

How Being Trauma Informed Improves Criminal Justice System Responses

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What is Volunteers of America?

- A social service agency serving over 400 communities in 46 states
- A faith based human service organization
- Noted for being first half way house in the country
 - NYC in the early 1900s
- Serve men and women (trauma-informed, gender-responsive since 2004)
- Historically developed knowledge of reentry





**Why
Learn about
Trauma?**



**How we think
about something
affects how we
respond!**

Why Learn About Trauma?

Two Sets of Goals:

- Personally
 - Develop understanding
 - Increase overall awareness
 - Recognize signs of trauma
 - Learn how to respond to symptoms of trauma
- Professionally
 - Increase Safety!
 - Reduce recidivism rates
 - Promote recovery of those in your care





What is Trauma?

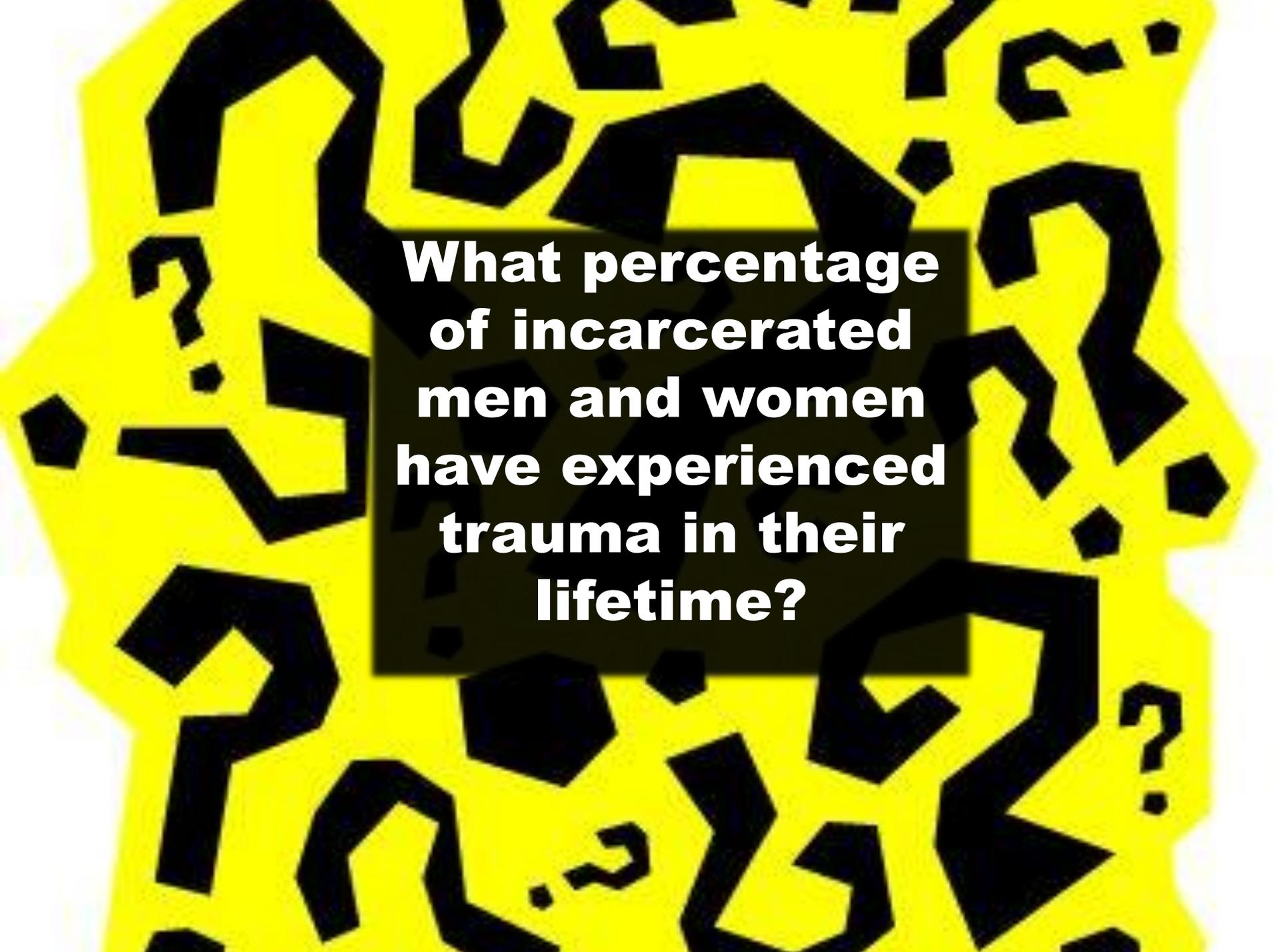
- **Exposure to an extreme traumatic stressor involving actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's physical integrity**
- **Witnessing a similar event**
- **Learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate.**
- **A situation in which a person feels intense fear, helplessness, and/or horror in regards to the situation.**

Examples of Trauma

- Sexual Abuse
- Physical Abuse
- Emotional Abuse
- Domestic Violence
- Witnessing Abuse/Violence
- Self-inflicted Violence
- Floods, hurricanes, tornados, tsunamis, etc.
- Shootings, bombings, etc.
- Situational vs. personal

Video

- Take note of the words Officer Tully uses to describe her experience with trauma.



**What percentage
of incarcerated
men and women
have experienced
trauma in their
lifetime?**

Jail Diversion Study

Women

96%
lifetime

74%
current
(12 mos.)

Men

89%
lifetime

86%
current
(12 mos.)

Mental Health Court Study

Abuse (self report)	% Women	% Men
Sexual abuse or rape (prior to age 20)	70	25
Parents hit or threw things at one another	46	27
Parents beat them with belt whip or strap	61	68
Parents hit them with something hard	43	36
Parents beat or really hurt them with their hands	42	36
Parents injured them enough to need medical attention	22	8

Women

67%
child physical abuse

34%
current
(12 mos.)

Men

73%
child physical abuse

32%
current
(12 mos.)

**The past is
never dead.
It's not
even past.
-William
Faulkner**



Effects of Trauma

Mental Effects	Emotional Effects	Physical Effects	Relationship Effects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Difficulty concentrating -Difficulty remembering some aspects of the trauma or the time just before or after it occurred -Difficulty making decisions -Confusion -Intrusive thoughts about what happened -General sense of disorientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Wild mood swings and out of control emotions -Anxiety -Fear or Terror -Anger/Irritability -Shock -Grief -Feeling numb or detached -Guilt -Helplessness -Alienation -Feeling of increased vulnerability -Feeling of abandonment -Loss of meaning in life -Short circuited goals (May abandon long-term career plans and settle for something that pays day-to-day bills. May focus on short-term romantic attachments instead of fostering meaningful relationships) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increased startle response -Exhaustion -Insomnia -Headaches Nausea/digestive problems -Rapid heartbeat -Feeling "spacey" -Loss of interest in activities that the person once enjoyed doing -Loss of interest in health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Hostility -Withdrawal -Lack of or increased interest in sexual relations -Poor work/school performance -Blame (self, other) -Desire to "nest"- stay home and avoid contact with outside world - Overprotectiveness/ distorted feelings regarding individuals involved in trauma (Stockholm Syndrome)



**Trauma has a
pervasive impact**



Problematic Behaviors are Attempts at Self-Cure

- **Substance Abuse**
- **Relationship Problems**
 - **Anger, mistrust, being easily manipulated, etc**
- **Snap decisions without thought of consequence**

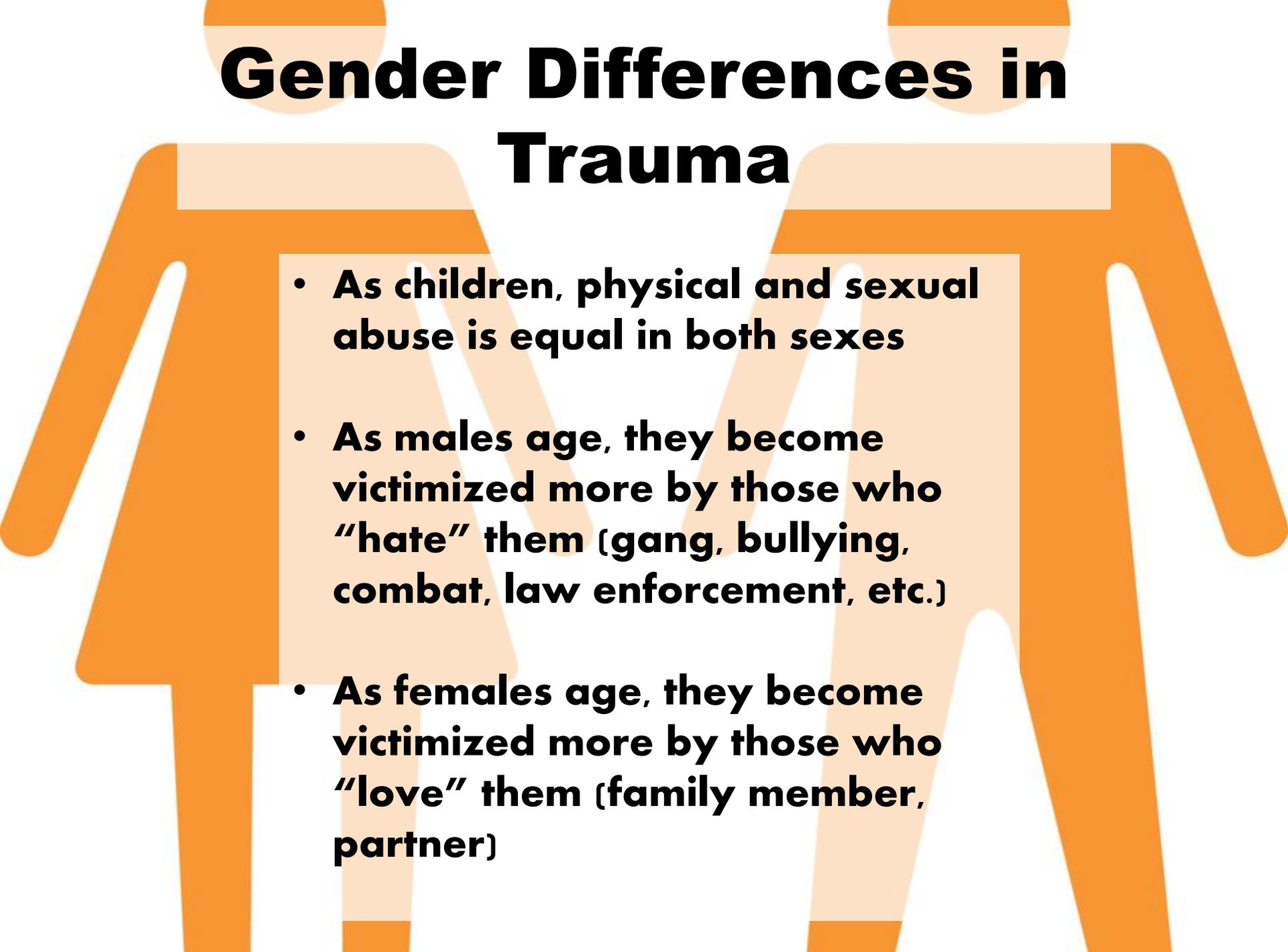
A globe of the Earth is centered in the image, showing the continents of North and South America. The globe is surrounded by a thick, jagged, red border that resembles flames or a splatter of red paint. The text is overlaid on the globe in a bold, white, sans-serif font.

**Trauma shapes a
person's world view
- often in a
dysfunctional
manner**

**Trauma “breaks” a
person’s fire alarm**



Gender Differences in Trauma



- **As children, physical and sexual abuse is equal in both sexes**
- **As males age, they become victimized more by those who “hate” them (gang, bullying, combat, law enforcement, etc.)**
- **As females age, they become victimized more by those who “love” them (family member, partner)**

Why Be Trauma Informed?

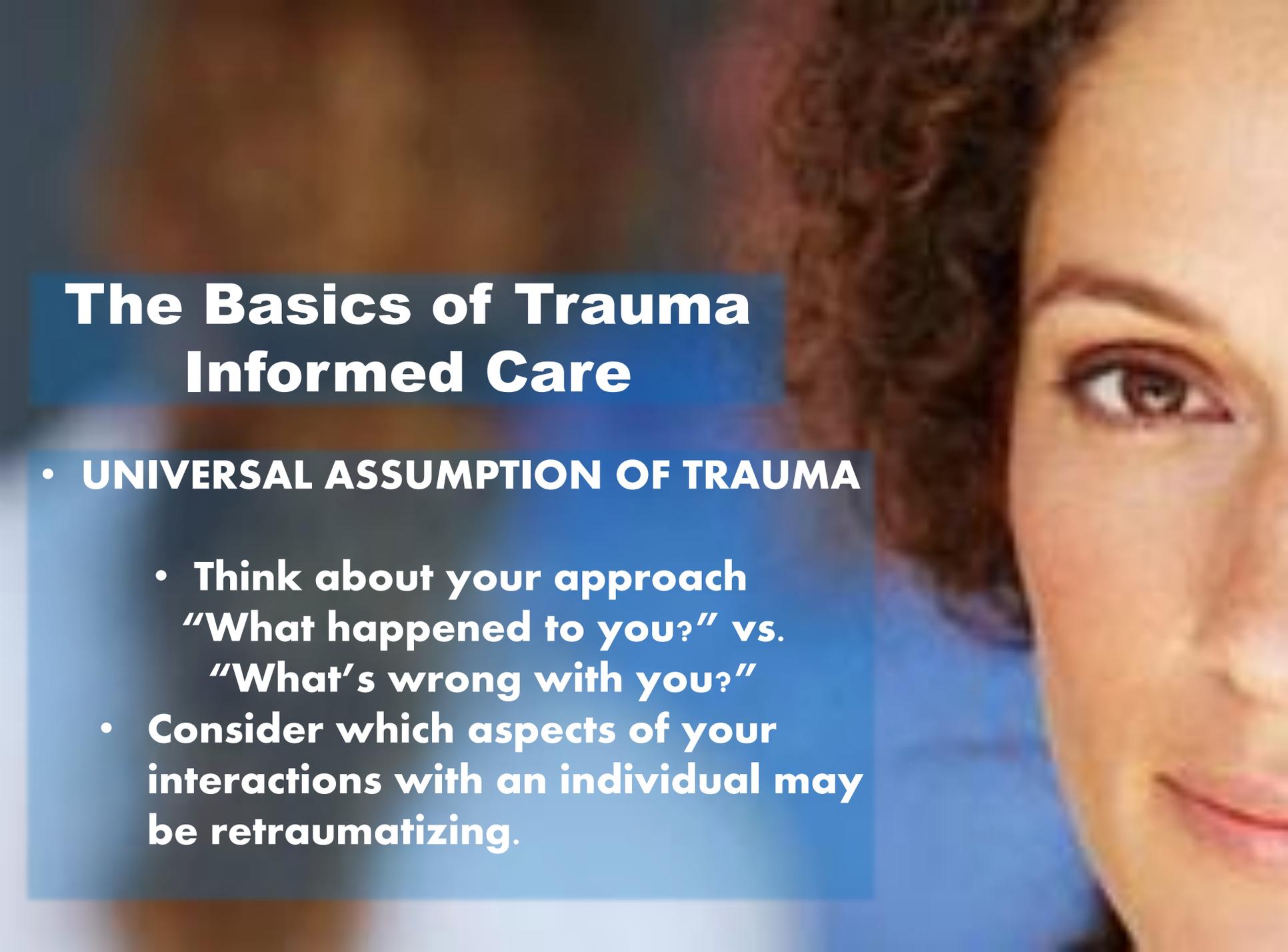
- Reduce Incident Reports (Rhode Island WP)

Physical Violence	2007	2008	2009
Inmates assaulting inmates	22	9	6
Inmate fights	38	28	4
Inmates assaulting staff	13	4	2
Use of Force	24	10	5



Why Be Trauma Informed?

- **Decrease recidivism rates, particularly for technical rule violators**
- **Decrease in reactive and resistant behaviors.**
- **Promotes recovery**
- **Less resistance to change**
- **Keeps you from burning out!**

A close-up photograph of a woman's face, showing her eyes, nose, and mouth. She has dark, curly hair and is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a neutral expression. The background is blurred.

The Basics of Trauma Informed Care

- **UNIVERSAL ASSUMPTION OF TRAUMA**
 - Think about your approach
“What happened to you?” vs.
“What’s wrong with you?”
 - Consider which aspects of your interactions with an individual may be retraumatizing.

People Need...

Respect

- It is essential to offer and expect respect
- Respect is key to help people gain self-esteem; self-esteem is necessary for people to take charge of their own lives
- People involved with the justice system and others who have been marginalized may not be accustomed to being offered respect
- Respect is a big factor in street and prison culture; people who do not expect or demand respect are considered weak and worthless

Information

- Providing information can help to reassure the person
- It also goes a long way in keeping the person calm, which can be key in avoiding aggressive responses

Safety

- To begin to take charge of one's life, means relinquishing old patterns
- To do so, one must feel safe

People Need...

Trust

- Trustworthiness is an essential antidote to the lack of trust so predominant in both women and men with trauma histories
- Consistency and following through are key – honor your promises, return calls, be on time for appointments

Choice

- In some circumstances (as dictated by the law) we don't always have a choice, so how can we build choice in?
- Provide choices wherever possible to enhance decision making skills

Collaboration

- Ask for examples of ways we can collaborate
- Collaboration is key
- A collaboration stance helps to enhance personal responsibility



Understand Your ...

- History of trauma and how this may affect your interactions with others
- Triggers for anger
- Situations that are likely to make you lose your temper

Avoid

- **Overreacting**
 - **Power Struggles**
 - **False Promises**
 - **Using Force**
 - **Aggressive Behavior**
- **Inappropriate Use of Authority**
 - **Ordering**
 - **Shouting**
 - **Demeaning**
 - **Deceiving**
 - **Staring**
 - **Minimizing Symptoms or seriousness**





Creating a Trauma Informed Environment

- Think about what aspects of safety are mandatory and what aspects you may be able to be flexible with
- Avoid triggers and re-traumatizing approaches:
 - Loud noises
 - Foul language / yelling
- Strip searches / property searches
 - Explain calmly
 - Allow for dignity
 - Same-sex staff
 - Tell them before you touch them
- Consider the manner in which your office is organized
 - A person with trauma who has to sit with their back to the door may become on edge the second they are seated.
- Know the people with whom you are working

Questions or Comments?

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