

# *Reclaiming My Sexuality*

**Intimacy And Self-love After Trauma**

**Presented by  
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**Building a healthy community free from  
oppression and sexual trauma**

## Mission

To support survivors of sexual trauma, improve systems response, and create social change to end sexual violence.

## Sexual Trauma Awareness & Response

- Only stand alone sexual assault center in the state of **Louisiana**
- 2018- 2019 served **674** survivors and provided education to **564** community members
- **Advocacy, Counseling, Legal and Prevention** Services
- Services for **primary and secondary** survivors
- 3 offices: Alexandria, Baton Rouge and New Orleans

## Learning Objectives

As a result of this workshop, participants will be better able to...

1. Recognize the impacts that trauma has on sexuality.
2. Discuss the relationship between having a healthy view on sexuality and healing from sexual trauma.
3. Present the topic of healthy sexuality to survivors and provide them with additional resources

## Before we begin...

### Disclaimer & Trigger Warning

## Who's in the room?

Advocates, Mental Health Professionals,  
Support staff, Students, Others?

How many of you have participated  
in an open discussion/dialogue  
about **sex and sexuality** with...

- Friends?
- Partner(s)?
- Colleagues?
- Clients?

**Small Groups**

**What is the difference between  
intimacy and sexuality?**

**What messages have you  
received from your personal  
upbringing about sexuality?  
Intimacy?**

**What messages have you  
received from society  
about sexuality?  
Intimacy?**

**How would you define  
“healthy sexuality”?**

**Sexuality** is a central aspect of being human. It encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction.

Source: World Health Organization, 2006

**Healthy sexuality** is having the individual knowledge and sense of empowerment to express sexuality in ways that contribute positively to self-esteem and relationships with other people.

Source: "Healthy Sexuality: A guide for advocates, counselors and prevention educators," NSVRC, April 2012

**Sexual health** is a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity.



Source: World Health Organization, 2006

**Intimacy** is closeness between people in a personal relationship. It builds over time as you connect with someone, grow to care about someone, and feel more and more comfortable during your time together.

Source: "How to Understand and Build Intimacy in Every Relationship," Healthline, April 2019

## Types of Intimacy

**Experiential.** You share common activities, interests, or experiences that bring you together.

**Intellectual.** You bond through an exchange of ideas or deep, meaningful discussions.

**Emotional.** You share innermost feelings or form a spiritual connection.

**Sexual.** You have a close sensual relationship.

**How does sexual  
trauma affect  
sexual health?**

## Sexual Effects of Trauma

- Avoiding or being afraid of sex
- Approaching sex as an obligation
- Experiencing negative feelings such as anger, disgust, or guilt with touch
- Having difficulty becoming aroused or feeling a sensation
- Feeling emotionally distant or not present during sex

## Sexual Effects of Trauma

- Experiencing intrusive or disturbing sexual thoughts and images
- Engaging in compulsive or inappropriate sexual behaviors
- Experiencing difficulty establishing or maintaining an intimate relationship
- Experiencing vaginal pain or orgasmic difficulties
- Experiencing erectile or ejaculatory difficulties

**Sexual health is an important part of overall physical and mental well being and has an impact on quality of life.**

**But despite its importance, embarrassment and discomfort in discussing sexual health issues remains a barrier—both for clients and providers.**

## **Barriers to Healthy Sexuality**

What **barriers** exist that interfere with an survivor's ability to discuss healthy sexuality after trauma?

## Survivors

- Feeling embarrassed, guilty or having no self-confidence
- Shame at being sexual
- Believing they should be able to sort out their own problems
- Fear of judgment
- Not feeling entitled to have sex
- Thinking the professional should start the conversation

## As Providers

- We don't want to offend the client
- We are worried that a sexual conversation might be misconstrued by the client
- We may not link healthy sexuality as a solution to the client's problem
- We think the client should start the conversation

We're not comfortable talking about sex

## How can we help survivors regain their sexual health?

### As providers

- Acknowledge trauma and its influence on sexuality.
- Help create a new meaning for sex.
- Help develop a positive sense of sexual self-esteem
- Develop skills of assertiveness and self awareness
- Identify and stop negative sexual behaviors that recreate abuse and block sexual recovery.

## As providers

- Work with them and their partner to gain an understanding about trauma, it's impacts, choice, trust, respect, safety, and equality
- Encourage sexual exploration, alone and with a partner
- Provide communication skills for discussions about any sexual desire, fantasy, and functioning problems

## Tools

Educating Clients About Healthy Sexuality

- Characteristics of Sexually Healthy Adults
- Continuum of Sexual Behaviors
- Additional Resources

## **A sexually healthy adult will...**

- Be comfortable with their body.
- Know that human development includes sexual development, which may or may not include reproduction or sexual experience.
- Have access to information and resources to protect and enhance their own sexual health.

## **A sexually healthy adult will...**

- Engage in sexual relationships that are consensual, non-exploitative, honest, pleasurable, and safe.
- Express their sexuality while respecting the rights of others.
- Interact with all genders in respectful and appropriate ways.

## **A sexually healthy adult will...**

- Know the difference between life- enhancing sexual behaviors and those that are harmful to self and/or others.
- Communicate well with family, peers and romantic partners.
- Express their sexuality in ways that are in line with their values.

## **A sexually healthy adult will...**

- Be aware of the impact of family, cultural, media, and societal messages on thoughts, feelings, values, and behaviors related to sexuality.
- Enjoy sexual feelings without necessarily acting on them.

## **A sexually healthy adult will...**

- **Accept one's own sexual orientation and respect the sexual orientations of others.**
- **Accept one's own gender identities and respect the gender identities of others.**

Adapted from the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States' Life Behaviors of a Sexually Healthy Adult demonstrate healthy sexuality (SIECUS, 2004, p. 16)

## **Continuum of Sexual Behaviors**

**Sexual behaviors can be viewed as part of a continuum, ranging from harmful to unhealthy to healthy.**



CONTINUUM OF SEXUAL BEHAVIORS

	Harmful	Unhealthy	Healthy
Dynamics	<p><b>Sexual interactions are nonconsensual</b> (one or more of the following conditions is met):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not legally age-appropriate</li> <li>One partner is unconscious, asleep, or has limited mental awareness due to alcohol/drug use</li> <li>One partner violates another's sexual boundaries using force/physical domination</li> <li>One partner violates another's sexual boundaries using coercion or manipulation (e.g. explicit or implied threats, intimidation, guilt tripping, or other forms of pressure).</li> </ul> <p><b>Sexual interactions involve a repetitive, cyclical pattern of physical and/or emotional abuse.</b></p> <p><b>Sexual interactions may be criminal or non-criminal.</b> (Behavior may be legal <b>and</b> harmful/abusive.)</p> <p><b>Sexual interactions are characterized by a lack of respect.</b> One partner is primarily interested in how they can exploit/benefit from the other person through manipulation, coercion, or force.</p> <p><b>Sexual relationship contains unequal power dynamics.</b></p> <p><b>Partners buy in to rigid gender roles and stereotypes,</b> believing that women or feminine individuals must be submissive and men or masculine individuals should be dominant; that men naturally deserve sexual access to women's bodies; or that men can be sexually experienced but women must be "pure."</p> <p><b>One or more partners do not communicate about, understand, or acknowledge the other's emotional needs and desires.</b></p>	<p><b>Sexual interactions are consensual</b> (all of the following conditions are met):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legally age-appropriate</li> <li>Conscious &amp; Aware</li> <li>Mutual agreement</li> <li>Absence of force, coercion, or manipulation</li> </ul> <p><b>Partners do <u>not</u> communicate openly and in-depth</b> about many important aspects of themselves and their relationship, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sexual values</li> <li>Sexual health status and STI prevention/birth control</li> <li>Relationship boundaries, status, expectations, and intentions</li> <li>Emotions and thoughts related to sexual interactions and relationship</li> <li>How prior experiences (positive and negative) impact their perspectives on sexual interactions</li> <li>Sexual desires, preferences, and boundaries; what is pleasurable for them (and what is not) during sexual interactions</li> </ul> <p><b>One partner is more interested in what they can get from the other person than in being considerate and respectful of the other's feelings, concerns, values, and choices.</b></p> <p><b>One or more partners lack basic information about human sexual health and development.</b></p> <p><b>Partners may or may not find pleasure in sexual interactions with one another.</b></p>	<p><b>Sexual relationships are equitable.</b></p> <p><b>Sexual interactions are enthusiastically consensual</b> (all of the following conditions are met):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legally age-appropriate</li> <li>Conscious &amp; Aware</li> <li>Mutually enthusiastic verbal and physical agreement</li> <li>Absence of force, coercion, or manipulation</li> </ul> <p><b>Partners are mutually informed of and openly communicate on an ongoing basis about:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sexual values</li> <li>Sexual health status and STI prevention/birth control</li> <li>Relationship boundaries, status, expectations, and intentions</li> <li>Emotions and thoughts related to sexual interactions and relationship</li> <li>How prior experiences (positive and negative) impact their perspectives on sexual interactions</li> <li>Sexual desires, preferences, and boundaries; what is pleasurable for them (and what is not) during sexual interactions</li> </ul> <p><b>Partners respect each other's implied or stated boundaries around sexual activity.</b></p> <p><b>Partners are considerate of each other's feelings, concerns, values, and choices.</b></p> <p><b>Partners are informed about basic sexual health and human development.</b></p> <p><b>Partners find pleasure in sexual interactions with one another, care about each other's enjoyment during sexual interactions, and support each other in discovering what is pleasurable for them.</b></p>

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Questions?

## Additional Resources

- Association of Reproductive Health Professionals. "Talking to Patients About Sexuality and Sexual Health" (2008). Retrieved from <http://www.arhp.org/publications-and-resources/clinical-fact-sheets/sexuality-and-sexual-health>.
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