
April 2021

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Sexual Assault Awareness, Personal Narratives and Trauma Informed Leadership

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April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month - a time to draw attention to the prevalence of sexual assault, provide education about prevention and recognize the impact of sexual assault on individuals and communities. The time also provides a space for those impacted by sexual assault to speak out, speak up and get support.

Sexual assault is a widespread problem in our country. Every 73 seconds someone is sexually assaulted, with 1 in 6 women and 1 in 33 men experiencing an attempted or completed rape.¹ One in 4 girls and 1 in six boys is sexually abused before the age of 18.² And an estimated 32.3% of multiracial women, 27.5% of American Indian/Alaska Native women, 21.2% of non-Hispanic black women, 20.5% of non-Hispanic white women, and 13.6% of Hispanic women were raped during their lifetimes.³

The statistics shed only a dim light on the true prevalence of sexual assaults, with nearly 80 percent of the assaults unreported in any given year.¹ Some of the most common reasons for the silence include:

- a fear of not being believed
- being afraid of retaliation
- shame or fear of being blamed
- pressure from others
- distrust towards law enforcement
- a desire to protect the attacker for other reasons⁴

As a social worker, a therapist, a foster parent and - most importantly - as a target of childhood sexual abuse, I understand the impact of sexual assault on individuals, families and communities. I also understand the power of adding my voice to the conversations about sexual assault. At a young age, I felt external and internal pressure to be silent. To not cause embarrassment. To not bring shame. *Why do you hate me?* I was asked. *Why are you lying?* The implicit demand was for me to be silent. Relationships – friendships – were suddenly

severed. Names were no longer spoken out loud. And to reduce the risk of chance encounters, circuitous drives and bike rides to familiar haunts became the norm. In reflection, I see the collective lack of full acknowledgement of what happened – like witnessing a tornado pass through your home, barely blinking an eye as the living room is laid to waste.

I share this to do my part in pulling back the shroud stopping us from fully seeing the problem and thus, each other. I do so as a reminder that we all have personal narratives that inform how we go about the business of living, of managing our relationships and of doing the work that we do.

We all bring our personal narratives to work. We and our staff respond to workplace experiences based in part on these personal narratives - narratives that might include traumatic experiences. Trauma-informed leadership recognizes the impact of emotional wounds and scars. It recognizes that our experiences can- and often do – affect our interactions, work performance and engagement, and feelings of safety in the workplace. Intentionally leading with a trauma-informed approach fosters compassion and empathy, and psychological safety. Here are six principles to keep in mind when leading from a trauma-informed perspective⁵:

1. Safety (Physical and Psychological)
2. Trustworthiness and Transparency
3. Peer Support
4. Collaboration and Mutuality
5. Empowerment, Voice and Choice
6. Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues

(Please see the [Trauma-Informed Approach Resources](#) below for more information)

The past year is a reminder that trauma spares no one. The pandemic and the multiple crises throughout the year have undoubtedly left their mark. For many individuals and communities, these experience add on to, and activate, past trauma and old wounds. As we navigate recovery and change, leaders have an opportunity to help their teams, programs, divisions and agencies make a way forward in a way that fosters safety, while also continuing to develop a resilient and effective workforce.

Sexual Assault Awareness Resources

- [National Sexual Violence Resource Center \(NSRVC\)](#)
- [Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network \(RAINN\)](#)
- [Sexual Violence is Preventable \(CDC\)](#)

Trauma-Informed Approach Resources

- PDF: [Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach \(NCSACW\)](#)
- PDF: [National Council's Framework for Trauma-Informed Leadership](#)
- [Adverse Childhood Experiences](#)

Sources

1. [Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network \(RAINN\)](#)
2. [Dube et al., Long-Term Consequences of Childhood Sexual Abuse by Gender of Victim, American Journal of Preventive Medicine, Volume 28, Issue 5, 2005](#)
3. [Black et al., National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2010 summary report](#) (PDF).
4. [Response: Help for Domestic Violence | Sexual Assault](#)
5. PDF: [National Council's Framework for Trauma-Informed Leadership](#)

EAP Live and On-Demand Webinars

Upcoming Live Webinars

EAP Orientation – Thursday, April 22nd, 1:30 PM -2:00 PM ([Registration link](#))

COVID-19 Related Webinars and On Demand Webinars

Leading Teams and Supporting Employees through COVID-19 ([On-Demand, YouTube video](#))

Leading the Human Side of Change ([Presentation slides PDF](#))

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