

The Neurobiology of Trauma: Understanding Victim Behavior

Olga R. Trujillo, J.D.
Olga Trujillo Consulting
olga@olgatrujillo.com

Why do we need to know?

- The impact of trauma on victim/survivors can affect your:
 - Investigations
 - Prosecutions
 - Services
- Incorporate trauma into your responses, investigations, prosecutions and services

How Dissociation Appears

- Blank stare or spacey look
- Flat manner
- Appears to be bored, uninterested or not paying attention
- Singular focus, losing track of time or surroundings
- Scattered talking – not linear or logical
- Unsteady when walking







How Dissociation Feels

- A numbing of emotions
- Slowing time
- Feeling of unreality or disconnected
- Quick or racing thoughts
- Spacey feelings that can't be controlled
- A sense of detachment from one's body
- Changing perceptions of people or surroundings
- Normal tasks become difficult
- Coping skills are decreased

What Helps?

- Create welcoming environments
- Assist with emotional safety as well as physical safety
- Understand the physical toll of violence and trauma
- Create routine & predictability
- Use different modes of learning
- Be flexible

What Can You Do?

- Learn more about trauma
- Share what you know
 - Survivor
 - Agency – officers/deputies, investigators, prosecutors, victim-witness advocates, community based advocates
- Adapt your credibility lens to incorporate trauma

Create Trauma Informed Responses

- Assists survivors in strengthening thier capacity to deal with the multiple complex issues she faces:
 - Accessing safety
 - Recovering from the traumatic effects of violence and other lifetime abuse
 - Rebuilding their lives
 - Engaging in the criminal justice system

Create Trauma Informed Responses

- All survivors of violence have access to advocacy services that are:
 - Inclusive
 - Welcoming
 - Destigmatizing and not re-traumatizing

Components of Trauma Informed Services

1. Provide survivors with information about the traumatic effects of violence
2. Adapt response, programs and services to meet survivors' trauma related needs
3. Incorporate trauma into your investigations and prosecutions

Provide Survivors with Information

Normalize what we may be going through

- Discuss the link between trauma and violence
- Discuss some of the common emotional or mental health effects of violence and ways our responses can interfere with accessing safety, processing information, or remembering details
- Discuss ways that trauma can make it hard to trust, manage our feelings and can affect the ways we feel about other people, ourselves and the world

Adapt to Trauma

- Work to create programs, policies and settings that meet survivors where they are
- Be careful not to re-traumatize
 - Create a welcoming environment with a wide range of options for survivors needs and capacities – provide information in various ways to help the survivors hear it, integrate it and remember it - written, visual, audio ...
 - Repeat information when asked and even if not asked
 - Schedule extra time
 - Help survivors know what to expect

Law Enforcement

Law Enforcement:

- Look for Signs
- Trauma Informed Interviewing
- Adapt Credibility Assessment

Prosecutors

State Attorney's Offices

- Incorporate a Trauma Informed Legal Advocacy Approach
 - Look for Trauma
 - Adapt Credibility Assessment
 - Plan for Trauma in Court
 - Prepare survivors and witnesses for court
 - Make sure they know what to expect
 - Normalize trauma for court – so judges know what they are seeing