RESPONDING TO TRAUMA

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Objectives

- Understand dynamics of sexual violence
- Review trauma theory and common response to trauma
- Understand importance of language and providing a trauma-informed response
- Review the role of supportive services and victim rights/options in care
PAAR services

VICTIM RESPONSE TEAM

- MEDICAL ADVOCACY
- LEGAL ADVOCACY AND ACCOMPANIMENT
- CRISIS COUNSELING IN VARIOUS SETTINGS

THE DROP IN CENTER

PAAR addresses the unique and practical needs of those who experience sexual exploitation and trafficking with services to help victims gain their freedom and independence:

- PERSONAL ADVOCACY
- INTENSIVE CASE MANAGEMENT
- GROUP WORK

1-866-END-RAPE
PAAR services

CLINICAL SERVICES

- CHILD AND FAMILY CENTER
- ADULT INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP THERAPY
- WELLNESS SERIES

PREVENTION

- PRIMARY PREVENTION
- PROJECT LAST CALL
- CBIM
- PITK

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Understanding the landscape

People with a disability are twice as likely to experience sexual violence. ¹

1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys are sexually abused by age 18. ³

1 in 6 women and 1 in 33 men have experienced sexual violence. ⁴

60% of black girls will experience childhood sexual abuse. ²

People are more likely to blame the victim if they are black or latinx. ⁵

People who identify as transgender are 50% more likely to experience sexual violence. ²

All reference information (1-6) available on Resources slide.
Intersectionality

The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage; a theoretical approach based on such a premise.

(Oxford Dictionary)
THROUGHOUT THE RESEARCH, ONE THEME HAS REMAINED CONSISTENT:

Sexual abuse is extensively undisclosed and under-reported.

“Sexual violence is one of the most UNDER-REPORTED CRIMES with 68% of assaults left unreported.”

U.S. Department of Justice, the Office of Victims of Crime
Shame and Secrecy

“The intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging – something we’ve experienced, done, or failed to do makes us unworthy of connection.” (Dr. Brene Brown)

- **Shame and secrecy** are central to sexual trauma
- Victims might feel responsible for the abuse, and feel shame as a result:
  “I was assaulted because I am (...)”
TRAUMA AND RESPONSE
The brain & trauma

TRAUMA OVERWHELMED OUR ABILITY TO

- Have a sense of control
- Make meaning of our experience
- Maintain connection to others

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT OUR BRAIN FUNCTIONS DIFFERENTLY WHEN WE EXPERIENCE TRAUMA.
Healing from sexual violence does not follow a time schedule or pattern. Individual responses to trauma could include:

- Withdrawn
- Laughing
- Hysterical
- Flat affect
- Sad
- Anxious
- Angry
- Frustrated
- Fearful
- Numb
- Quiet
- Indifferent
The brain

- **Thalamus**
  - Accepts information from our 5 senses
  - Regulates sex hormones; blood pressure; body temp

- **Hippocampus**
  - Gives a date and time stamp

- **Amygdala**
  - Determines danger

- **Pre-Frontal Cortex**
  - Higher level of thinking, decision making

- **Broca’s Area**
  - Attaches speech to our experiences
Average Memory

- Five senses
- Thalamus
- Amygdala
- Broca's area
- Prefrontal cortex
- Hippocampus
Traumatic Memory

- Five senses
- Thalamus
- Amygdala
- Broca's area
- Pre-frontal cortex
- Hippocampus
The brain & trauma

AUTOMATIC RESPONSE SYSTEM –

FIGHT

FLIGHT

FREEZE
WHAT DOES TRAUMA LOOK LIKE?

- Difficulty regulating emotions
- Emotional numbing
- Anger and aggression
- Self-harming behaviors
- Dissociation (*spacing/blanking out; losing time*)
- Memory gaps (*difficulty retrieving & communicating memories*)
Difficult falling asleep/ nightmares/ flashbacks
Hypervigilance, constantly “on guard”
PTSD
Cumulative trauma, repeated sexual victimization**
Use of poor coping mechanisms (drugs & alcohol, self-injury, eating disorders, etc)
Avoidance or withdrawal

Depression and anxiety
Feelings of shame and guilt
Chronic physical health problems (headaches, fatigue, stomach problems)
Early initiation of sexual activity
Loss of self-esteem
Suicidal thoughts or suicide
“The FIRST RESPONSE to victims is critical in determining how someone cope.”

U.S. Department of Justice, the Office of Victims of Crime
A Coordinated Response to working with victims:

1. POLICE
2. SANE RESPONSE
3. PAAR ADVOCATE
4. DISTRICT ATTORNEY
5. CORRECTIONS STAFF
6. CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER

Adapted from Boston Area Rape Crisis Center, “Introduction to Sexual Assault of College Students” (2015).
Why a coordinated response?

COMMON GOALS

- Being responsive to the needs of victims
- Ensuring safety of victims
- Ensuring safety of the community
- Prosecuting offenders
- Victims choose to participate – because they are understood and supported
MEET VICTIMS AND THEIR FAMILIES AT LOCAL EMERGENCY ROOMS

- On-call advocates available 24 hours a day and respond in 60 minutes
- Hospital personnel contact advocates immediately after triage: 1-866-END-RAPE
- Guide and support victims through the Forensic Medical Exam and initial police interview
Options in care

TO ENSURE HEALTH AND SELF-PROTECTION

- Check for possible injuries, even if none are visible
- Early detection and preventative treatment for HIV, STI’s and pregnancy

TO COLLECT FORENSIC EVIDENCE

- Complete a Forensic Medical Exam, preformed by a SANE or medical professional

IMPORTANCE OF DNA

- Key tool in investigation & prosecuting cases
- Evidence that the assault occurred, and perpetrator is the source of biological material
Police accommodation

- Helpline available 24/7 to police departments requesting an advocate
- Explain reporting options
- Explain the court process and timeframe
- Court accommodation in criminal and juvenile court

- Act as liaison between various systems (District Attorney's, police, probation)
- Assist in court preparation
- Registration and assistance:
  - SVPO’s and PFI’s
  - Victim’s Compensation
  - Jail Notification
  - Victim’s Bill of Rights

1-866-END-RAPE
Needs at disclosure

- To be believed
- To be recognized as a survivor of sexual assault
- To have others be honest with them
- Information and choice about what will happen next (transparency)
- Time and space to process feelings
- To feel safe
Needs at disclosure

THE VICTIM SHOULD –

- Be informed & involved
- Understand the next steps once a report has been filed
- Make active choices about how to proceed
- Be encouraged to access resources

- Provide choices – control
- Explain purpose & what will happen next
- Allow victim to refuse to make a statement
- Provide a private space
- Acknowledge the difficulty of talking about the assault
- Preface sensitive questions with why the question is being asked
I’m sorry you have to go through this. There is no “normal” so it is ok to feel (____). You aren’t alone; there are services to help you through this.

You might feel unsafe or uncomfortable. It’s important that the right people know about this so we can help keep you safe.

I want you to know that regardless of the circumstances, this shouldn’t have happened.

I’m sorry that happened to you. There are people who can help you through this.
Keeping perspective

- Feeling victimized is a terrible experience
- Many victims do not utilize the criminal justice system – it can feel re-victimizing
- Many barriers and stereotypes exist and everyone's experience is unique
- It is our role to refrain from making judgements
"We think we listen, but very rarely do we listen with real understanding, true empathy. Yet listening, of this very special kind, is one of the most potent forces for change that I know."

— Carl Rogers
LANGUAGE MATTERS!

Terminology has a real impact on people.
validation and hope

- This is hard. You’ve done hard things before and I believe in you.
- I know there’s a lot that could go wrong. What could go right?
- All vibes are welcome here.
- It’s pretty normal to have some negativity in this situation.
- It’s probably pretty hard to be positive right now. I’m putting out good energy into the world for you.
- It’s probably really hard to see any good in this situation. We’ll make sense of it.

Whitney (@sitwithwhit) (Instagram 2019).

toxic positivity

- You’ll get over it!
- Just be positive!
- Good vibes only!
- Stop being so negative!
- Think happy thoughts!
- Never give up!
- Just be happy!
- See the good in everything.
Healing is not linear.
“When someone says ‘I’ve been raped’ the most important words in the world to say are ‘I believe you.’ If a survivor doesn’t hear that from anyone else, she or he is going to hear it from me.”

—Karen Carroll

The Voices and Faces Project
voicesandfaces.org
RESPOND, EDUCATE & ADVOCATE TO END SEXUAL VIOLENCE

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1-866-END-RAPE
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