

# UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA

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Trauma is a result from exposure to an incident or series of events that are emotionally disturbing or life-threatening. Trauma has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, and/or spiritual well-being.

Trauma can affect anyone and at different levels. The same incident can happen to two different people and only one may experience the traumatic effects.

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## ***What experiences may be traumatic?***

- Physical, sexual and emotional abuse
- Racism, discrimination and oppression
- Childhood neglect
- Violence, war or terrorism
- Living with a family member with mental health or substance use disorders
- Sudden, unexplained separation from, or loss of, a loved one

## ***How does trauma affect our clients?***

Victimization by an intimate partner places women at significantly higher risk for depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, and suicide attempts, whether or not they have suffered physical injury.

Not all our clients are victimized by an intimate partner, however they can experience all the same affects.

*They may also experience:*

- Difficulty sleeping or staying asleep
- Nightmares or night terrors
- Re-experiencing terrifying memories
- Flashbacks
- Emotional numbness
- Emotionally disconnected from others
- Difficulty trusting people
- Aggression
- Dissociation or avoidance
- Confusion/Disorganization
- Indulgence in risky behavior

## ***How can I best help our clients that have experienced trauma?***

Trauma can impact safety, credibility and access to resources for the individuals and families we serve. Tips for best practice tools:

- Allow them space to share their story when and if they choose to. We are not privileged to know their story just because we are providing services to them.
- Let them make the choices for their lives. We are here to help them understand their options, offer our support and expertise, however at no time should this be forced. Empowerment is key is building from victimization to survivor.
- Be curious, not judgmental. We all have a story, a history, that has defined who we each are as individuals and how we live our lives. It is important to recognize that not all stories are the same. Allow yourself to be curious about behaviors that you don't understand as this will allow you to find compassion and understanding for someone who needs you to be in a place of non-judgement.
- Be patient. Healing takes time as trauma affects every part of who we are – our brain, our health, our emotions, our sense of safety, our worldview, our ability to cope, our social connections and ability to socialize, our trust in others, etc.
- The impact of trauma is great on our clients however, the impact you make can be just as great.