Supporting Survivors: Crisis and Support Lines

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Communication Tools

Hand Signal  Bike Rack
Looking at Our Current Models...

- Mainstream models
- Evidence based practices
- “The way we’ve always done it…”
- Survivor centered models

What are our strengths and challenges on crisis/support lines?

A compassionate witness

- In our roles as advocates and helpers we can reasonably assume that many of the people we serve are survivors of trauma
- Trauma informed advocacy begins with this assumption—and a shift in our thinking
- It is a philosophy, as well as a set of skills

The Context of Sexual and Domestic Violence

- Trauma and abuse do not occur in a vacuum—it occurs within the personal, social (and often political) context of the person
- Who, what, where, when, how...

- In the context of their identities: race, class, dis/ability, gender, language, sexual orientation, religion, immigration status, body size, first language, etc.
What is the context?

- Services in rural communities
- Historical context of dual/multi-service agencies
- Mental health services and trauma resources
- Our own beliefs, identities
- The positionality of the survivor

What is Trauma Informed Advocacy?

Trauma-informed advocacy is an approach to engaging people with histories of trauma that recognizes the presence of trauma responses (often called “symptoms”) and acknowledges the role that trauma plays in their choices, emotional well being, behaviors, and lives.

CHANGE the paradigm

- To change the paradigm from one that asks, “What’s wrong with you?” to one that explores, understands, and shows empathy focused on “What has happened to you?”
- It is a shift in understanding and practices
**Trauma Informed Advocacy**

- Survivor is the expert on her/his/their own experience
- Look at survivor’s ways of coping/survival with compassionate curiosity, rather than judgment

“Rather than standing in judgment of the survivor in front of me and how they carry their burdens...I must stand in awe of what they carry”
- Father Boyle

**Trauma Informed Advocacy is:**

- Collaborative, supportive and skill-building
- Promotes empowerment for the survivor
- Creates safety, consistency and choice for the survivor
- Avoids re-traumatization of survivor
- Provides an individualistic response, based on that survivor’s identity, circumstance and needs

**Becoming Trauma Informed**

- Every part of the organization—board, administration, directors/supervisors, front line staff, volunteers and interns are involved
- All service delivery systems and the agency culture is assessed
- Modifications made to avoid potential trauma triggers and re-traumatization
We often focus on the coping mechanism.

Understanding Trauma

Trauma: A Natural Response to Crisis

Trauma Experiences

- Interpersonal violence creates the strongest and most long-lasting trauma responses
- Trauma experiences include threats to or attacks upon bodily integrity, safety or possible loss of life
Trauma Experiences

- Includes intense fear, horror, and helplessness
- The brain is equipped to respond intensely to these dangerous situations and experiences

Trauma Response

- Brain response
- A NATURAL Response to an EXTREME amount of stress.
- Chronic arousal (stress)
- Consistent, prolonged trauma responses
- Impacts concentration and focus
- Avoidance, survival are key

Trauma Response

- FIGHT
- FLIGHT
- FREEZE
- Chemical and physiological basis for trauma response
- All animals respond
Trauma Informed Support
1. Building Safety—importance of trust and checking for safety
2. Normalize and Validate feelings, reactions
3. Explaining trauma and dynamics of SA/DV
4. Empowerment statements—hope and reducing self blame
5. Psychoeducation—debunk myths and give facts
6. Healthy coping strategies—build skills
7. Resources and information—give options

Building Safety
- Establishing rapport and trust
- Checking for physical/emotional safety
- Immediate needs?

Normalize and Validate
- Active Listening skills
- Increases safety
- Allows survivor choice to share
- Avoids directive questioning
- It sounds like you are feeling...
- It is normal to...
Explore the Feelings

• Spend the most time on this part
• Can’t move to problem-solving without processing the crisis first
• You can’t give good information if you don’t know what is going on
• Why do advocates/counselors often skip this step? (time, fear, wanting to help, feels uncertain, “need information”…)

Empowerment statements

• Instill hope for healing
• Decrease self-blame
• Point out strengths and self-protection
• Reframe abuser messages

Psychoeducation

• Giving information that has a positive psychological effect
• Debunking myths
• Reframing societal or past disclosure blame
• Giving information on options
Healthy Coping Strategies

- Brainstorm what they have used to survive
- Decrease self blame for using less healthy coping
- See survival skills as creative, adaptive
- Discuss options for support
- Encourage self-care

Resources and Information

- Be careful of going directly into resources and problem solving
- Explore options
- Explore pros & cons of options
- Validate concerns & share information
- Make a plan
- Respect the survivor’s choices - avoid directiveness and giving “advice”

Interactive Exercise:
Volunteers?
Responding to Survivors

- Reactions?
- What myths, stigma or misconceptions did you hear?
- Was it realistic?
- What do you think would happen to this survivor?

Uncovering Layers of Stress for Survivors

- Avoiding reminders of the assault
- Intrusive thoughts mimic the hypervigilance of historical trauma and oppression
- Often developed with protective intentions

Uncovering Layers of Stress for Survivors

- Adaptation: Survivors move straight into outward adjustment
- This stalls the healing process
- Others misinterpret as “being o.k.” “being strong” or prioritizing other responsibilities
- Silences the issue in the community
Active Listening

- Accomplish the 2 C’s
  - Maintain Connection
  - Show Concern
  - Can be done one-on-one, or with a group
  - Useful in *every* interaction with survivors

Active Listening

The goals of active listening are:

- SHOW the speaker that you’re REALLY LISTENING and ACCEPTING what they are trying to communicate to you (thoughts, feelings, desires, actions)
- ENCOURAGE the speaker to talk as freely, clearly, and completely as possible.

Active Listening

In order to accomplish this, it important to:

- Take in all of the words and behaviors of speaker AT THAT MOMENT (vs. rehearsing your response)
  - FULLY CONNECT with the other person
  - Not interrupt or give premature answers or DIRECTIVE responses based on PARTIAL INFO
Active Listening Challenges

PROBLEMS OCCUR because we perceive:
• A possible loss of control
• Your proposal won’t get attention
• There is a feeling that there is not enough time
• Listening might seem that you are giving in or agreeing
• You might have to change something significant
• You believe you know what’s best for them

The Benefits

BENEFITS of active listening include:
• Less stress and defensiveness in getting to the primary concern
• Clearer information
• More trust in the relationship
• More collaboration in working together to address a concern or solving a problem

Active listening skills

The SKILLS involved in ACTIVE LISTENING are:
1. Reflecting
2. Encouraging
3. Summarizing
4. Exploring
Reflecting

- Convey your physical and non-verbal attention
- Observe non-verbal cues
- Note what is expressed and not expressed (thoughts and ideas vs. feelings and needs)
- Show you are listening
- A gesture, a sound (uh-huh), or a head nod.

Reflecting

- Show you are listening
- A BRIEF statement/sentence showing that you’re noting what the speaker is saying regarding their communication (thoughts, feelings, desires, action):
  “Sounds difficult.”

Encouraging

- ENCOURAGING is a one sentence statement or doing something (i.e. in person--smile, raise your eyebrows, turn your head slightly, etc.) which communicates to the speaker that what is being expressed is important to you AND YOU WANT TO HEAR MORE.

- ENCOURAGING usually occurs during a lull or interval when the speaker may be observing if you’re really interested in hearing more information.
Encouraging

- ENCOURAGING gently urges the speaker to tell you more about the topic
- “I’d like to hear more about what you want.”
- “If you feel safe, you can share more about….”
- “I’d like to hear more about how you feel.”

Reflecting and Encouraging

- Honor system: choose someone you don’t know
- Form a dyad for practice
- **What is something you like about yourself?**
  - Body language
  - Tone of voice
  - Show encouragement and interest
  - Reflect what you hear (briefly)

What Worked? Challenges?

- Did we accomplish connection?
- Show concern?
- Staying relaxed
- Not rehearsing
- Staying focused on the person
- Keeping it brief
- Positive, nonjudgmental reactions...
Summarizing and Exploring

- Assists in comprehension
- Reflects being on the “same page”—mutual understanding of what is being shared
- Accomplished by paraphrasing
- Always ask for feedback
- Be open to being wrong
- Collaborate for understanding

Summarizing

"It’s important for me to fully understand what you just said. I heard you say......"

"Let me see if I understand you correctly and please correct me if I’m off. You believe that when you try to express your feelings s/he doesn’t listen which then frustrates you."

"Let me know if this fits with what you were saying...it sounds like...."

Exploring and Venting

- Change and trauma necessitate talking about them MORE THAN ONCE
- Exploration is crucial
- Being heard and having a voice is vital to moving through an issue and healing/collaborative change
Exploring and Venting

- Use open ended questions
- Let the story unfold
- What do you “need to know” and when? Be curious.
- Be careful of minimizing, self disclosure and investigating

Handling a Disclosure

- Thank them for trusting you and show compassion
- Disclose your role, limitations on confidentiality, mandated reporting information
- Check for safety, ask about immediate needs and any immediate danger
- Use open ended questions and reflection
- Avoid becoming an investigator, minimizing or using self disclosure

Handling a Disclosure

- Provide options for further help—yourself, hotline, law enforcement, other resources, etc.
- Allow survivor to make decisions about who and when or if to tell— as much as possible
- Avoid being directive or giving advice
- Give brief info on trauma, myths and facts
- Avoid assuming how a survivor “should” act
**Handling Disclosures**

- Give options for ongoing support and make a follow-up plan
- Be accountable for your part
- Validate the person’s strength
- Let them know you are sorry for what they are going through
- Let them know that interpersonal violence of any kind is NEVER the survivor’s fault

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**Crisis Intervention and Emotional Support**

1. Building Safety—importance of trust and checking for safety
2. Normalize and Validate feelings, reactions
3. Explaining trauma response/dynamics of SA/DV
4. Empowerment statements—hope and reducing self blame
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**How will I use Trauma Informed advocacy and Active Listening to Maintain the connection (not cut the string)=yes**
Common Ground

• One thing I’m taking with me from this is...
• One thing I appreciate about the group is...
• One thing I commit to do based on what we discussed is...

Questions?

Thank you!

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