CARING FOR SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL TRAUMA

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Trigger Warning

• During this activity we will talk in detail about childhood sexual abuse, rape, and intimate partner violence which may trigger intense emotional responses.

• It is OK to show emotion.

• It is OK to leave this activity right now, at any time, and for any period of time.
Another Model: Give her control

- Recognize that sexual trauma is very common.
- Remind ourselves that her fear is legitimate.
- Realize that a principle factor is that she hasn’t had control of her body.
- Give her control.
A Rite of Passage?

• 1 in 5 girls will be sexually abused by an adult before age 12
• 1 in 4 teenage girls and women have survived a rape or attempted rape.
Abortion and Re-victimization

• Stigmatized socially, politically, and economically.
• Often not covered by health insurance.
• Aggressive protesters.
• A gynecological procedure that may be painful.
• Consequence of sex
Common Red Flags

• Current or past IVDU.
• Obesity.
• Lack of appropriate gyn care.
• Frequent somatic complaints.
• Early diagnosis of PTSD, bipolar, depression, anxiety.
• “Difficult” or “High-maintenance” patient who complains of pain and fear.
Risk Factors

- Everyone is at risk, but…
- Other adverse childhood events.
  - Parental addiction or mental illness
  - Death or incarceration of a parent
  - Violence in the home
- Participation in foster care or correctional facilities.

- Native girls and women
- Girls and women with disabilities.
- Gay and trans women and men.
What Constitutes “Trauma?”

• Must it be penetrative?
• Must it hurt?
• Must we call it “rape” or “abuse?”
• Must it be perpetrated by a person?
The Spectrum of Sexual Trauma

• Torture ← ---------------- → Misogyny and Shaming
Triggers

- Emotional
  - Shame
  - Fear
  - Powerlessness

- Physical
  - Pain
  - Any sensation on certain body parts (genitals, anus, inner thighs, abdomen, breasts, neck, mouth)
  - Shallow breathing or breath holding
  - Muscle tension
  - Tachycardia
When we are the trigger...

Healthcare providers

Teachers

Police Officers

Social Workers
Emotional Triggers:

- Shame
- Fear
- Powerlessness
The Shaming of the Poon

• Cultural-Social shaming of female sexuality and female bodies interwoven with a total media obsession with objectifying female sexuality and the female body.

• *Poon* and *Poontang* are common slang words for female genitalia or the act of having sex with a woman.

• Originates from the French *putain*, meaning *whore*.
Shame

• While guilt is “I did a bad thing,” shame is “I am a bad person.”
• It exists on a very basic level in many survivors of sexual trauma.
• It increases often during pregnancy, desired or not.
Anxiety and Fear

• She isn’t “a hard patient”, her experiences have been hard.
• Having difficulty with gynecological exams is a normal reaction to those experiences.
• Our bodies have memory.
Power and Control

• The motivation behind rape is removal of power and control, it’s not about sex.
• Sex is the weapon chosen to inflict pain, violence and humiliation.
• A medical visit should not create more pain, violence and humiliation.
Other tips:

• Value her communication
• Value her participation
• Will sedation help? Or make her feel even less in control?

Avoiding other triggers:

• “Relax”
• “Trust me”
• “Sweety, honey, darling, etc…”

• Touch in certain places:
So, why would we put the pokey parts up there?
Thanks to my teachers:

Marissa

Universal Precautions

Destiny

Be creative

Yvette

Sometimes nothing works
Thank you!
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