

# Postvention After Mass Violence: Toward a Trauma- Centered Community Response

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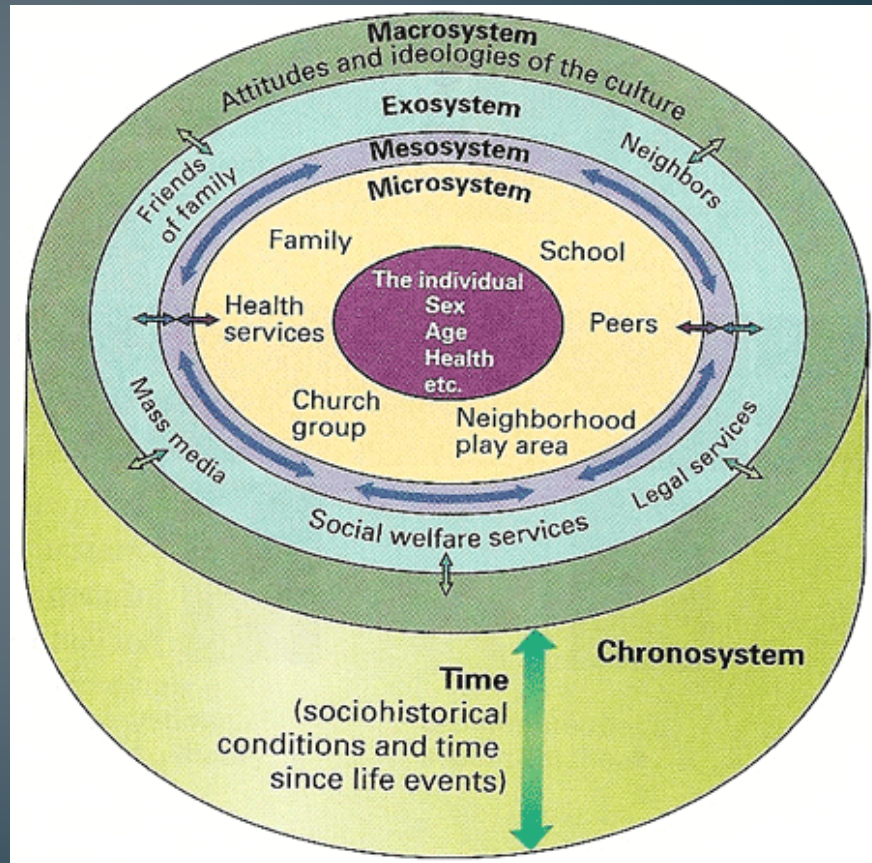
# In Tribute: Jennifer Irvine



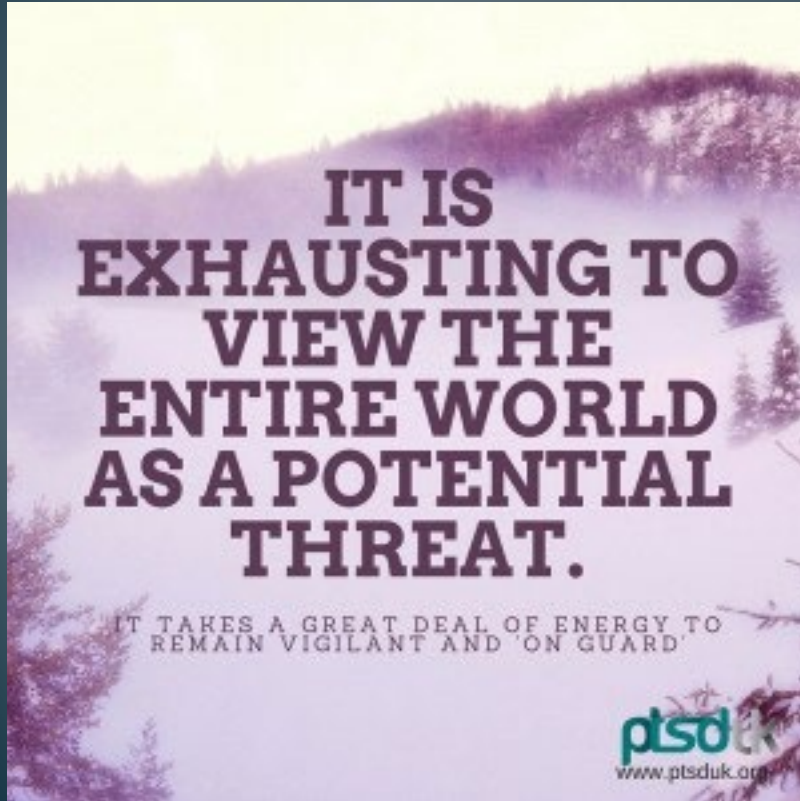
# Trauma-Centered Approach

- According to SAMHSA (2018), a program or system that is trauma-informed or trauma-centered:
  - *Realizes* the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery;
  - *Recognizes* the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system;
  - *Responds* by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices;
  - *Seeks to actively resist Re-traumatization.*

# Trauma-Centered Responses



# Effects of Trauma



## Short Term Effects

- Common experiences for survivors
  - Triggers
  - Initial physical reactions
  - Fear
  - Change in homeostasis

# Triggers for Route 91 Survivors

- Gun Sounds
- Jackhammers
- Helicopters
- Loud noises
- Flashing lights
- Alarms
- Crowds
- Sirens
- Certain tempos and beats
- Jason Aldean songs and/or country music
- Las Vegas
- Casinos
- Fireworks
- People that look like the shooter
- People who look like those who died
- Places that are similar to the location the shooting occurred (outdoor events)
- Places that are similar to locations where other shootings have occurred (e.g., movie theaters, malls)
- Violence in movies

# Long Term Effects

- Mental Health Concerns
  - PTSD
  - Depression
  - Substance Use
  - Suicidality
  - Co-occurring disorders
  - Agoraphobia and other anxiety disorders
- Loss or change in social networks
- Change in beliefs about the world, themselves, and others
- Grief
- Interruptions of life stages

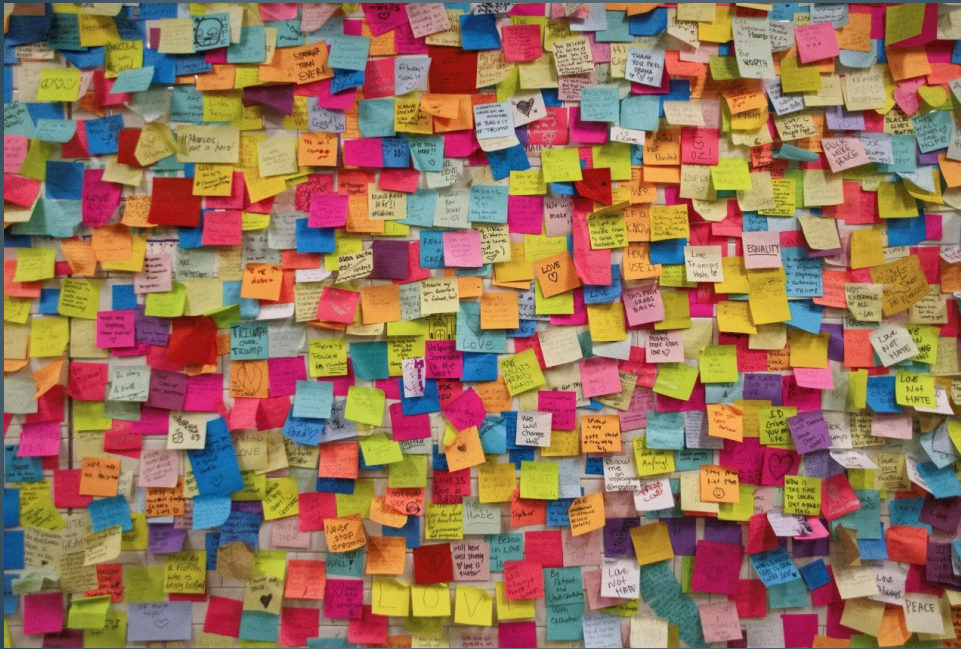
# Long Term Effects (cont.)

- Family conflict
- Guilt about how the shooting has affected loved ones, children
- Survivor guilt
- Financial Struggles
  - Barriers to financial support
- Spiritual questioning
- Medical Issues
- Post-traumatic Growth





# Neurobiology of Trauma



Rebecca Campbell (2012):  
*The neurobiology of sexual assault.*

- Flight, Flight or Freeze
- Tonic Immobility
  - Increase of self-blame
  - Common in people who have been traumatized before
  - Decrease in likelihood of help-seeking
- “Chemical cocktail”- mixed emotions
- Memory Impairment

# A traumatized community



## Short Term Effects

- Secondary Trauma
- Reminder of previous trauma
- Fear of more attacks
  - Prejudice



## Long Term Effects

- Changes in beliefs about the world, the community, other people
- Compassion fatigue
  - Loss of the “just world” illusion
- Family disruptions
- Continued fear



The background features a light gray gradient with numerous thin, vertical, teal-colored lines of varying lengths and positions, creating a textured, rain-like effect. A solid teal horizontal bar spans the width of the image, positioned in the lower half. The text 'Community postvention' is centered within this bar.

# Community postvention

# Postvention

- Postvention = College and university postvention is the provision of psychological support, crisis intervention and other forms of assistance to those affected by a campus tragedy (e.g., suicide or a death on campus).
- An evidence-based approach to suicide postvention has been outlined and created (e.g., The Jed Foundation, Higher Education Mental Health Alliance).
- We don't yet have a formal guide for postvention for mass casualty events.
  - *FBI is working on it for colleges.*

# Promoting Resiliency

- Protective factors: Factors that lead to resilience and protective factors that assist in healing
  - Social support
    - Online and in-person
  - Support of the survivor's changing identity
  - Opportunities to meet as a community
  - Education about trauma
    - Passive and active programming



- Identify vulnerable groups and reach out to those groups to offer support
- Before an incident occurs (and again afterward), share campus plans on how to handle an active shooter, postvention
  - It's time to educate!

# Mental Health Focused Activities



• Debriefings = NOT  
RECOMMENDED

- “Critical incident debriefing” may actually strengthen traumatic memories, impair natural recovery process.
- Many lay people still believe debriefing, prompting survivors to talk about the traumatic event, is helpful or necessary.

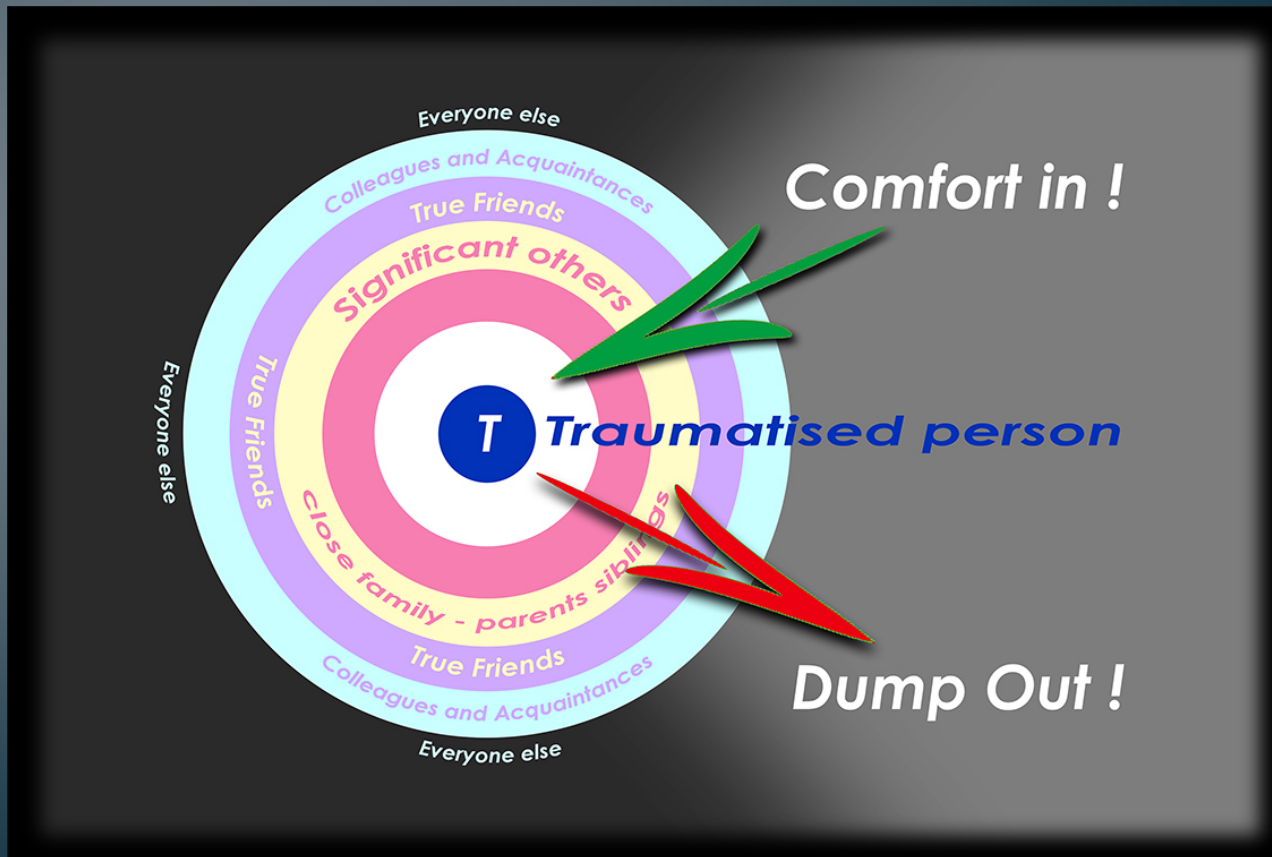


# Mental Health Focused Activities

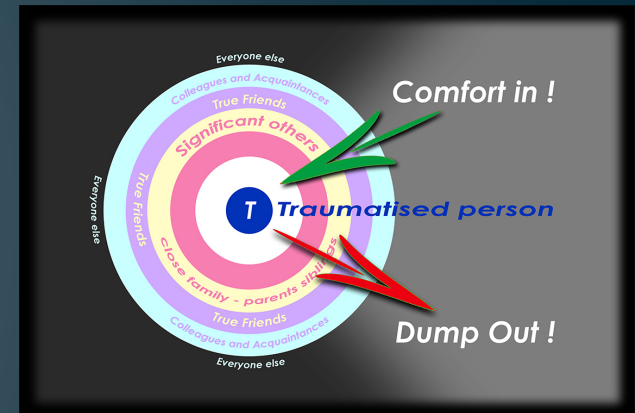
- Psychological First Aid = Recommended ✓
  - Secure safety, basic necessities
    - Food, medical supplies, shelter
  - Focus on increasing coping skills, not directly processing trauma
- Counseling drop-in hours in student friendly spaces ✓
- Family interventions ✓
- Mindfulness and coping skills programs ✓

# Ring Theory / Circles of Grief

Susan Silk & Barry Goldman (2013)



- The person in the center circle can cope any way he/she wants.
- The job of those in the larger circles is to listen and support.
- When talking to a person in a circle smaller than yours, remember that you are talking to someone *closer* to the tragedy. Your job is to help. You are not allowed to dump your anger, fear, grief, or needs to people in circles smaller than yours. Express these emotions to those in your circle or larger circles.
- The concept is simple:  
“Comfort in, dump out.”



# How to talk to survivors

## DON'Ts:

- Don't ask specific questions about the trauma unless the person invites you to discuss
- Avoid telling stories of trauma you had or heard about
- Avoid comparing grief
- Avoid making it a political conversation
- Avoiding clichés like “You're lucky to be alive”, “It's God's plan”, “This too shall pass”
- Don't assume anything about symptoms; not everyone gets PTSD

# How to talk to survivors

## DOs:

- Ask before engaging in any physical comfort
- Ask the person how they want to be supported
- Make space for the harder moments, rather than coming in immediately with encouragement
- Focus on the present, on what they are feeling right now; simply listen and keep company with them, with deep acceptance

# Communication and Memorials

- If there is a memorial:
  - Victim focused
  - Survivor supporting (hope, unity)
- Consider modifying campus rituals as needed, if perpetrator is connected to community  
Communication: See example letter to community (HEMHA)
- Notify relevant third parties
  - After-hours crisis services (e.g., ProtoCall)
- Minimize glorification/Don't name perpetrator(s)



# Resource sharing

- Victims of Crime
  - Financial support
  - Mental health
  - Medical support
- Passive advertising about resources
  - Table tops in dining halls, posters, social media, student newspaper
  - Course websites and syllabi
  - **Include suicide hotlines**
- Outside organizations specialized in trauma and psychological first aid
- Consult with Registrar, Admissions, Financial Aid, Residence Hall Director
  - Have numbers (for during & after hours) already stored in your phone.

# Survivor Support

- Reach out to the survivors about resources
- Know your community
  - Example: Students from Palo Alto
- Let survivors know about emergency drills
- Be aware of anniversaries
- Online communities and support groups
- Connection between communities
- Remind community that they are **NOT** obligated to speak with the media, even if asked direct questions
  - Campus Security can help keep reporters separated from all survivors who do not wish to engage w/them.



# Connection to online communities:

## Benefits

- Some communities not as open to talking about mental health & trauma; online can be safer, less stigma (Zhang, Eschler, & Madhu, 2018)
- Easy to access support without limitations of material resources
- Sharing & normalization of experiences
- Connecting with those who helped you
- Online communities can share information about mental health challenges; can lead to survivors making more informed choices about treatment (Zhang et al., 2018)
- Encouragement notes often shared between users
- Events (especially anniversaries); support at concerts, meet-ups
- Movies/TV shows: trigger warnings

# Connection to online communities: Downsides



- The support is different than in-person
  - Dopamine vs. Oxytocin release
- Comparison of experiences can increase survivor guilt
- Trolls
- Nonresponse to posts can lead to feeling a lack of support (Crook & Love, 2017)
- Exposure to distressing content (Crook & Love, 2017)
- Messages may be more negative
  - Young adult cancer survivor communities reported more anger and sadness online than in person; can be destructive if reinforcing negativity (Thompson, Crook, Love, Macpherson & Johnson, 2015)
- While there are many members, only a few are actually active, while the others are lurkers

- Educate yourself about the survivor group's culture
- Survivor Identity and empowerment
  - Tattoos and other identifying symbols
    - “Undo the shame”
  - Survivor rituals and acts of healing
    - 58 Acts of kindness
    - Birthday celebration fundraisers



# Media Considerations

- Counseling on what you may see in the media
- Being thoughtful of media use
  - Prep survivors: They may see themselves in the media
  - Airplane mode
- Educate student media about responsible reporting



# Recommendations

- Working group
- Systematic research
- White paper



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