



Forensic Interviewing and Conducting Trauma-Informed Investigations



Maggie Sweeney, MSW, LSW
Mission Kids Child Advocacy Center
Forensic Interviewer, Program Manager



Katie Colgan Vodzak, JD
Drexel University
Assoc. Director, Equal Opportunity & Title IX
Compliance, Deputy Title IX Coordinator

Trauma-Informed Work Includes:

- ✓ Incorporating our knowledge about the impact of trauma in all aspects of our service delivery
- ✓ Being empathic and engaging with survivors
- ✓ Minimize revictimization/retraumatization
- ✓ Facilitate the road to recovery

Rosenberg, L. (2011) We Must Do More. *National Council Magazine*, issue 2, 6-8.



Polyvictimization

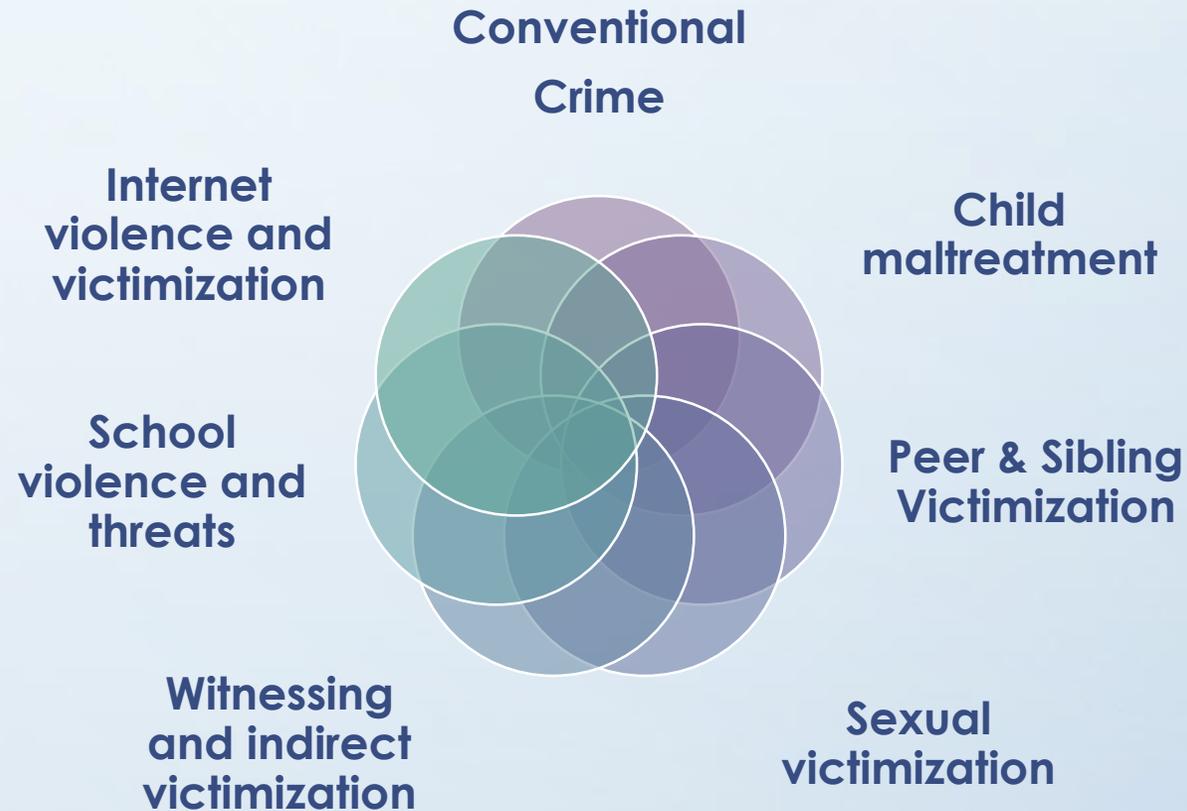
What is
it?

Evidence that victimizations tend to cluster

Repeated victimization, in multiple settings and at the hand of different perpetrators characterize the lives of many victims of sexual abuse and domestic violence

If identified as a polyvictim at a young age, more likely to continue to have multiple types of victimization as they get older

Factors for Polyvictimization



Results

92% of rape victims and 76% experiencing dating violence in one sample were poly-victims.

More than 1 in 4 witnessed a violent act

A child who is PHYSICALLY assaulted is 6X more likely to be sexually victimized and 5X more likely to be maltreated

Children who experience rape/flashings, witnessing parental assault of a sibling, witnessing murder, or dating violence averaged 7 or more victimizations in a given year.

RARE for a child to experience a single type of abuse (condition rather than event)

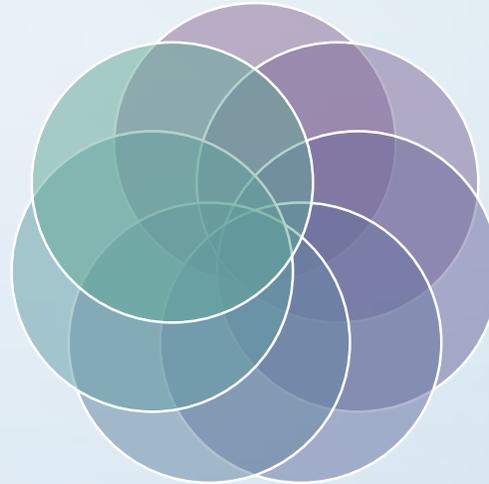
Nearly 1 in 10 witnessed one family member assault another

More than 60% surveyed exposed to both direct/indirect violence

Victimization of 1 type left substantial vulnerability for different type of re-victimization

Co-occurrence between DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & CHILD ABUSE

Frequent victimizations across different domains in the same time period





Forensic Interview Structure



STAGE 1

- Introductions
- Rapport
- Guidelines
- Narrative Practice
- Family

STAGE 2

- Transition
- Narrative Description
- Follow-up Questions
- Clarification
- Closure

Forensic Interview Techniques

- Narrative Invitation
 - Open-ended questions
 - Gives interviewee the most control over the topic
 - Most often serves as a follow-up prompt to ask for more information
 - Examples:
 - “Tell me why you’re here today?”
 - “How come you think you’re here today?”
 - “Sometimes I talk to kids because someone’s worried about them, that something might have happened to them. Is anyone worried about you?”
 - “Start at the beginning and tell me everything about what happened.”



Forensic Interview Techniques

- Scaffolding/Reframing
 - Memory cue
 - Building on the account
 - Repeat back to the interviewee part of what they said.
- Funneling (Focused Narrative Request)
 - “Cued open-ended question, FI picks the topic (person, object, action, time segment, location)
 - Request more information about a topic mentioned
 - “Tell me more about.....”
 - “Describe/explain.....”
 - ‘Wh’ questions (Who, What, When, Where)



Trauma-Informed Work

How does the trauma-informed approach help the investigation and the victims?

- ✓ Enhanced engagement with victims
- ✓ Prevention of trauma-related symptoms



Why use trauma-informed techniques?

- **Episodic Memory**
 - ✓ memory of a specific event
- **Script Memory**
 - ✓ memory of “typical events”



Memory

- **Recall Memory**
 - “Tell me what you know about.....”
 - Reflects what is most notable and important
- **Recognition Memory**
 - Is it “A” or “B”?
- **Declarative**
 - Memory hooked to words
- **Non-declarative**
 - The “feel” of the memory
 - Memory stored bodily or emotionally

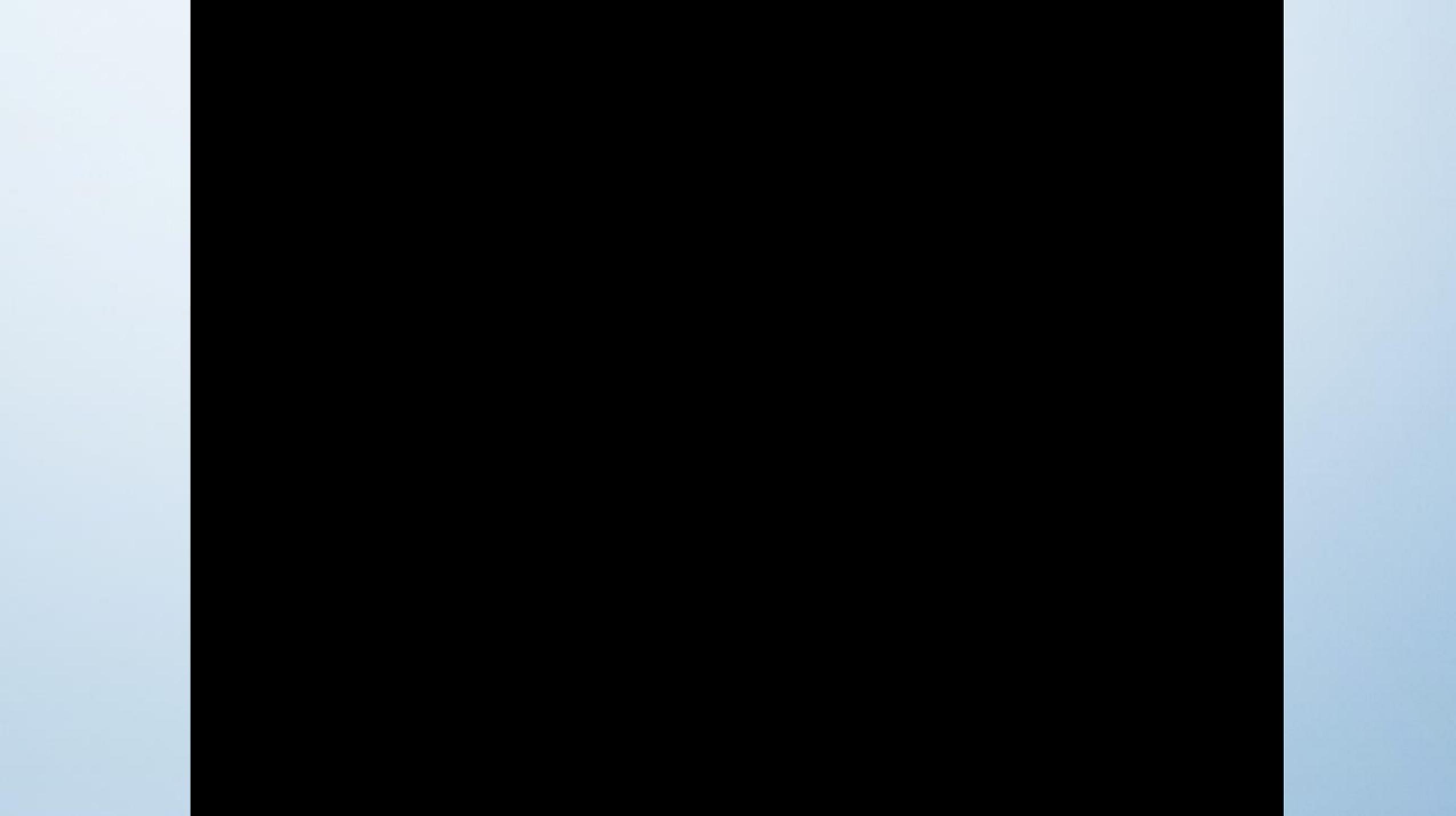


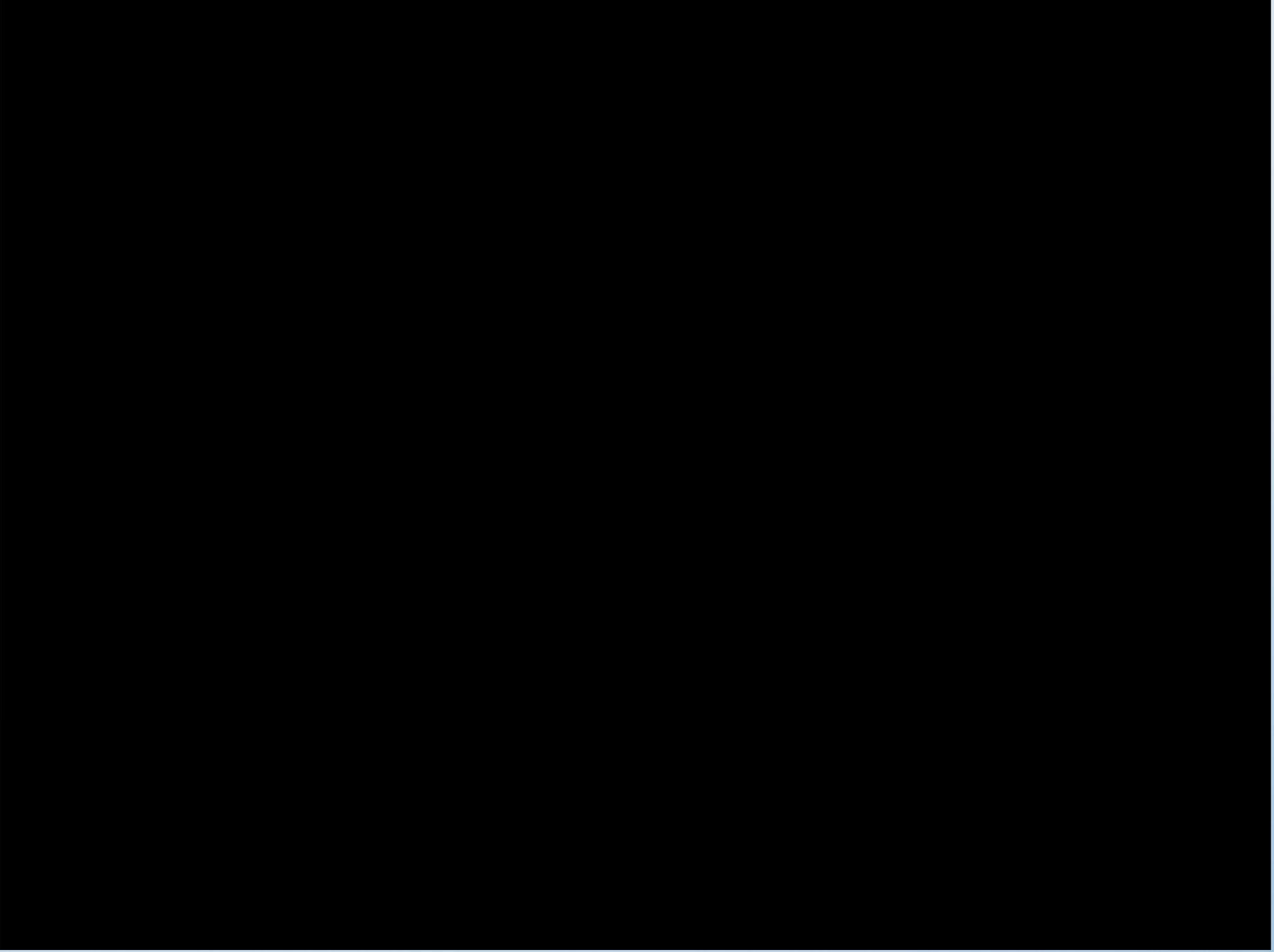
Title IX Investigations within Higher Ed



The Role of Title IX Coordinators and Investigators

- Not psychiatrists
- Not counselors
- Not attorneys providing legal advice to students
- Not victim advocates
- We are providers of information about resources, process, options
- We are connectors to those resources and options (for *both* parties)
- We are neutral fact-finders conducting fair and thorough investigations





What is our goal in conducting interviews?

- Conduct interviews geared to elicit the most truthful and accurate information from those who have experienced either a traumatic event, series of events, or adversity...
- ...while limiting or preventing further traumatization or re-victimization in the course of the interview.

Keep in mind...

- Sexual assault survivors and those affected by intimate partner violence react in a myriad of ways and don't always act the way people may think a "victim" should act, or disclose immediately (In PA it is now permitted for experts to testify in criminal cases regarding delayed disclosures, to explain that there are different behavioral and psychological responses to sexual assault, and to explain the process of disclosure)
- Often times, disclosure is not a singular act; it is an ongoing or continuous process: it can be either immediate or delayed, accidental or intentional, and certain or involving recantation, denial and then *re-disclosure*.

FORENSIC INTERVIEWS

fo ren sic

(fə-rĕn'sĭk, -zĭk) adj.

1. Relating to, used in, or appropriate for courts of law or for public discussion, reasoning systematically in support of an idea, action, or theory;
2. Relating to the use of science or technology in the investigation and establishment of facts or evidence in a court of law.

In a nutshell: forensic means a systematic or scientifically sound approach to evidence collection and the establishment of facts.

Adopting and Modifying the Forensic Interview Structure

STAGE 1: RAPPORT BUILDING

- Introductions
 - Introduce self/role
 - Explanation of process (in general) and the policies of your University
- **THE RULES**
- Early Engagement
 - Allow student to become comfortable
 - Engage in conversation regarding topics that are non-triggering
 - Learn about student's interests/day-to-day life (What year are you? What's your major? Do you live on campus?)
 - This also gives you the opportunity to observe how the individual communicates about non-triggering topics – take note if there is a difference in demeanor or ability to communicate when you switch to the topic at hand

THE RULES/THE OPTIONS

[GIVING THE SURVIVOR BACK THEIR POWER]

- Confidential vs. private
 - Counseling, Health, Spiritual & Religious Life are confidential; external resources can be confidential
 - Private = can respect confidentiality except on a need to know basis; give example of a need to know situation
 - Reassure that “you can talk to me about as little or as much as you’d like, if you want to talk to me about everything that happened, I’m here to listen, if you don’t want to talk about what happened, WE CAN STILL HELP YOU. You need to have this information so YOU can choose what is best for YOU.”
- Formal complaint options, informal resolutions, MORE CHOICES

THE RULES, CONTINUED

- Non-retaliation provisions in your policy?
- Amnesty policy? If so, what does that cover?
 - Drexel University has an amnesty policy related to Drugs/Alcohol usage when reporting sexual assault/intimate partner violence. Reassure that they can be honest about this information because they're not in any trouble (and truthful information is needed for a thorough investigation)
- Language: They are free to use whatever words they need to in here; don't have to be embarrassed saying any words or afraid of getting in trouble for language.

STAGE 2: SUBSTANTIVE PHASE

- Transition
 - To questions about why they are here
- Narrative Description
 - Elicit narrative using recall prompts – who, what, when, where, why, how?
 - Ask for explanation and further description
 - BE SURE TO EXPLAIN WHY YOU NEED TO ASK CERTAIN QUESTIONS
 - For example:
 - Did you have any alcoholic drinks at the bar?
 - What were you wearing?
 - Don't just ask these questions... explain why you need to know the answer before you even ask it..
 - “Because the clothing you wore that night may have DNA evidence on it, for evidence preservation purposes, I need to know what you were wearing that night and if you still have that clothing and whether it was washed..”
 - *Picture the students from The Hunting Ground talking about how they were treated and how they felt victim-blamed when people asked certain questions... if you explain the reason you are asking, this will decrease the opportunity for the student to misinterpret your evidence collection needs as judging or blaming.

- Follow up Questions
 - Eliciting further details
 - Open ended questions yield the most truthful answers
 - Is there anything else that you think I should know that I didn't ask you about?
- Closure
 - Answer questions or concerns
 - Tell them what you're going to do and what you need them to do
 - Send an email following up with what you've done and what you still need from them
 - **AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, DO WHAT YOU SAY YOU'RE GOING TO DO**
 - We are talking to people who have already had their trust and/or feelings of security violated

WWSD?

What would Sandra
(Bloom) Do?

S.E.L.F.

www.sanctuaryweb.com

- “The four concepts: Safety, Emotions, Loss, and Future represent the four interactional fundamental domains of disruption that occur in a traumatized person’s life and within these four domains, any problem can be categorized. Naming and categorization are the first steps in making a problem manageable. The S.E.L.F. Trauma-Informed Psychoeducational Group Curriculum is designed to provide clients – and staff – with an easy-to-use and coherent cognitive framework that can create a change momentum. Because it is a model that is “round” not square, circular, not stepped, it provides a logical framework for movement. We think of S.E.L.F. as a compass through the land of recovery that can help guide individual treatment, staff decision, team treatment planning, and an entire institution. It is not constrained by gender, age, race, religion, or ethnicity because the domains of healing that S.E.L.F. represents are human universals, unbound to any time, place, or person. In our residential programs, children as young as four are comfortably using the S.E.L.F. language – and using it appropriately.”

SELF

Safety

~~Emotions~~ Evidence

Loss

Future

Safety

- Physical Safety
 - Public Safety, Campus Police, Childline, 911, appropriate law enforcement jurisdiction need to be contacted?
 - Medical referrals need to be made?
 - Health Center, Women's Care Center, PSARC?
 - Emergency housing accommodations?
 - Interim Measures necessary? Campus ban or No Contact Provision?
- Psychological Safety
 - Counseling Center, Hotline referrals
 - Referrals to outside counseling/support services – WOAR, WAA
 - THE RULES – Providing individuals who have experienced trauma with the ground rules and options – confidentiality vs. privacy – options for filing complaints, PFAs, police involvement, housing/academic accommodations, provides them with feelings of regaining control; many have felt they lost their ability to choose/decide what happened to them, this gives them back their ability to decide what's best for them

Evidence

- Testimonial
 - “I ask for any physical and electronic evidence, etc. because it’s my job to find any relevant evidence, but please know that your account IS evidence.”
 - In the state of Pennsylvania there is a jury instruction that reads “the uncorroborated testimony of a victim, standing alone, if believed by the jury, is sufficient to support a finding of guilt.”
- Physical evidence
 - Can anything be preserved?
- Electronic evidence
- Witnesses

Loss

- Lost feelings of security/trust
- May have lost support system/friends
- May have lost loved one/been violated by a loved one
- Understand the loss/emotions they are experiencing and that they may have also lost their ability to make rational judgments
- Understand the way loss/emotions affect people differently; victims don't always "Act like you think a victim should act"

Future

- Provide them with clear expectations of what you need from them
- Provide them with clear statements of what you will do
- DO WHAT YOU SAY YOU WILL DO
- Assist them with any needs going forward
- Reassure they will get through this

Questions?



References

- Cyr, K., Chamberland, C., Lessard, G., Glement, M., Wemmers, J., Collin-Vezina, D., Gane, M., & Damant, D. (2012). Polyvictimization in a child welfare sample of children and youths. *Psychology of Violence, 2*(4), 385-400.
- Finkelhor, D., Ormord, R., Turner, H., & Holt, M. (2009). Pathways to poly-victimization. *Child Maltreatment, 14*(4), 479-502.
- Finkelhor, D., Shattuck, A., Turner, H., Ormord, R., & Hamby, S. (2011). Polyvictimization in developmental context. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma, 4*(4), 291-300.
- Finkelhor, D., Turner, H., Hamby, S., & Ormord, R. (2011). Polyvictimization: Children's exposure to multiple types of violence, crime and abuse. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs*: Retrieved from <http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/jvq/Polyvictimization%20JJDP%20bulletin.pdf>
- Finkelhor, D., Turner, H., Ormord, R., Hamby, S., & Kracke, K. (2009). Children's exposure to violence: A comprehensive National Survey. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs*: Retrieved from <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/227744.pdf>
- Mitchell, K., Finkelhor, D., Wolak, J., Ybarra, M., & Turner, H. (2010). Youth internet victimization in a broader victimization context. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 48*(2), 128-134
- Bloom, S.L., *Creating Sanctuary: Toward the Evolution of Sane Societies*. 1997, New York: Routledge.
<http://www.sanctuaryweb.com>

Contact info

Katie Colgan Vodzak

kcolgan@Drexel.edu

Maggie Sweeney

mwsweeney@missionkidscac.org