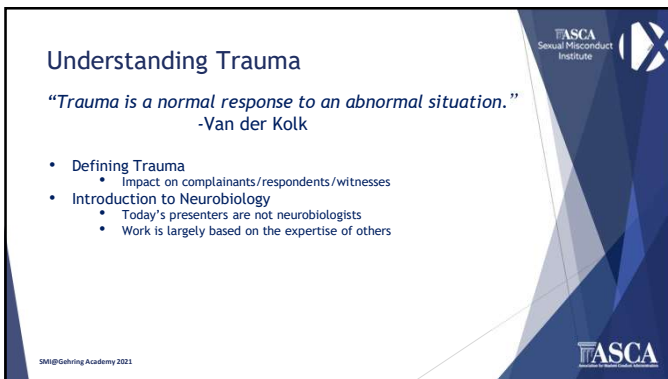
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**What is Trauma?**

*“Trauma is a normal response to an abnormal situation.”*  
-Van der Kolk

*Extreme threat/terror/horror*  
+  
*Lack of control or perceived lack of control*  
- Dr. Christopher Wilson, Psy.D., 2017

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**What is Trauma?**

- Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one or more of the following ways:
  - Directly experiencing the traumatic event(s)
  - Witnessing, in person, the event(s) as it occurred to others
  - Learning that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a close family member or close friend. In cases of actual or threatened death of a family member or friend, the event(s) must have been violent or accidental
  - Experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event(s) (ex: first responders)

(DSM-V Diagnostic Criteria for PTSD)

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**Neurobiology of Trauma**

- ▶ Science-based understanding of:
  1. How brains and bodies respond to acutely stressful and traumatic events such as a sexual assault, as they are happening, and
  2. How these experiences of extreme stress are encoded, stored, and potentially retrieved from memory.
- ▶ This is consistent with the way in which psychological trauma is defined by scientists in the field of traumatic stress, and also how it is defined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM 5).

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**Other Aspects of Trauma**

- Experiences that are emotionally painful and distressing, that overwhelm people's ability to cope
- Developing situation and person specific
- More than violence- more subtle forms such as discrimination, racism, oppression, etc. can have a cumulative impact

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**Hopper - Sexual Assault and the Brain in 6 minutes**



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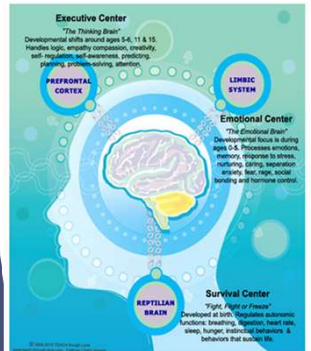
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**Loss of Prefrontal Regulation**



- No "if-then logical thinking"
- No ability to process temporal questions
- Inability to make meaning of experience and feelings

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How does trauma show up?

- Impacts:
  - Physical response (freeze/fight/flight)
  - Cognitive (memory)
  - Emotional regulation (affect)
  - Behavioral (decision-making)
- Impacts are:
  - Immediate (during incident)
  - Persistent (immediately following)
  - Potentially permanent (impacts brain structure)

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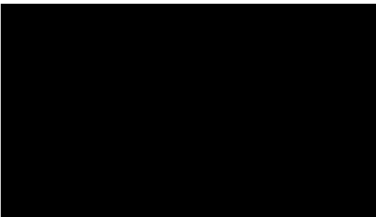
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Fight Flight Freeze Response



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Survival Reflexes

- Fight - Flight - Freeze
- Types of freezing
  - Pause: Momentary freezing while they determine what happens
  - Tonic Immobility: Remain conscious, but unable to move
- Other survival reflexes:
  - Disassociation
  - Habit behaviors
  - Negotiation

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Tonic Immobility



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Discussion

- Share with break out room, then with larger group
  - How have you seen trauma in investigations?
  - What can we do with this information as investigators?

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Trauma-Informed

- “A ‘trauma-informed’ system is one in which:
  - All components of a given system have been reconsidered and evaluated in the light of a basic understanding of the role that violence plays in the lives of people seeking mental health and addiction services
  - [and] uses that understanding to design service systems that accommodate the vulnerabilities of trauma survivors
  - Allows services to be delivered in a way that will avoid inadvertent re-traumatization and will facilitate consumer participation in treatment” (Harris & Fallot, 2001).

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**Considerations for Trauma in Investigation Process**

- If someone reports an incident
- How someone acted during the incident
- Whether someone discloses
  - How they do it, to whom
  - What the narrative sounds like
- Whether someone reports/takes action
- How someone behaves in the aftermath
  - With friends/family
  - With medical personnel
  - Investigators/law enforcement
  - In a hearing

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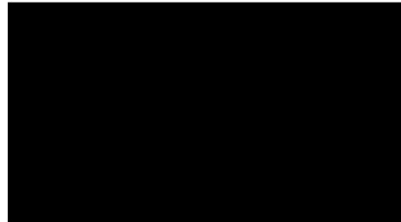
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**Trauma & Memory**



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**Trauma-Informed Investigations**

- ▶ Sincere efforts to establish trust, rapport and comfort for the victim.
- ▶ Acknowledgment of the victim's trauma and/or pain.
- ▶ Creating an environment that feels physically and emotionally safe for victims.
- ▶ Communicating in language the victim will understand and be comfortable with.
- ▶ Use of non-leading questions and other open-ended prompts (e.g., "Tell me more about that," or "What were you thinking/feeling at that point?").
- ▶ Encouragement of narrative responses with pauses, and ~~without~~ interruptions.

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## Trauma-Informed Investigations

- ▶ Focus on what the victim can recall thinking and feeling throughout the experience.
- ▶ Particular emphasis on emotional and sensory experiences (five externally focused senses plus internal body sensations).
- ▶ Expressions of patience, empathy, and understanding throughout the interview.
- ▶ No necessity for information to be provided in a sequential or “logical” order.
- ▶ Instruction not to guess at any answers, and to say “I don’t know” when needed.
- ▶ Not asking victims “why” they did or did not do something during the assault, but rather inquiring in ways that convey a non-judgmental desire to understand their

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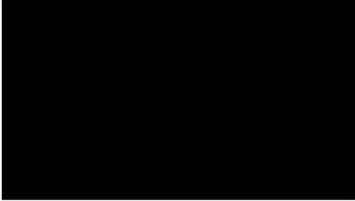
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## Hopper - Trauma Informed Sexual Assault Investigations



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## Vicarious Trauma and Burnout

Impact of investigating sexual violence on investigators

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**Impact of Investigating Trauma**

- ▶ **Vicarious trauma** is the experience of trauma symptoms that can result from being repeatedly exposed to other people's trauma and their stories of traumatic events. A person's worldview (belief systems) can be significantly changed as a result of hearing those stories. Vicarious trauma is cumulative, building up over time.
- ▶ **Secondary traumatic stress** is the emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the first hand trauma experiences of another. Its symptoms mimic those of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- ▶ **Burnout** is the prolonged physical and psychological exhaustion related to a person's work. It does not include traumatic elements or PTSD-like symptoms.

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**Recognizing the signs and symptoms of vicarious trauma**

- ▶ Invasive thoughts of victim's situation/distress
- ▶ Frustration/fear/anxiety/irritability
- ▶ Disturbed sleep/nightmares/racing thoughts
- ▶ Problems managing personal boundaries
- ▶ Taking on too great a sense of responsibility or feeling you need to overstep the boundaries of your role
- ▶ Difficulty leaving work at the end of the day/noticing you can never leave on time
- ▶ Loss of connection with self and others/loss of a sense of own identity
- ▶ Increased time alone/a sense of needing to withdraw from others
- ▶ Increased need to control events/outcomes/others
- ▶ Loss of pleasure in daily activities

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**Recognizing the signs and symptoms of burnout**

- ▶ Physical and emotional stress
- ▶ Low job satisfaction
- ▶ Feeling frustrated by or judgmental of clients
- ▶ Feeling under pressure, powerless and overwhelmed
- ▶ Not taking breaks, eating on the run
- ▶ Unable to properly refuel and regenerate
- ▶ Frequent sick days or "mental health days"
- ▶ Irritability and anger

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**Managing Trauma and Burnout**

- ▶ Some tips for managing symptoms of vicarious trauma and burnout:
  - ▶ Reach out to someone. This could be your manager, a trusted friend or colleague, a counsellor or another support person. You could also access your employee assistance program (EAP), if you have one. For after-hours support, the [SAMSHA National Hotline](#) can help connect you with a provider in your area.
  - ▶ Find a way to escape physically and/or mentally e.g. reading, days off, holidays, walks, seeing friends
  - ▶ Rest - have some time with no goals e.g. taking naps, watching clouds, lying on the beach
  - ▶ Play - have fun and do things that make you laugh e.g. playing with children and pets, creative activities, watching a favorite comedy

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**References**

- ▶ DSM-5 Diagnostic Criteria for PTSD: [https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207191/box/part1\\_ch3\\_box16/](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207191/box/part1_ch3_box16/)
- ▶ [https://evawintl.org/wp-content/uploads/2019-12\\_TB-Becoming-Trauma-Informed-Trauma-to-Victim-Interviews.pdf](https://evawintl.org/wp-content/uploads/2019-12_TB-Becoming-Trauma-Informed-Trauma-to-Victim-Interviews.pdf)
- ▶ <https://www.jimhopper.com/topics/sexual-assault-and-the-brain/>

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**Additional Resources**

- ▶ Forensic Experiential Trauma Interviewing: <http://www.azcvs.net/wp-content/uploads/FETI-Public-Description-Jan-2017.pdf>
- ▶ EVAWI Forensic Experiential Trauma Interviewing Course (Free): <https://evawintl.org/courses/forensic-experiential-trauma-interview-a-trauma-informed-experience/>
- ▶ IACP Successful Trauma Informed Victim Interviewing: <https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Final%20Design%20Successful%20Trauma%20Informed%20Victim%20Interviewing.pdf>
- ▶ Campbell Neurobiology of Sexual Assault Lecture: <https://nij.ojp.gov/media/video/24056>

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