

UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA

JESSICA GROLEAU, PH.D



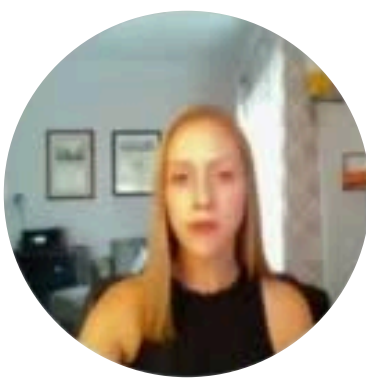
What is Trauma?

DEFINITION OF TRAUMA

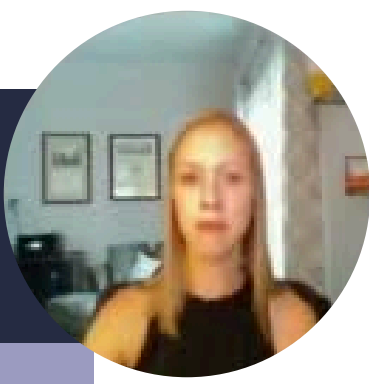
- Subjective
- Real or perceived threat
- Manifests differently in each person

CONSIDER EACH PARTY'S EXPERIENCES

- One or both Parties have likely already experienced trauma, either:
 - Prior to the incident (childhood experiences, family history, collective memory, etc.)
 - During the incident
 - As a result of being accused of the alleged incident
 - Through a combination of these experiences
- One or both Parties may be currently experiencing trauma during the Title IX grievance process



NEUROBIOLOGY OF TRAUMA



BRAIN STEM ("REPTILIAN BRAIN")

- Involuntary survival processes (heartbeat, breathing, etc.)

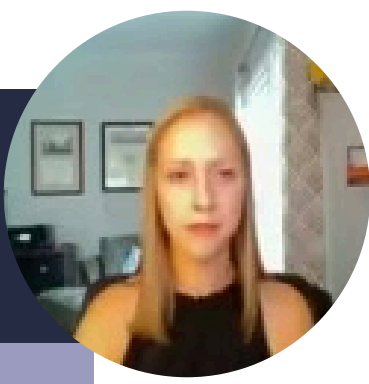
LIMBIC SYSTEM ("EMOTIONAL BRAIN")

- Regulates the body's stress response
- Plays an important role in memory and learning

FRONTAL LOBES ("EXECUTIVE BRAIN")

- Responsible for cognitive skills including ability to rationalize, plan, self-monitor, and control one's responses
- Important for voluntary movement

NEUROBIOLOGY OF TRAUMA



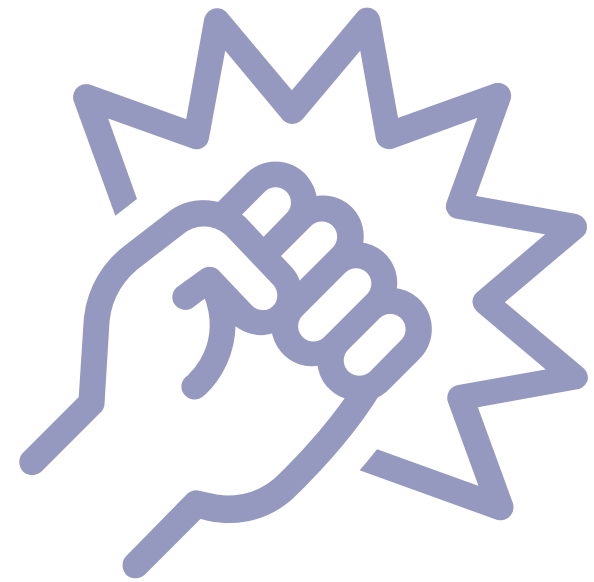
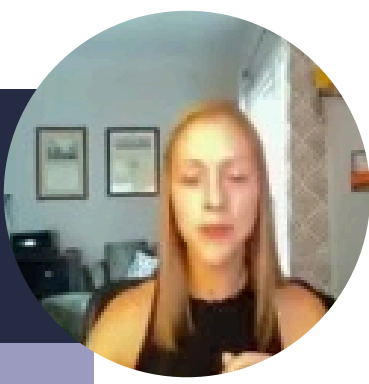
LIMBIC SYSTEM RESPONSE

- Amygdala (“fear center”) is activated
 - All resources are re-directed toward survival

DISCONNECTION OF FRONTAL LOBES

- Executive functioning goes “offline”
- Interferes with cognition, voluntary muscle movement, and ability to process the experience later on
 - This is functional and protective

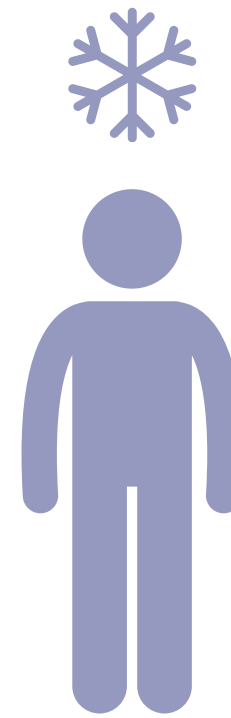
HUMAN STRESS RESPONSE



FIGHT



FLIGHT

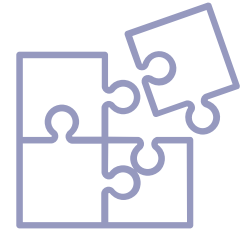
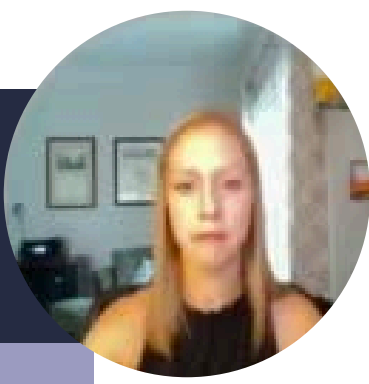


FREEZE

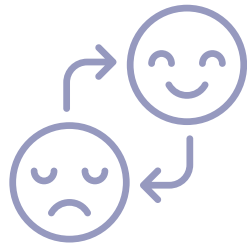


FAWN

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR TITLE IX?



Fragmented, incomplete memories are common



Emotional dysregulation is expected

- Can appear in a variety of ways: inappropriate affect (laughter), extreme anxiety, numbing/disconnection



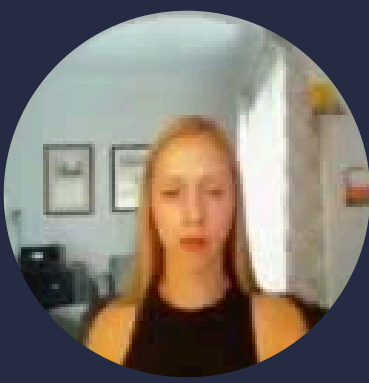
The fawn or freeze responses may appear to be consent



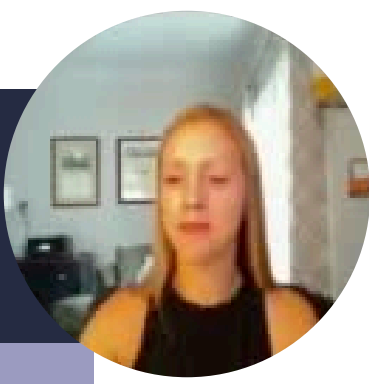
Discussing the event is retraumatizing

- Try to limit the number of interviews, questions, etc.

RECOGNIZING PERSONAL BIAS



PERSONAL BIAS



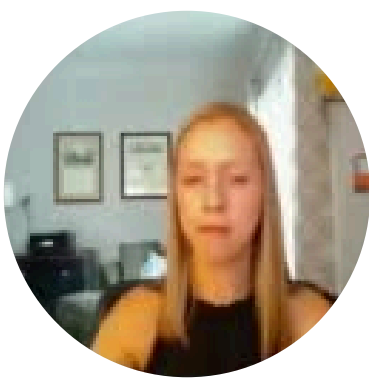
A TENDENCY, INCLINATION, OR PREJUDICE TOWARD OR AGAINST SOMETHING OR SOMEONE.

- Biases are universal
 - We are all products of our own personal histories, cultures, and many other factors that shape the ways in which we see the world
 - Biases are automatic and often outside of conscious control
- Biases are not always bad
 - i.e. an inclination toward healthy lifestyle behaviors
- Biases can be based on stereotypes or inaccurate information



It is crucial that you understand your biases in order to be most effective in your role.

BIAS VS. CONFLICT OF INTEREST



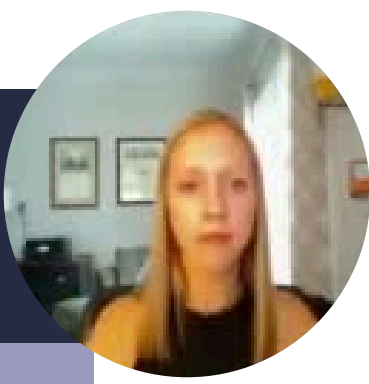
BIAS

- Having a personal history with sexual misconduct
- Holding stereotyped gender beliefs about sexual violence
 - i.e. perpetrators are males
- Internalization of rape culture
 - Often leads to skepticism or blaming of the Complainant

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

- Having a personal relationship with one or more parties
- Holding multiple relationships with one or more parties
- There is any way in which you could benefit (or be harmed) from the outcome of the investigation

RECOGNIZING PERSONAL BIAS



IS YOUR PERSONAL BIAS AFFECTING YOUR ABILITY TO BE OBJECTIVE?

✓ Introspection

- Implicit Bias Tests

- <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/selectatest.html>

✓ Having implicit bias does not make you a bad person (we all have it)

- Managing your implicit biases will make you a better Title IX professional

✓ Questions to ask yourself:

- What does the information at hand cause me to believe about those involved? Why?

- When should an individual recuse themselves from a case because they are unable to overcome personal bias?

IMPLICIT BIAS TESTS

Project Implicit



Race IAT

('Black - White'
IAT)

Weapons IAT

('Weapons -
Harmless
Objects' IAT)

Age IAT

('Young - Old'
IAT)

Transgender IAT

('Transgender
People -
Cisgender
People' IAT).

Gender-Science IAT

('Gender -
Science' IAT)

Gender-Career IAT

('Gender -
Career' IAT)

Asian IAT

('Asian -
European
American' IAT)

Disability IAT

('Physically
Disabled -
Physically Abled'
IAT)

Native IAT

Native American
('Native - White

Project Implicit

Native IAT

Native American
('Native - White
American' IAT).

Presidents IAT

('Presidential
Popularity' IAT)

Religion IAT

('Religions' IAT).

Weight IAT

('Fat - Thin' IAT)

Arab-Muslim IAT

('Arab Muslim -
Other People'
IAT).

Skin-tone IAT

('Light Skin -
Dark Skin' IAT)

Sexuality IAT

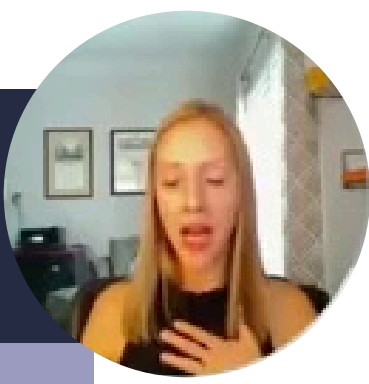
('Gay - Straight'
IAT)

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RECOGNIZING PERSONAL BIAS



IS YOUR PERSONAL BIAS AFFECTING YOUR ABILITY TO BE OBJECTIVE?

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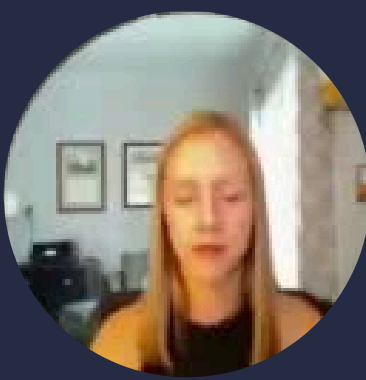
✓ Having implicit bias does not make you a bad person (we all have it)

- Managing your implicit biases will make you a better Title IX professional

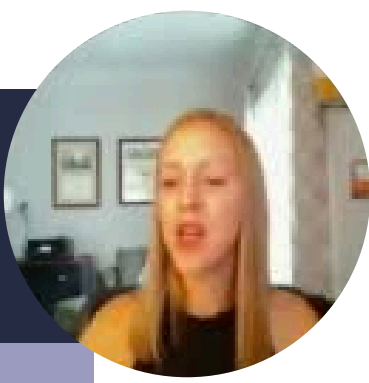
✓ Questions to ask yourself:

- What does the information at hand cause me to believe about those involved? Why?
- When should an individual recuse themselves from a case because they are unable to overcome personal bias?

TRAUMA-INFORMED COMMUNICATION

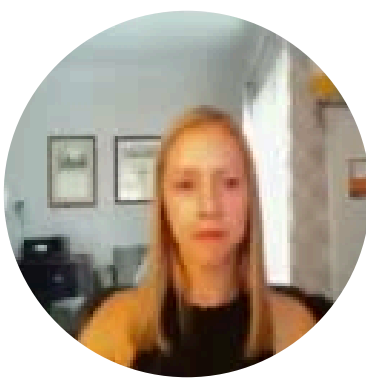


FOUNDATIONS OF A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

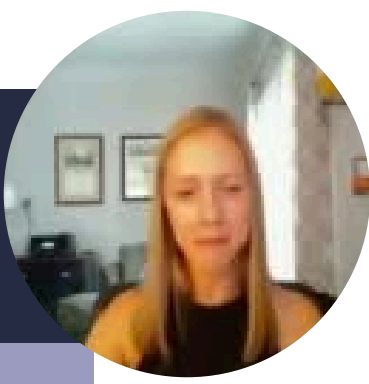


EMPATHY

- The ability to understand and share the feelings of another
 - Doesn't mean that you fully "get it" – because you don't
 - You can try to put yourself in your party's shoes
- Not the same as sympathy!
 - Sympathy is rarely helpful in these situations
 - Most trauma survivors report that sympathy exacerbates feelings of shame/embarrassment



COMMUNICATING EMPATHY

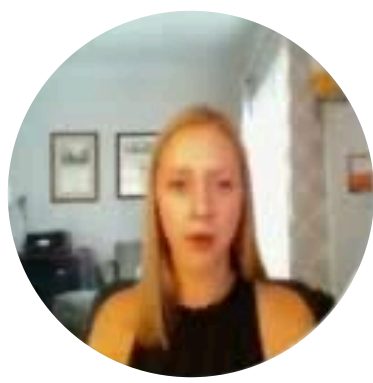


“I can see how painful this is for you to talk about.”

“That sounds incredibly scary.”

“There are resources here on campus to support you through this.”

VALIDATION



Recognition or affirmation that a person or their feelings, opinions, and experiences are real or worthwhile.

DO

Share your own similar reactions, if you have them:

"I would feel really angry too."

"It makes sense that you would feel that way."

DON'T

Tell someone how they should feel:

"You shouldn't let this bother you so much."

Question their responses:

"Are you sure that is what happened?"

Validation ≠ Agreement

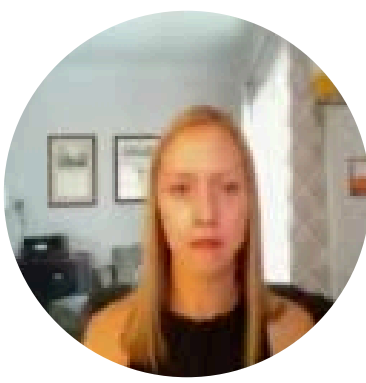
ACTIVE LISTENING

A COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUE THAT SERVES THE FOLLOWING PURPOSES:

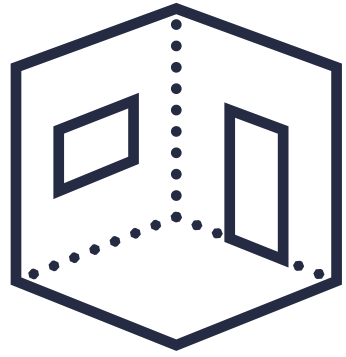
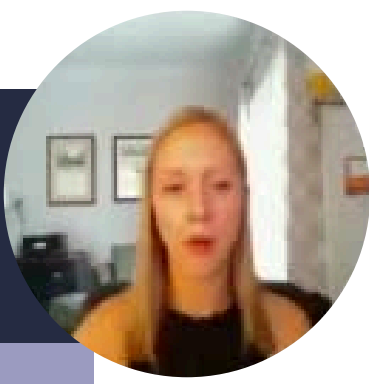
1. Ensures that you understand what the other person is saying accurately
2. Communicates to the other person that you are listening

STRATEGIES FOR ACTIVE LISTENING

- Avoid distractions
 - Cell phones, emails, knocks on the door
- Use frequent brief paraphrases of what you heard
- Use nonverbal cues
 - Nodding, smiling or frowning, leaning forward
- Remain neutral and nonjudgmental
- Use phrases to communicate your desire to understand:
 - *"Did I understand that correctly?"*
 - *"I want to make sure I am hearing you."*
- Ask open-ended questions:
 - *"Can you tell me more about..."*



ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES



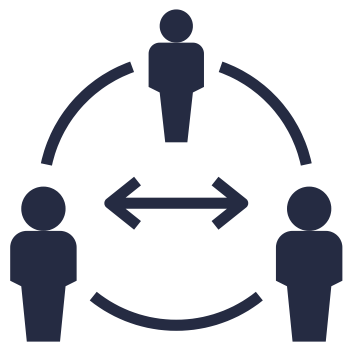
CONSIDER THE ENVIRONMENT

- Allow each Party to choose the meeting place, if possible
- Consider comfortable seating, tissues, water, privacy, etc.



FOCUS ON EACH PARTY AND THEIR NEEDS

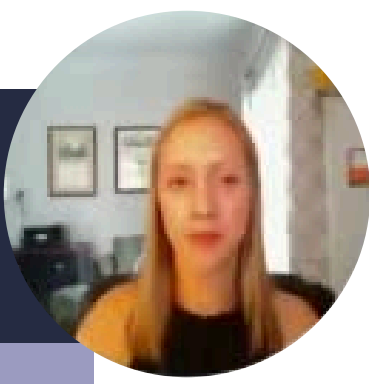
- Refrain from sharing own stories & experiences
- Create an open space for them to talk (no judgement)
- Aim to understand each Party's perspective



KEEP A HEALTHY EMOTIONAL DISTANCE

- Self-care is crucial
- Boundaries are okay (and even healing!)
- Direct each Party to campus resources that can provide support

DE-ESCALATION



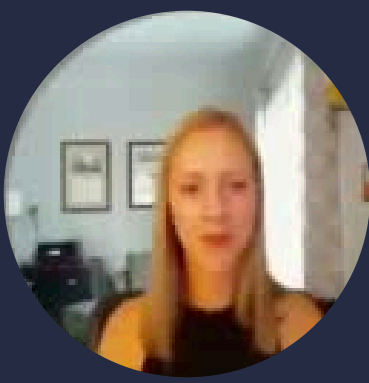
CONFRONTATION IS POSSIBLE

- Title IX processes may be intense, and emotions may run high
- Confrontation may occur between you and either Party or their Advisor

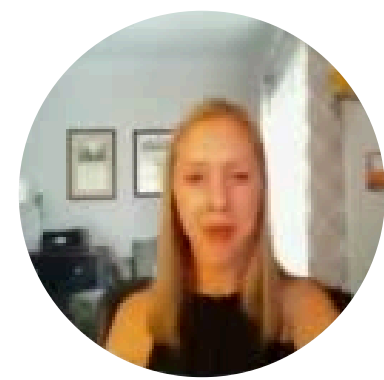
STRATEGIES FOR DE-ESCALATION

- Keep personal emotions in check
- Create physical space
- Allow for silence & patience for decisions
- Practice validation, active listening & empathy

PROMOTING EMPOWERMENT



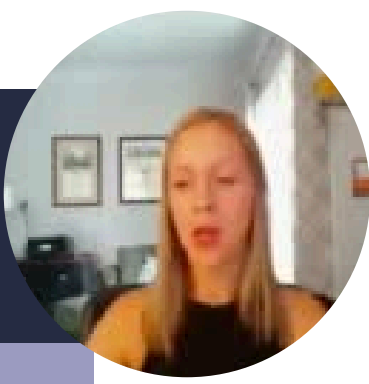
EMPOWERMENT



EMPOWERMENT = VOICE AND CHOICE

- ① What could empowerment look like for each Party?
- ② How can you, as an administrator in the Title IX process, identify resources to help empower a Party?
 - You need to be neutral and objective, but you can refer each Party to other sources of support or advocacy
- ③ What may each Party consider to be possible obstacles to empowerment?
- ④ How may you address them?

TOOLS FOR EMPOWERMENT



ASK THE PARTY:

How are you feeling?

Do you feel safe?

How can I help you feel safer?

What do you need right now?

What do you need throughout the duration of the Title IX process?

How do you feel about participating in the Title IX process?

What steps of the Title IX process concern you?



Remember the foundations of empathy, validation, and listening.
How can you best support each Party and address their needs?