



Why Is It Important to Be Trauma-Informed?

Trauma impacts academics, work, and personal relationships. It influences if, and when a complainant feels able to contact a Title IX office or any other resources.

How someone responds to trauma may be impacted by:

- Any prior history of trauma/Adverse Childhood Experiences
- The specifics of the traumatic event
- Their personal world view
- Their identities
- Their support system at school and at home
- Their understanding of gender-based violence from a social/political perspective



The Integrated Self

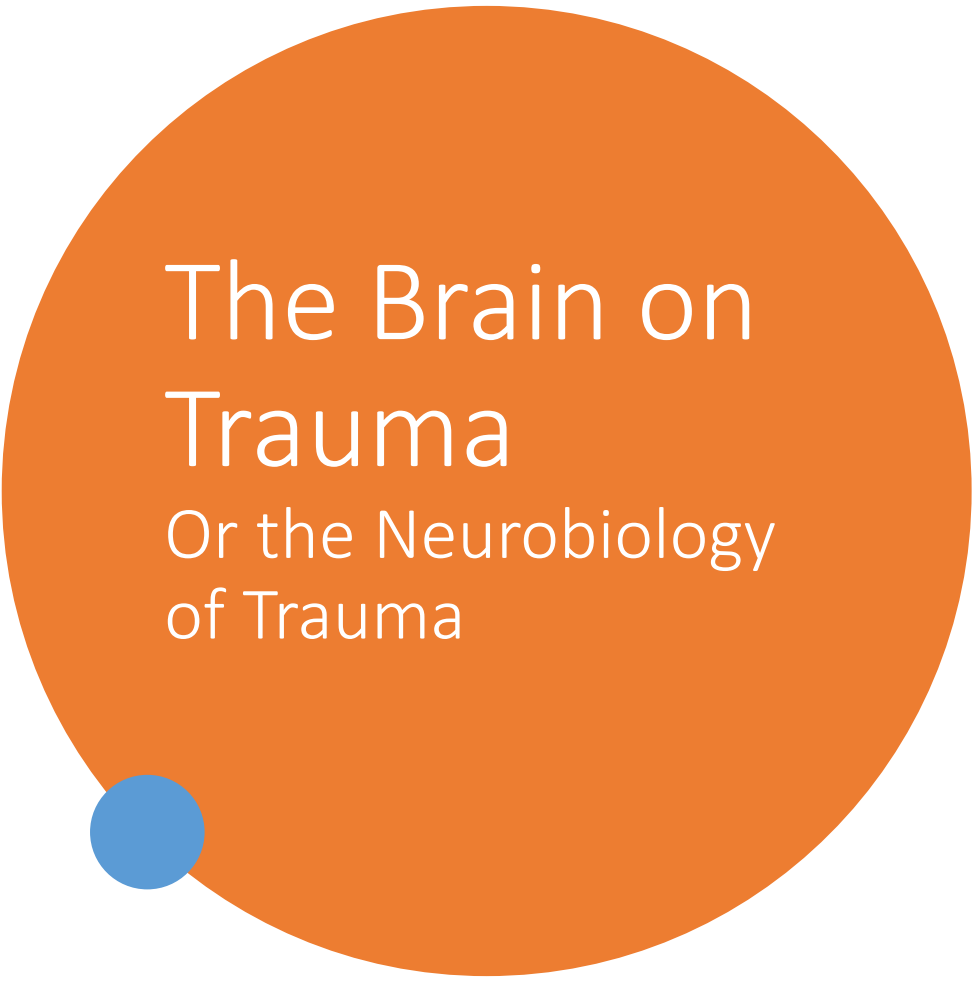
- An individual who has not experienced (or has healed from) trauma has integrated executive functioning:
 - Emotional
 - Cognitive
 - Memory
 - Sense of safety
 - Concentration/learning
 - Beliefs
 - Physical/Biological
 - Relationships

The Disintegrated Self

Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community. They shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience. They violate the victim's faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis.

-Judith Herman





The Brain on Trauma

Or the Neurobiology of Trauma

- We are creatures of habit, especially when we're under stress. Most survivors of violence instinctively fall on habitual behaviors in the face of threat, coercion, fear, and violence. Many people, especially women, use their "thinking brain" to appease, reason, negotiate, plead.
- When these strategies are ineffective, the limbic system ("doing brain") takes over with involuntary responses.
- The two key structures in the brain related to memory are the Hippocampus and the Amygdala, both of which are very sensitive to hormonal fluctuations.
 - The flood of hormones released during high stress impair memory functioning by interfering with the recollection, organization and storing of memories.
- As a result of this automatic response to traumatic events, many survivors have trouble recalling events or the sequence of events.
- This is why so many survivors historically have not been believed by those who are responsible for responding to their needs.

What Internalized Barriers Prevent Complainants From Coming Forward?

- Ambivalence because
 - respondent was a friend/partner
 - Greek or club system issues
 - not sure respondent understood lack of consent
 - presence of alcohol or other substances
- Impact of prior trauma
- Fear of confronting respondent
- Fear of retaliation by respondent or respondent's friends
- Fear that parents will find out
- Marginalized student who does not want to report a member of their community (esp. students of color)
- Fear that friends won't believe them and/or causing division in friend group
- Victim blaming (internalized and external)
- Respondent comes from same hometown/friend of the family
- Fear of being sued
- International students:
 - Cultural attitudes about gender-based violence, women, LGBTQ+ and non-binary people
 - From a country with an oppressive political systems, repressive policing or that didn't deal with these issues at all.

What Institutional/ External Barriers Prevent Complainants From Coming Forward?

- Victim blaming by institutional representatives
- Students' negative perception of the TIX office
- Biased or unclear messaging in informational materials & training of faculty, staff and students
- Lack of transparency regarding case outcomes
 - How many cases result in a finding of responsibility?
 - Are sanctions proportional to the offense?
- Institution ignores physical and emotional safety when making accommodations
- Students' friends have been through the process, so they
 - don't want to have to deal with that level of emotional stress
 - can't deal with the time it takes
 - their friends didn't have good outcomes
- Professional school students (health professions/law/business) are highly reluctant to report due to necessity of working relationships.
- Grad students who report professors fear repercussions on their future professional careers
- Confusion about where TIX is located or difficulty accessing resources online



Tips For Helping Complainants Feel Comfortable

- . How easy is it to find your webpage?
 - . It should take two clicks or less to find you.
- . Does someone greet them when they come in? Does the greeter ask them why they are there (big NO) or simply ask with whom they have an appointment? Can you use an online check-in in lieu of verbalizing?
- . In your meeting, set up chairs so you are sitting at an angle if possible, allowing for indirect eye-contact.
 - . Assure that conversations are confidential, except for information that is used in the investigation (who will have access).
- . Ask open-ended questions. Avoid “WHY” and “SHOULD.”
- . Be as transparent as possible and explain EVERYTHING:
 - . Why you are taking notes and what you will do with them
 - . Why you must record and what will happen to the recording
 - . What the respondent will see if an investigation occurs
- . NCOs: Can they remain in place even if the case results in “not responsible.”

Overcoming Reluctance:

Creating a Sense of Safety



Listen and affirm their experiences even while being neutral



Explain their options verbally AND in writing. Make sure written material is in plain language--don't expect them to wade through legal jargon.



Brainstorm options and respect their choices. Help them identify their most urgent issues.



Allow them to prioritize their own goals. Respect their right NOT do something that could be helpful.



Foster feelings of control, competence, and self-help. Follow up with an email that confirms steps and provides web links.



Provide assistance with resources including counseling and academic/ housing accommodations.

Planting Seeds for Future Needs Can Help Establish Trust



Most complainants aren't thinking far ahead. But there are some issues you may want to discuss briefly, "just in case" a need arises. These can often help them make productive decisions throughout



If it was a recent event and they haven't gotten medical attention, point out some reasons to do that:

Blind evidence kits

Plan B or Ella

STI prophylaxis



Accommodations are useful for:

Academics

- Notifying faculty
- Remind complainant of the last possible day for a medical withdrawal/drop

Housing