

Teaching Responsible Employees to be Trauma-Informed: Practical Skills and Takeaways

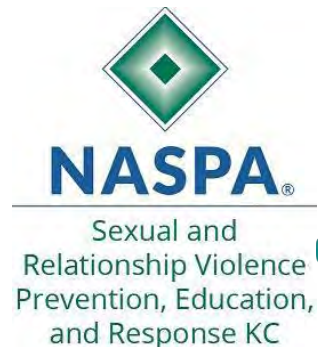
Puzzles 2019

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Framing this Session

Numerous studies over the years have shown that faculty & student affairs professionals are not trained to handle disclosures

- × The 2015 National Faculty Survey on Student Engagement (FSSE) found that over half of faculty reported receiving “some to no” training on sexual assault
- × An EVERFI Pre-Assessment of its faculty and staff training module revealed that only 53% of faculty and staff understood the steps to handle a student disclosure
- × In a general study of disclosures, most survivors reported wishing they had received more emotional support, validation, and tangible aid from those they disclosed to



What does it mean to be trauma-informed?

Realize the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery;

Recognize the signs and symptoms of trauma

Respond by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and

Seek to actively resist **re-traumatization**.



Objectives

Provide context on the scope and impact of sexual violence on college campuses

Introduce basic information on the neurobiology of trauma

Present a trauma-informed technique which can be utilized to respond to a student disclosure



Realities of Sexual Assault on College Campuses

- × 80-90% of the time, the perpetrator is someone the victim knows
- × 60% of the time, the assault takes place in the victim's own place of residence, 30% of the time in the residence of a friend
- × 72% of sexual assaults of female college students occurred when the victim was too intoxicated to consent (incapacitated)

Not Just “A Woman’s Issue”

**1 in 4 female college students,
1 in 16 male college students, and
1 in 2 trans/gender non-conforming
college students experience sexual violence**

**LGBQ individuals are also at an increased
risk of sexual violence**

- × **44% of lesbian women & 46% of bisexual women**
- × **26% of gay men & 37% of bisexual men**

Impacts of sexual violence on victim-survivors

Following their assault, victim-survivors may face psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, sleep disorders, self-harm, or PTSD

Victim-survivors may also struggle with self-blame, low self-esteem, and guilt

Victim-survivors may try to self-medicate with alcohol or other drugs

Experiencing sexual violence prior to or during college is significantly correlated with lowered college GPA

Reporting

- × Only about 5% of victim-survivors ever report to law enforcement; of those, only a quarter report within 24 hours
- × A study on college campuses found that on average, a victim delayed 11 months before reporting to campus authorities
- × National statistics show that rates of false reports are rare; about 2-8%
- × The nature of the incident may affect rates of reporting or disclosure;
 - × The greater the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator, the less likely they are to report
 - × The more a victim blames themselves, the less likely they are to report
 - × Factors that increase likelihood of reporting: if force was used, if the perpetrator was a stranger, if weapons were used

The #1 reason college students do not report or seek help was “I thought what happened was ‘not serious enough’”



**Some insights from the
Neurobiology of
Trauma**

Why victims' stories are often fragmented

During trauma, the brain releases a rush of hormones to protect the physical and emotional well-being of the victim

The areas of the brain that are responsible for processing & storing memories are highly influenced by hormones

Often, the strongest memories may be sensory or emotional memories— the feeling of fear, smells, sights, etc.

Time or sequencing information and details are the least likely to be encoded into memory

Fight, Flight, or Freeze

- × Over 50% of victims report some manner of freezing in response to their assault
 - × Dissociation, a feeling of being removed from one's body, can also occur
 - × "Tonic immobility" occurs in 12-50% of cases

Remembering the Assault

- × If a victim feels unsafe when they are questioned, they may not be able to use their prefrontal cortex to understand the questions and retrieve certain memories.
- × If a victim feels traumatized by questioning, this may trigger the bottom-up retrieval of fragmentary sensations and emotions that are nearly as intense as the assault itself.

Managing Identity After Assault

Homeostasis–

Maintaining normality, routines as a way to avoid acknowledging the impact of trauma

Diffraction–

Noticeable changes in behavior, thoughts, or appearance to distance self from their experience

PTSD

Re-experiencing the trauma

(flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive thoughts)

Social withdrawal

(emotional numbness, disinterest in living)

Increased physiological arousal

(anxiety, hypervigilance, poor memory, difficulty concentrating, irritability, rage, anger)

Avoidance behaviors and actions

(denial, avoiding triggers)

The background features a dynamic composition of blue and white. On the left, there are large, irregular white shapes that resemble splatters or thick brushstrokes, extending towards the center. The right side is dominated by various shades of blue, from light turquoise to deep, saturated navy blue, with some darker, almost black, areas. The overall effect is that of a textured, artistic surface, possibly a watercolor or ink wash.

Handling a Disclosure

Barriers to Reporting

A significant amount of victims never officially report that they were sexually assaulted

- × May fear not being believed or being blamed
- × May fear being punished for other actions (underage drinking, drug use, etc.)
- × May fear their friends or family finding out
- × May blame themselves for what happened
- × May not acknowledge what happened to them as rape, sexual assault, or dating violence
- × May be unsure or fearful of the criminal justice system

Research on Student Disclosures

- × Disclosing to others has been linked to improved psychological well-being
- × Negative reactions to disclosures can lead to more severe trauma and symptoms
- × 80% of the time, the first person a student discloses to is a peer (friend or RA)
- × In a study of 30 professors who had experienced a student disclosure, 93% received multiple disclosures
 - × Of students who initiated a disclosure:
 - × 30% came up to a professor after class
 - × 20% contacted them via email
 - × 16% mentioned being victimized in an assignment
 - × 93% of students did not ask for academic flexibility while disclosing
 - × Approximately 31% were judged by the faculty member to be in crisis

Source: *Professors' Experiences with Student Disclosures of Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence*, Branch, Hayes-Smith, and Richards (2011)



The Impact of Title IX on Disclosures

Supportive/Interim Measures From a trauma-informed lens





The ABC's of Responding

A- Acknowledge

Use active listening throughout

Thank the student for sharing their story

Use language that mirrors the student's way of talking about their experience and identity

Acknowledge any positive/help-seeking behaviors they have already engaged in



B- Believe

Ensure that the student feels they are heard, believed, and supported

Focus on providing space for them to share as much or as little as they want– do not take the role of investigator

Remind the student that what happened was not their fault, and avoid asking “why” questions that could place blame upon them for their experience



C- Check In

Ask the student how you can best support them

Focus on providing options and facilitating access to resources, rather than giving advice

Try to empower the student to decide what is right for them— they are the expert of their own experience

Remind them that you are a responsible employee and that the Title IX Coordinator will be reaching out





Thank you!

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