

# STUDY GUIDE: INTERVIEWING BEST PRACTICES

# 20-Minutes-to... *Trained*

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## **20-Minutes-to...*Trained*: Interviewing Best Practices Learning Outcomes**

- Participants will be able to define the different types of trauma that parties may exhibit during an investigation.
- Participants will appreciate that trauma does not always manifest itself in people in the same ways, or on the same timeline.
- Participants will be able to evaluate trauma's impact on credibility, memory and sequencing.
- Participants will understand that physical space considerations and tactical support techniques can reduce the effects of trauma and build rapport with the victim.
- Participants will be able to exercise best practice associated with trauma-informed interviewing.



## **20-Minutes-to...*Trained*: Interviewing Best Practices Discussion Questions**

- Investigators can predict how a victim of sexual violence will respond to trauma. True or False?
- What are the benefits of interviewers being trauma-informed?
- How can an interviewer create a physical environment and foundation for the interview that is comfortable for a victim of trauma? What physical space elements can be helpful?
- Trauma always indicates that a traumatic incident occurred. True or False?
- What techniques can an interviewer utilize to break down barriers? How can an interviewer build trust and rapport?





## **20-Minutes-to...*Trained*: Interviewing Best Practices Case Studies**

### **Amy and Todd**

On April 27, Amy Craft, a first-year student at Tessera, set up a time to meet with her Women and Gender Studies Professor, Julia, for later that afternoon. Upon arriving for the appointment, Julia can see that Amy is very upset and looks exhausted. Julia asks if everything is OK, and Amy asks if she can close the door. Julia gets up, closes the door, and sits back down. Amy blurts out, "I think I was raped last weekend in my dorm room by another student, a friend of a friend named Todd." Stunned and very concerned, Julia asks what happened. What follows is Amy's account as provided to the faculty member.

#### **Reporting Party's Statement:** Amy Craft

On Friday, April, 23, I went to an on-campus party. I was doing a lot of drinking and dancing and getting to know people. I had at least four drinks in the first few hours I was there. Then, I met Todd. I remember that he came up to me on the dance floor, and started to dance with me. He was really good-looking, and so was the other guy he was with, Jeff, whom I had met at a different party the week before.

We danced and had a lot of fun, and I remember drinking some more and Todd getting me some Jell-O shots, which were really strong and nasty. I wasn't feeling well and went into the bathroom, thinking I might throw up. The bathroom was really crowded, so I went outside for some fresh air instead. I sat on the stoop, feeling nauseated. I went over to the bushes and got sick. Todd came over and helped me out. I remember walking home with him and throwing up some more in my bathroom, but nothing else.

When I woke up the next day, his name and number were scrawled on a pad by my sofa, and there was a used condom in the toilet. I got scared, and called him to find out what had happened. I remembered most of what he said about the party, but when he told me that we came back to my room and had sex, I started to cry. I didn't remember any of it, and was afraid I might be pregnant. Todd assured me that he wore a condom, and asked me out again. I hung up and cried. I told everything to my roommate Sarah, who was sitting on the sofa when I called Todd. She suggested that I call the campus police, but I felt more comfortable talking to you. Please don't tell anyone...

Amy called the police station at 1:30 p.m. Her call was referred to Lt. Discov. Lt. Discov contacted the Title IX investigator. He noted that Amy is experiencing bad dreams and eating disturbances that he believes are consistent

with those of others who have experienced significant trauma. Lt. Discov refers to Amy's condition as "black time." He asserts that it is possible for students to consume enough alcohol that they black out mentally, but not physically. That would explain why Amy recalls nothing, but Todd says she was an active participant.

## **Skyler**

Skyler Everett met with the Title IX Coordinator on May 23 and shared the following narrative:

The assault happened last Friday night. A group of us got together at Carmen's place after final exams to celebrate together before we went home. I was having a great time. I started off with some beers and then moved to doing tequila shots – in fact Dakota, my best friend, and I had a competition to see who could do the "salt-slam-slurp" thing the quickest. We had a whole group of people gathering around us and cheering us on. I may have had some other drinks too – I can't remember, but people were passing around Jello shots and test tubes with stuff in them. I may have had some of that. The music was loud and thumping and we were all dancing. There was lots of pot smoking going on and I had a few joints. At some point people started taking off their shirts and I joined in and we were feeling great, then several people got totally naked. I kept on my underwear but no one seemed to be uncomfortable with how much or how little clothing people had on.

Sometime during the evening, it was probably around midnight or so, some guys were playing pool and asked me to join in. I don't remember if it was three guys or more. At one point, I was leaning over to make my shot and one of the guys pulled down my underpants. I didn't know what to do so I just laughed and kicked them off, but I was really uncomfortable. I think we played pool for a while and maybe some other people came in. The next thing I knew another guy came up behind me and put his arms around me from behind. He put his penis between my legs and asked me if that was OK. I just froze – I couldn't speak. He proceeded to insert his penis inside me – it hurt but I didn't say anything. The other guys were laughing and saying they wanted in on the action. The next thing I knew I was performing oral sex on several of them. Eventually we all got cleaned up and rejoined the party.

Dakota asked me where I had gone and I just said, "Playing pool for awhile." I didn't want to say what happened – I needed to figure it out. I don't know why I didn't leave, no one made me stay, I liked all the guys and always felt like I was part of the group and now I don't know what's going on. I just feel so guilty, I drank a ton, got naked and acted like I was "into" it – at least I didn't specifically say "no" or leave or push anyone away. I'm so confused. It didn't seem right, but I don't know. I'm just embarrassed and scared and confused.



## **20-Minutes-to...*Trained*: Interviewing Best Practices Case Studies Question & Answer**

### **Amy and Todd**

#### For Discussion:

- What weight should the Title IX investigator give Lt. Discov's statements?
  - Lt. Discov's statements are based off his professional opinions, however they should be compared to the investigator's perceptions of Amy during interviewing.
  - Lt. Discov's professional opinions, based off his experience are valuable but should not be dispositive.
  - Lt. Discov's opinion about "black time" should be compared with the investigator's timeline of events, as well as Amy's testimony about the amount of alcohol she consumed (as well as any other important factors such as whether she is on medication, whether she ate, etc.).
- What foundational steps might the investigator put into place prior to interviewing Amy?
  - The investigator should set up the investigation room in a way that supports a victim of trauma such as considering lighting, smells, privacy, and sense of security.
  - The investigator should consider offering Amy a warm comforting beverage upon her arrival and strategize other techniques that will build rapport and trust.
  - The investigator should prepare to present non-judgmentally and supportive.
- How might the investigator evaluate whether Amy is experiencing trauma?
  - The investigator should establish Amy's normal sleep and eating patterns and establish whether those have changed since the incident.
  - The investigator should also determine whether there are other ways Amy has been impacted since the incident (such as missing classes or assignments).
- Should the investigator focus on getting all the details in one interview?
  - The investigator should allow Amy to lead the discussion, sharing what she feels comfortable.
  - The investigator should focus on building comfort and rapport.
  - The investigator can always call Amy for additional interviews if further information is needed.

### **Skyler**

#### For Discussion:

- What facts indicate that Skyler may have experienced trauma?
  - Skylar indicates that she “froze” when a guy came up behind her and put his penis between her legs.
  - Skylar’s recount of the incidents contains gaps. It is unclear what is causing those gaps.
  - Skylar is confused, embarrassed and scared. She is having difficulty processing what happened to her.
- Is there enough information to determine that a policy violation has occurred?
  - More information is needed to determine whether a policy violation occurred.
  - At this time, Skylar has not provided names of the male students.
  - Skylar also has not indicated that she wishes to move forward.
  - Next steps should include determining whether Skylar believes a policy violation may have occurred.
- How might the Title IX Coordinator make Skylar feel comfortable while she is sharing her story?
  - The Title IX Coordinator should ensure Skylar feels safe.
  - The Title IX Coordinator should ensure their office feels secure, private, and comfortable.
  - The Title IX Coordinator should ask Skylar what she needs to feel comfortable and not make assumptions.

# Trauma Informed Interviewing Techniques

ATIXA/SCOPE Joint Conference 2015

## Content Warning

- Talking about trauma stirs up trauma (personal and secondary)
- The terms victim and survivor will be used interchangeably. That is not to say that every victim identifies as or has the opportunity to be a survivor.
- When discussing reports I will most likely say “alleged victim”.



# Trauma Informed Means

- o You recognize the myriad ways trauma can be experienced- and you respect that
- o You are prepared for the needs of a traumatized person
- o You ask questions strategically and transparently

You recognize the myriad ways  
trauma can be experienced

and you respect it

Bullying

# TRAUMA

Military Trauma

Victim or Witness to Domestic Violence

Neglect

Sexual Abuse or Assault

Physical Abuse or Assault

Emotional Abuse or Psychological Maltreatment

Natural or Manmade Disasters

School Violence

Serious Accident, Illness, or Medical Procedure

Forced Displacement

Traumatic Grief or Separation

War, Terrorism, or Political Violence

Victim or Witness to Community Violence

## The Trauma We Don't Talk About

o Historical Trauma

o Gender Norming Trauma

o System-Induced Trauma and  
Re-Traumatization



You are prepared for the needs  
of a traumatized person

**SOME DAYS  
ALL YOU CAN DO  
IS BREATHE  
AND THAT'S OKAY**



ROFLBOT

# MASLOW'S HEIRARCHY of NEEDS



<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/maslows-hierarchy-needs-matthew-larsen-morava>



## Crisis vs. Strategy

- We often do our work running from one crisis to the next
- Trauma-Informed means you're the one thinking ahead since the alleged victim won't/can't
- What Would Maslow Do?



## Reduce Opportunity for Guilt

- Victim blaming (self and community) means a victim may struggle to tell you what they need because they feel selfish asking
- The mind in crisis may not be able to fully explain what it needs to feel safe
- Plan out the basics so they don't have to ask

# Your Space

- o Keurig is your friend
- o Texture
- o Smell
- o Light
- o High traffic?
- o Easy entrance/exit?
- o Accessible?
- o Privacy

# YOU

- o How do you present (clothing, demeanor)
- o Compared to others in the institution?
- o Your perception vs. their reality
- o Who is your focus?



You ask questions strategically  
and transparently

**Tell me all of your problems**



## First Impressions

- Trauma-informed questions are ineffective if your first impression was not trauma-informed
- Initial Contact Letters: K-I-S-S
- How in control of the process are they *really*? (Victims can smell a lie.)

## Needs vs. Want

- o Starting out, focus on what you need vs. what you want
- o You're building trust
- o Give people time to process everything
- o Small chunks

## Transparency

- o Tell them tough stuff before you get started:
  - o You will need to ask detailed questions.
  - o You will need to clarify slang terms or vague statements
  - o You may need to ask "devil's advocate" questions
  - o You may need to push back if something doesn't add up
- o Explain why you need to do the tough stuff
- o Explain that they can't "fail" at this



## Non-Verbal Cues

- Times to slow down:
  - Physically closed off
  - Won't make eye contact
  - Change in tone
- Shift the kinds of questions
- Talk about interim measures
- Bring in an advocate
- If you have enough for the moment, end the session

## Asking Questions

- Open ended
- They are your expert in that moment. Tell them that.
- When using open-ended questions, the control of the conversation switches over to the person being asked the question
- Save technical questions for the end when open-ended is exhausted.
- "Tell me more about", "I'd like to go back to when you said..."

## The Accused Person

- o If you do these things for the accused person, you often get a better response
- o They may be scared.
- o They may have their own trauma that is being triggered by this experience
- o If a Complainant expresses they care about the accused's well-being, you can talk about how you respect them. It builds trust.

## Vicarious Trauma & Compassion Fatigue

- o Hearing these stories is not easy
- o You start to hear the commonality, which makes it feel exhausting to listen to the "same story" over and over
- o You have too many cases, so you try to speed things up wherever you can



# Trauma Informed Means

Every time someone reports a Title IX issue to you they are telling you:

“Someone took my control away.”

We facilitate empowerment.

How can I help you be safe?  
How can I help you stay successful?

Thank you!

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