Trauma Informed Response to Sexual Violence
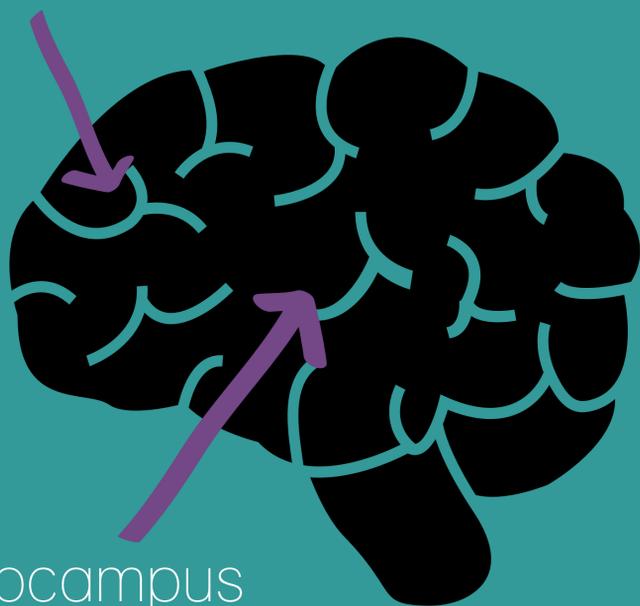
A trauma informed response means understanding the neurobiology of trauma and how it impacts the way survivors behave and process their trauma.

Neurobiology of Trauma

Everyone responds to trauma differently.

During trauma, a flood of hormones impairs both the prefrontal cortex and the hippocampus.

PREFRONTAL CORTEX
Victims may respond in ways that don't make sense. Rational thinking, decision making, and planning are all impaired. They may be unable to flee or fight off their attacker.

HIPPOCAMPUS
The brain has fewer resources for encoding new information. It is common for victims to have memory gaps or issues with time sequence.

Prefrontal Cortex

Hippocampus

It is normal for a victim to have a wide variety of emotions, including flat, blunted, or numb emotions, as well as paradoxical responses, like laughing. There is no "typical" victim response.

75% of victims experience moderate to high levels of paralysis during sexual assault (Levine, 2010).

How to Respond When Someone Discloses Sexual Violence

It can be hard to disclose or talk about sexual violence. Keep in mind how trauma impacts the brain.

Be prepared for <u>any emotion</u>
Stay <u>calm</u>
Be <u>non-judgmental</u>
Engage in <u>active listening</u>
Convey <u>belief</u>
<u>Mirror</u> language

Avoid:
"Should" statements
"Why" questions
Minimizing the assault

Initial things to say

"I believe you."

"It's not your fault."

"I'm sorry this happened to you."

"You are not alone."

Validate the survivor's feelings

"That makes sense."

"That's terrible."

"That's understandable."

Normalize the survivor's reactions

"It's common to feel..."

"I've heard this from survivors."

"It's normal to experience a range of emotions..."

Let survivors make their own decisions

"There is help available. Here are some options..."

"How can I support you?"

"What would you like to do?"

Keep responsibility with the perpetrator

"No one has the right to do that to you."

"The only person at fault is the person who did that to you."