

## Building Trauma-Informed Capacity for DV Organizations

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GEORGIA COALITION AGAINST  
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE  
[www.gcadv.org](http://www.gcadv.org)



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## Welcome!

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**Tell us:**

1. **Your name**
2. **Your role or position at your program**
3. **What's one thing you hope to learn or gain from our time together these next two days?**

*About us . . .*

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## Presenters

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Alexis Champion  
Training Manager  
[achampion@gcadv.org](mailto:achampion@gcadv.org)  
404-209-0280, ext. 23

Michelle White  
Child & Youth Project  
Manager  
[mwhite@gcadv.org](mailto:mwhite@gcadv.org)  
404-209-0280, ext. 27



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## Thank You to Our Funder!

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### Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council

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## Introduction to the Project

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- GCADV chooses 3 Domestic Violence (DV) Programs
- GCADV meets with DV Program's Leadership Team
- Participate in a 2-Day Trauma-Informed training with all staff
- Begin Internal Agency Work:
  - Complete a Program Self-Assessment
  - Set Program Goals (re: trauma-informed capacity)
- GCADV provides follow-up to DV programs
  - Technical assistance (TA) and support
- GCADV facilitates a 1-day follow-up training for staff
- GCADV provides Undoing Racism training
- Arrange future involvement in training and TA to other programs

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## National Center on DV, Trauma & Mental Health

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- The materials for this presentation were developed by the National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health
- Resource Center and TA Provider
- [www.nationalcenterdvtraumamh.org](http://www.nationalcenterdvtraumamh.org)

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## Self-Awareness: First, Find Your Balance . . .

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- Awareness of our own experiences with trauma, how we are affected by the work & how we may be affecting others
- Self-reflection
- Attention to what helps you stay balanced, focused, caring & effective
- Willingness to do the self-work



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## Self-Awareness Check-In

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## Survivors Accessing Services

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**What do women & children bring?**

### What We Understand:

- Safety
- Empowerment
- Information & Support
- Abuser Accountability
- Social/Systems Change

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### What do you think will happen?

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Content adapted from National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health

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### What would be helpful?

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- What does he want?
- What can he do on his own?
- What help does he need?
- What help can we give?
- What will we do if he falls?

Content adapted from National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health

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## What Do We Mean by “Trauma”?

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Overwhelming experience that involves a threat

Results in vulnerability and loss of control

Leaves people feeling helpless and fearful

Interferes with relationships and beliefs

Content adapted from National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health

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## What Do We Mean by “Trauma”?

14

Trauma is in the eye of the beholder

NORMAL responses to ABNORMAL situations

Shifts away from emotional safety & balance

Trying to get back to center - coping

Content adapted from National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health

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## Collective & Historical Trauma

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- Cumulative – over the lifespan
  - Emotional
  - Psychological
  - Spiritual
- Across generations – massive group trauma experiences



[http://www.aboutnorthgeorgia.com/eng/Cherokee\\_Trail\\_of\\_Tears](http://www.aboutnorthgeorgia.com/eng/Cherokee_Trail_of_Tears)

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# Historical Trauma

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# Domestic Violence & Trauma

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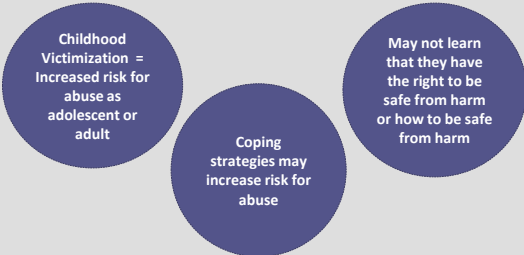
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# Survivors Experience Multiple Types of Trauma

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Fabri: Triple Trauma Paradigm; Root: Insidious trauma; Packard: Cultural and Historical Trauma

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## Sources of Trauma

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- **Historical Trauma**

- Slavery, genocide
- Refugees, religious groups



- **Social Violence**

- Poverty, racism
- Polluted environments



- **Childhood Trauma**

- Emotional, physical or sexual abuse
- Witnessing DV
- Family separation

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## Sources of Trauma

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- **Interpersonal Violence**

- Domestic violence, rape, sexual assault
- Harassment, workplace violence



- **Institutional Trauma**

- Forced medication, involuntary commitment
- Law enforcement, restraint



- **Other Traumatic Events**

- Natural disasters, acts of terrorism, war
- Organizational trauma
- Vicarious/secondary trauma

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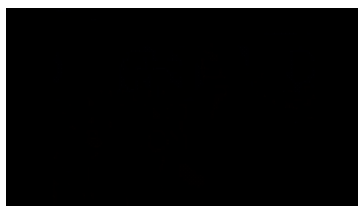
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**Activity:**  
Tracing  
Trauma

**Oprah  
Winfrey**



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## What Do We Mean by Trauma-Informed?

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- Understanding the pervasiveness and impact of trauma
- Reducing and transforming those effects
  - Minimizing retraumatization
  - Supporting healing, resilience and well-being
  - Attending to the impact on providers and organizations



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## What Do We Mean by Trauma-Informed?

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- Addressing the underlying conditions that produce abuse, violence & oppression
- Embodying in our lives & our work the world we want to create



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## How We Respond & the Environments We Create Make a Difference!

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When we respond in culturally attuned, trauma-informed, & survivor-defined/person-centered ways . . .



When survivors feel safer talking about their experiences, they are more likely to access our services & are more likely to find our services helpful.

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## What Role Does Culture Play?

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### Culture influences:

- Strengths, resources & resilience
- Sense of belonging
- Experiences with discrimination & oppression
- The meaning we make of our experiences
- The beliefs & traditions we draw upon
- What & who we find to be helpful

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## Trauma-Informed or Just Good Advocacy?

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- Not understanding trauma is often what gets in the way of good advocacy
- Being trauma-informed means adding a layer of understanding about the impact of trauma - not defining everything through a trauma lens



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## Why Think About Trauma in the Context of Domestic Violence?

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**Domestic violence has significant health, mental health, and social consequences.**

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## Domestic Violence Increases the Risk of Experiencing:

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- Depression
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Substance abuse
- Suicide attempts
- Sleep disturbances

**Experiencing discrimination & oppression further increase these risks**

Bimbi et. al. 2007, Thoma & Huebner 2013, Blossnich & Bossarte 2009, Black et. al. 2013, Chen et. al. 2013

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## Abuse, Violence & Trauma Across the Lifespan



**Plays a key role in the development and exacerbation of health, mental health, & substance abuse conditions**

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## Abuse, Violence & Trauma Across the Lifespan

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- **Gender based violence** increases risk for health, mental health & substance abuse conditions
- **Women** are twice as likely to develop PTSD & depression after trauma exposure & may use substances to manage the traumatic effects of abuse
- **Adverse childhood experiences** also increase the risk for health, mental health & substance abuse problems as an adult



Felitti et al 1998, Kessler et al 1995, Weigh et al 2010, Rees et al 2011, CDC NISVS 2011

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## Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study

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The more ACEs experienced, the greater the risk of experiencing:

- **Health Issues:** Heart, liver, lung, and bone disease; cancer; obesity & physical inactivity
- **Substance Abuse:** Alcoholism, drug abuse, smoking
- **Mental Health Issues:** Depression, anxiety, psychiatric hospitalization, suicide attempts, hallucinations
- **Any ACE** increased suicide risk by 2-5 times

Felitti et al 1998, Dube et al 2001, Weigh et al. 2010

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## At the Same Time . . .

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- Experiencing a mental health or substance abuse condition **puts someone at greater risk** for being abused
- And symptoms may be a direct result of **coercive control**
- Why is this? How does this work?



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## Traumatic Effects of Abuse or Coercive Control?

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For example:

- **High rates of substance abuse** among women who have been victimized
  - Self-medication is common -- may be symptom specific
- **High rates of victimization** among women in substance abuse treatment
  - May be coerced into using or dealing -- using increases risk for coercion

Nayak et. al. 2012, Heffner et. al. 2011, Lipskey et. al. 2010, Schneider et. al. 2009

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## Mental Health & Substance Use Coercion

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- **Abusers use mental health & substance abuse issues to control their partners**

- Undermine sanity, sobriety, credibility, and parenting
- Coerced overdose, coerced use, coerced illegal activities, coerced sex
- Control meds; Control treatment; Sabotage recovery
- Use against survivor to prevent access to support, resources, protection & custody
- “She was out of control”

Warshaw, Lyon, Bland, Phillips, Hooper, 2014

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## Resilience & Healing

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Safety, support & access to resources  
can help to mitigate the effects of  
trauma on survivors

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## Trauma Theory As a Bridge

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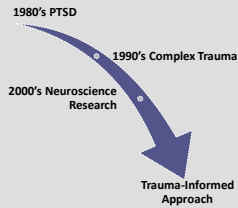
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## Emergence of Trauma Theory:

Reframing Symptoms from a Trauma Perspective

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- Trauma theory has evolved over each decade and continues to evolve.
- Profound shift in understanding trauma and reassessment of mental health symptoms.
- Provides bridge between clinical & advocacy perspectives.
- Led to more holistic, complex & nuanced approaches

Herman 1994, 2009, Bloom 1997, van Der Kolk and Courtois 2005, Wanshaw 2005, Courtois 2009, Ford 2009

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## How Does a Trauma-Informed Approach Help?

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- Offers a more holistic approach
- Is empowerment-based -- views relationship as a key component of healing
- Rehumanizes the experience of dehumanization
- Considers & attends to the impact on providers & organizations
- Helps to counteract abuser manipulation & control



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## Trauma & Domestic Violence: Framing the Issues

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- Without a domestic violence lens, services can be **endangering**
- Without a trauma lens, services can be **retraumatizing**
- Without a culture lens, services may not be **relevant or helpful**
- Without an human rights lens, services may be **oppressive and/or inaccessible**
- Without a social justice lens, we would **not be engaged in social change**

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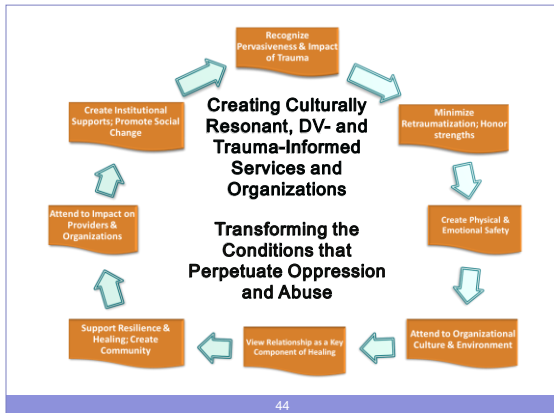
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### How does this framework resonate with you?

- Think about a survivor you have worked with – difficult, combative, uncooperative, mental health, substance use/abuse, disruptive
  - What events in her life may have caused trauma?
  - How might these traumatic experiences affect how she was showing up?
- Using a trauma lens, what might you have done differently?




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## Understanding the Impact of Trauma

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### Understanding Trauma & Development

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### Understanding the Traumatic Effects of Abuse

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#### Why a Developmental Framework Is Important:

- Our brains grow in relation to our experience
- The nature and quality of those experiences help to shape our development
- Each individual is impacted by trauma differently

NCDVTMH, 2009

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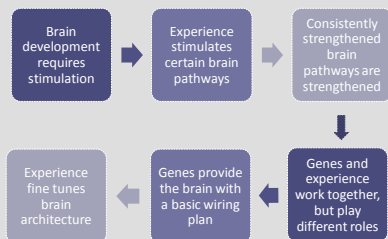
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### Impact of Experience on Brain Development

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Civitas and Wurman, 2002; Center on the Developing Child at Harvard

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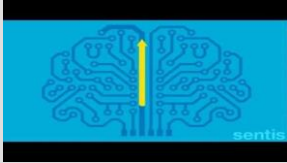
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## Neuroplasticity Video

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELpfYCza87g>



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## How We Grow and Develop

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**Nature + Nurture + Other Early Experiences Influence our Development**

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## Stress & Trauma in the Context of Attachment

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### Positive Stress:

Entry to school or childcare, managing frustration, routine medical care



### Tolerable Stress:

Adverse experiences that occur for brief periods, such as a frightening accident



### Toxic or Traumatic Stress:

Stressful events that are chronic & uncontrollable

**Complex Trauma:** Exposure to multiple traumatic events – often of an invasive, interpersonal nature – and the wide-ranging, long-term effects of this exposure

National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2005; Courtois et. al., 2009; NCTSN, 2009

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## Early Exposure to Trauma

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When exposure to trauma begins in the child's earliest caregiving environment and . . .

- Is repeated and ongoing
- Involves other stressors, losses, and adversities
- May affect all aspects of a child's functioning over time

Some child trauma experts call this:  
**Complex Developmental Trauma**

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## Impact of Trauma on the Brain

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## The Brain's Reaction to Trauma

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Thinking brain  
checks out  
situation

Doing brain  
senses danger

If there is no danger,  
the doing brain goes back  
to normal functioning.

If there is danger, the  
'thinking' brain shuts down,  
allowing the doing brain to  
act.

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## Trauma Can Lead to Changes

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People may move between extremes:

### Arousal

Hyperarousal ↔ Numbing

### Attention

Dissociation ↔ Hyper-focus

### Emotion

Absent ↔ Overwhelming

N. Miller

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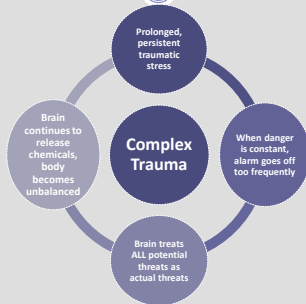
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## Complex Trauma & Trauma Responses

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## Complex Trauma & Triggers

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Triggers include seeing, feeling, or hearing something that reminds us of past trauma

Triggers activate the alarm system → Respond as if there is current danger

The "thinking" brain automatically shuts off when triggers are present

Past & present danger become confused

Complex trauma → More reminders of past danger → Brain is more sensitive to danger

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## Common Triggers for Survivors

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- Reminders of past events
- Lack of power/control
- Conflict in relationships
- Separation or loss
- Anniversaries
- Transitions and routine/schedule disruption
- Feelings of vulnerability or rejection
- Feeling threatened or attacked
- Loneliness

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## Common Trauma Reactions

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### Dissociation

- Disruption in the connections between functions of identity, memory, thoughts, feelings and experiences
- Can alter perceptions of time and memory



### Hyperarousal

- Constantly on alert for danger
- Startle and/or jump easily



### Intrusion

- Survivors feel as though they are actually experiencing the original trauma
- May result in seemingly irrational behavior



### Avoidance

- Survivors restrict their lives to create a sense of safety
- Usually consists of detachment, disorientation, and denial

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## Physical Reactions Related to Trauma

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### Nervousness

Stomachaches/nausea

Numbness

*Bruises, cuts,  
concussions*

**Headaches**

Gynecological pain

### Fatigue

Difficulty  
sleeping

Compromised  
immune system

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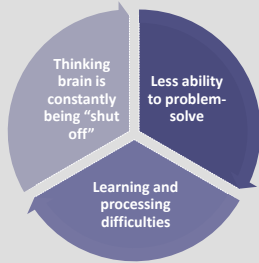
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## Cognitive Reactions & Trauma

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## Trauma & Memories

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During trauma:

Information, thoughts and emotions are disconnected



They are stored in the brain in such a way that a person may not be able to remember the details of the event very easily.



Important to view memories of abuse through the trauma lens to gain a fuller understanding of survivors' experiences.

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## Understanding Responses to Trauma

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- Coping strategies for survival
- Caused by the brain's response to trauma
- Challenges day-to-day functioning

Can affect our ability to:

- Manage feelings
- Self-soothe
- Thoughtfully plan
- Develop empathy
- Utilize feelings
- Connect with others

Content adapted from National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health

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## Do you ever wonder?

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"What do I do when **a survivor's behavior** gets in the way of the work, gets in the way of her responding to information we give, and with her using the services we have?"

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## What if you wondered . . .

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"What do I do when **trauma's impact** gets in the way of the work, gets in the way of her responding to the information we give, and with her using the services we have?"

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## Trauma Can Affect Our Capacity to:

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|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <b>Trust other people</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reach out for or respond to help</li><li>• Build new relationships</li><li>• Receive support, guidance or assistance</li></ul></li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <b>Trust ourselves</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Solve problems, exercise judgment</li><li>• Process information, screen out distractions</li><li>• Take initiative, thoughtfully plan</li></ul></li></ul> |
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Saakvitne et. al., 2000, Harris & Falot 2001, Lanius et al 2011

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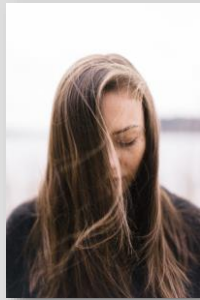
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## What Women Describe

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### The Psychological Impact of Domestic Violence:

- Sadness, loss, despair, depression
- Loneliness, shame, isolation
- Confusion, guilt, substance abuse
- Loss of sense of self, insecure about capabilities
- Fear, anxiety, stress, terror
- Physical symptoms
- Concerns about children



Warshaw, 2001

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## How does knowing this help survivors?

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- Normalizes and makes sense of responses
- Offers alternative coping strategies
- Acknowledges importance & challenges of connection
- Prepares for trauma responses
- Ensures choice & optimizes control

NCDVTMH, 2009

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## Trauma Affects Survivors' Experience of Programs

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### Domestic violence programs can often have:

Neutral requests, stimuli, and interactions can set off trauma responses

Authority, rules, and controlling practices can be traumatizing

Lack of cultural awareness and accessibility can be traumatizing

So what can we do differently?

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## Resilience is a **Critical** Ingredient

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### Resilience:

Capacity for successful adaptation  
*despite* challenging or threatening  
circumstances

***What have you witnessed?***

McLewin & Muller 2006; Waller 2001; Bell 2006

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## Activity: Vee Case Study

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## How does understanding trauma & DV improve advocacy services?

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Understanding survivors' responses in context

Respond in more helpful & empathetic ways

**Understanding Trauma**

Offer more effective interventions

Understand our own responses & their potential impact & need for organizational support

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