

Assisting Survivors of Sex Trafficking

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ARE YOU BREATHING?



Survivors of Sex Trafficking are:

- Severely traumatized individuals
- Have lost relationship to self
- Have lost relationships to others
- Have lost relationship to reality
- Feel helpless & powerless



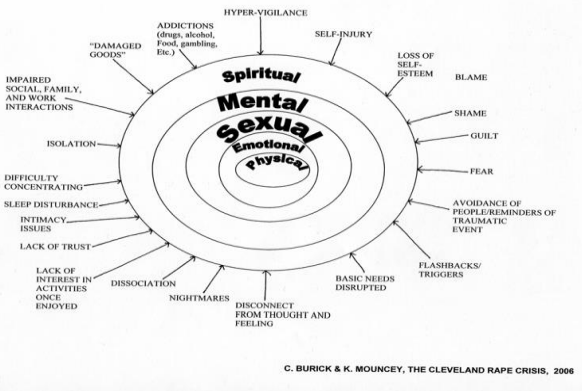
Trauma is....

An event or series of events that involves actual or threatened harm, that places overwhelming demands on the body system and results in the person experiencing intense fear or helplessness.





IMPACT OF TRAUMA



Complex Trauma

- Over and over again
- Stuck
- Frozen
- Shut down
- Numb
- Alarm system broken



Captivity Deepens Trauma

“In situations of captivity, like human trafficking, the perpetrator becomes the most powerful person in the life of the victim, and the psychology of the victim is shaped by the actions and beliefs of the perpetrator.”

Source: In Trauma & Recovery, Judith Herman, 1993



Stockholm Syndrome & Trauma Bonds

- Positive feelings by the victim toward the abuser/controller
- Negative feelings by the victim toward family, friends, or authorities trying to rescue/support them or win their release
- Support of the abuser's reasons and behaviors
- Positive feelings by the abuser toward the victim
- Supportive behaviors by the victim, at times helping the abuser
- Inability to engage in behaviors that may assist in their release or detachment

Source: (CSEC Curriculum, Lloyd and Polaris Project)



Stockholm Syndrome & Trauma Bonds

- Rationalizes violence
- Denies anger at exploiter to others and to self
- Believe they have some control over abuse
- Believe if they control situation it lessens pimps/customers/traffickers control and abuse
- Self-blame for situation and abuse

Source: (CSEC Curriculum, Lloyd and Polaris Project)



Trauma Lens

Traumatic responses are that person's best attempt to cope with the overwhelming experience of trauma. Each person responds differently to the same potentially traumatic events depending on one's personal history with trauma, social and familial supports, and natural coping skills.

Source: (J. Herman, 1992)





Understanding Survivors Reactions in the Context of Trauma

- Doesn't want to leave the situation, says that the trafficker has treated them well
- Doesn't show any emotional reaction when telling story
- Irritable, becomes angry at you
- Doesn't want to talk to law enforcement
- Refuses services
- Disappears, may go back into trafficking situation



Breaking Trauma Bonding

- Unfortunately, many victims return to abusive situations.
- Breaking trauma bonds takes the following: time, being genuine and caring about their welfare, building a trusting relationship, involving survivors in a program, providing practical assistance, and offering hope for positive change over time. (move from victim to survivor identification).



Best practices when working with a trafficked person

- Use the same words the person is using and don't correct them, especially as it refers to their relationships and situation
- Be open to unfamiliar narratives and stories
- Create a safe space for talking
- Always use professional interpreter services when a language barrier exists
- DO NOT rely on a friend or associate of the person if interpretation services are required
- Use a **trauma-informed, non-judgmental** approach



If you think a person is a victim of human trafficking

Communicate messages of hope:

- You have rights.
- You are not alone and not to blame.
- You are entitled to services and help.

Assess safety:

- Are you afraid to go home?
- Do you have a safe place to stay?
- What would happen if you didn't return to your work site/residence this evening?

Make referrals:

- Connect the person with appropriate service provider.



If you think a person is a survivor continued...

- Do not try to rescue the her/him
- Do not ask about immigration status
- Do not contact authorities without permission (unless mandated to do so)
- Do not make promises you can't keep
- Provide the person with contact information for Cleveland Rape Crisis Center and partners



If an identified person is not ready to accept your help...

Validate/normalize their feelings:

Reassure them that they have the choice not to accept your help at that time

Provide information:

Many trafficked persons will seek assistance for their situation when they feel safe and able to do so

Tell the person where they can go for help in the future: call Project STAR, come to CRCC



Initial Post Trauma Phase

- Immediately after a raid or rescue, your client's body might be full of adrenaline. They will need rest.
- Interviewing during this stage is not recommended, particularly regarding trauma details.
- Normalize traumatic stress reactions, "you are not crazy, this is how your body is supposed to react to a dangerous situation." "Many people have these types of reactions."
- Encourage adaptive coping
- Remind them that you are a safe person
- Encourage healthy connection to peers and professionals



Grounding Skills

- Grounding through the use of the senses (5 things you see, 5 things you hear, 5 things you can touch)
- Using senses to create a sense of safety (soft blanket, pillow on lap)
- Use of senses to return to present moment experience (scented lotions, scented oils, eating a mint or tangerine)



Create safety by

- Use senses to feel environment
- Body awareness: can you feel your legs, arms, etc.?
- Staying in the present: We are here at Hillcrest Hospital...
- Helping people stay grounded



To Review...

- We need to provide a safe, supportive environment or space that offers consistency and predictability,
 - with clear boundaries,
- an emphasis on empowerment (choice, control)
- and positive reinforcement, that encourages the development of new coping skills
- In other words, a regulated environment



THANK YOU!

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