



Trauma Responsive Investigations and Prosecutions (TRIP)

Over the last two decades, there has been an increasing recognition of the role that trauma plays in a wide range of health, mental health and other social problems. Sexual assault, domestic violence, assault, human trafficking, child abuse, automobile accidents, natural disasters...can be deeply traumatic experiences that often cause severe damage to survivors' physical, emotional, spiritual, and psychological well-being. Traumatic experiences, particularly multiple experiences over the course of a lifetime, can result in a range of behavioral health problems beyond and including post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, depression, anxiety problems, childhood behavioral disorders, psychosis and some personality disorder diagnoses can be traumatic responses. In other words, people who have experienced trauma(s) may respond to the experience(s) in a variety of ways and can be challenging to work with. There may be no visible signs, or there may be dramatic responses ranging for irritability, sudden mood swings, anxiety, anger, denial, fear, and/or may not be able to practice good hygiene. They may not be able to follow even the most basic of instructions.

Unfortunately, many first responders, advocates, members of law enforcement, prosecutors, counselors and other allied professionals, do not truly understand trauma and are not providing true trauma informed response and care. Too many victims of traumatic experiences are being harmed or re-traumatized by insensitive, uninformed, burnt-out, old school or inadequate community and criminal justice response. Further, many victims are unable to access justice often times due to the impact of trauma in their lives and resulting behaviors that are often misunderstood.

A trauma responsive investigation and prosecution (TRIP) enhances traditional responses in that it incorporates an understanding and application of how high stress and trauma impacts the human body and behavior and how to preserve and use evidence of trauma in the investigation and prosecution. This presentation will provide a general overview of traditional investigation techniques and methods, up-to-date research, case studies and emphasize preserving, corroborating and presenting evidence within the context of the whole experience. This presentation will also highlight advances in technology and forensic science that have investigative implications.

There are tangible changes we can make to improve how we capture experience and context by refining the way we corroborate impact, evidence of trauma and fear, understand and document changes in behavior, understanding decision making within context, improving our use of fact witnesses and properly preserving and presenting psychophysiological evidence.

Objectives:

- General overview of traditional criminal investigation methods
- Discuss challenges in investigations and prosecutions when trauma is not understood
- Discuss methods to corroborate, preserve and use evidence of the impact of stress and trauma
- Identify the impact of culture on judgments we make
- Highlight advances in technology and forensic science that have implications for investigation
- Identify what a trauma responsive court can look like