



Sexual violence in war – a crime against humanity. Mental health consequences and supporting survivors

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Sexualised Gender-Based Violence in war and conflict



- *A very high number of all women in war and conflict experience one or more kinds of gender-based violence*
- Bosnian war: some estimates - 20 000 cases, others 50 000....
- Estimates of rape during the 1994 Rwandan genocide range from 250 000 to 500 000 individuals.
- More than three quarters (75%) of Liberian women were raped during the country's civil war
- The Democratic Republic of the Congo - "tens of thousands" of women raped during the conflict spanning more than a decade from the mid-1990s
- Conflict in Colombia: more than 15 000 women and girls suffered sexual violence, including rape, during Colombia's civil war



What happens in Ukraina today?

Women being raped in front of their children.....

Allegations of sexual abuse by russian troops against senior citizens as well as on minors in different places in the country

A women said - "Irpın is Hell. They rape women and the dead are just being dumped"

Women are raped after their husbands have been killed....

Dreadful examples of violations taking place while persons are seeking protection

Ukraine's attorney general, Iryna Venediktova, announced the first rape charges against a Russian soldier

Charges about war crimes are being raised in court !!

Rape and other forms of sexual violence are prohibited in both international and non-international armed conflicts

Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions prohibits “violence to life and person”, including cruel treatment and torture and “outrages upon personal dignity”, which includes sexual violence

How was Sexual and gender based violence in war dealt with before 1990?

- In most cases, abusers were not convicted
- Seen as “collateral damage” - it happens in all wars
- Not considered politically relevant
- Conflict related sexual violence under-reported
- No documentation or systematic research
- Not part of the human rights agenda
- But Civil Society action and awareness about what was happening changed this....



The widespread rapes of women during the war in the former Yugoslavia led to global attention

- The Security Council's Commission of Experts, investigated violations of international humanitarian law in the former Yugoslavia (Resolution 780, 6 October 1992) and identified **systematic sexual assault as a priority** in its report (UN, 1993 a; UN, 1998)
- The Security Council's resolution 798 (18 December 1992) identified "massive, organized and systematic detention and rape of women, in particular Muslim women, in Bosnia and Herzegovina" as "**acts of unspeakable brutality**" and urged further investigation
- The UN Commission of Human Rights special rapporteur on violence against women concluded that the sexual violence served as "**instruments of ethnic cleansing**" (UN, 1993 b; UN, 1998).

In 1993 the Statute of the **International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY)** included **rape as a crime against humanity**, as well as the crimes of torture and extermination

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR, 1994) decided that **rape constituted a war crime and a crime against humanity** and was the first international court to find an accused person guilty of rape as a crime of genocide.

Finally, the **Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC)(2002)**, included wartime **sexual violence in its list of crimes against humanity and war crimes** (art. 7 & 8) and defined sexual violence as *“rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity”*.



Navi Pillay, former UN High commissioner for human rights, 2014

- "Victims of sexual violence bear the cost of the harm they suffered with dramatic physical, psychological and material consequences which destroy not only their lives but often also the lives of their children.
- This creates irreparable damage to the very fabric of societies and in turn poses serious threats to the prospects of reconciliation and sustainable peace and development"



UN Security Council resolutions

- **SC Resolution 1325 (2000)**

For the first time, women's security is considered relevant to international peace and security by the UN Security Council

- **SC Resolution 1820 (2008)**

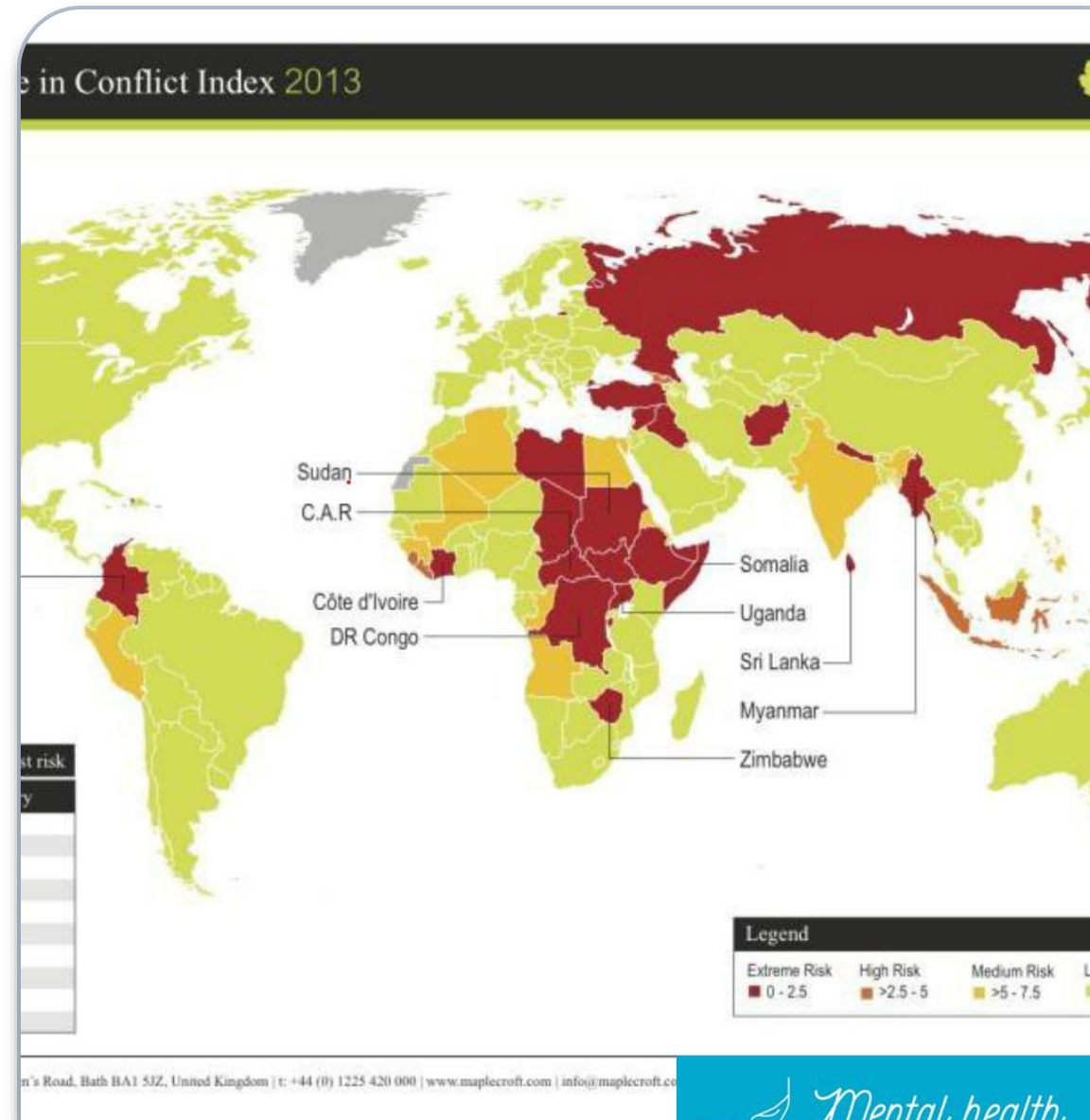
Recognizes sexualized violence in conflict as a weapon and tactic in war, also war crimes and crimes against humanity

- **SC Resolution 1888 (2009)**

- **SC Resolution 1960 (2010)**

- **SC Resolution 2106 (2013)**

- **SC Resolution 2331 (2016) and 2467 (2019)**



The rights of the victims ?



- ***The recognition of sexual Violence under International humanitarian and Human rights law – as crime of war, crime against humanity, implies the right to justice and redress***
- ***This means that the right to redress is enforceable for victims of GBV according to the UN Convention Against Torture, article 14***

The severe consequences of sexual violence

- Individual survivor – world torn apart, shame, alone, frozen out
- Family and group – the violence has been regarded as part of ethnic cleansing
- Community – aimed at destroying society from within
- The present – difficult to deal with the traumas, shame and isolation
- The future....little hope – often exclusion – but some communities mobilize....
- And then - the many CHILDREN BORN OF RAPE

Urgent.....

There is a strong need to establish good mental health assistance and support to women, children and men who have suffered this form of violence

Advocate for an approach where mental health, psychosocial support and somatic care is provided as an integrated assistance

This requires helpers that are prepared and ready to provide such assistance

The work should be based on human rights principles and have a human rights- based approach

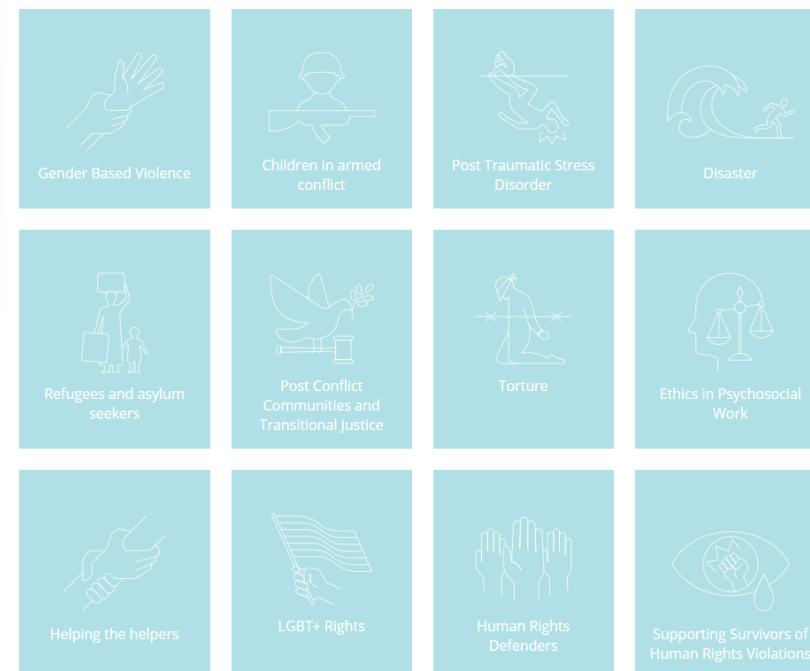


Mental Health and Human Rights Info is a resource database providing free information about the consequences of human rights violations on mental health in contexts of disaster, conflict and war.

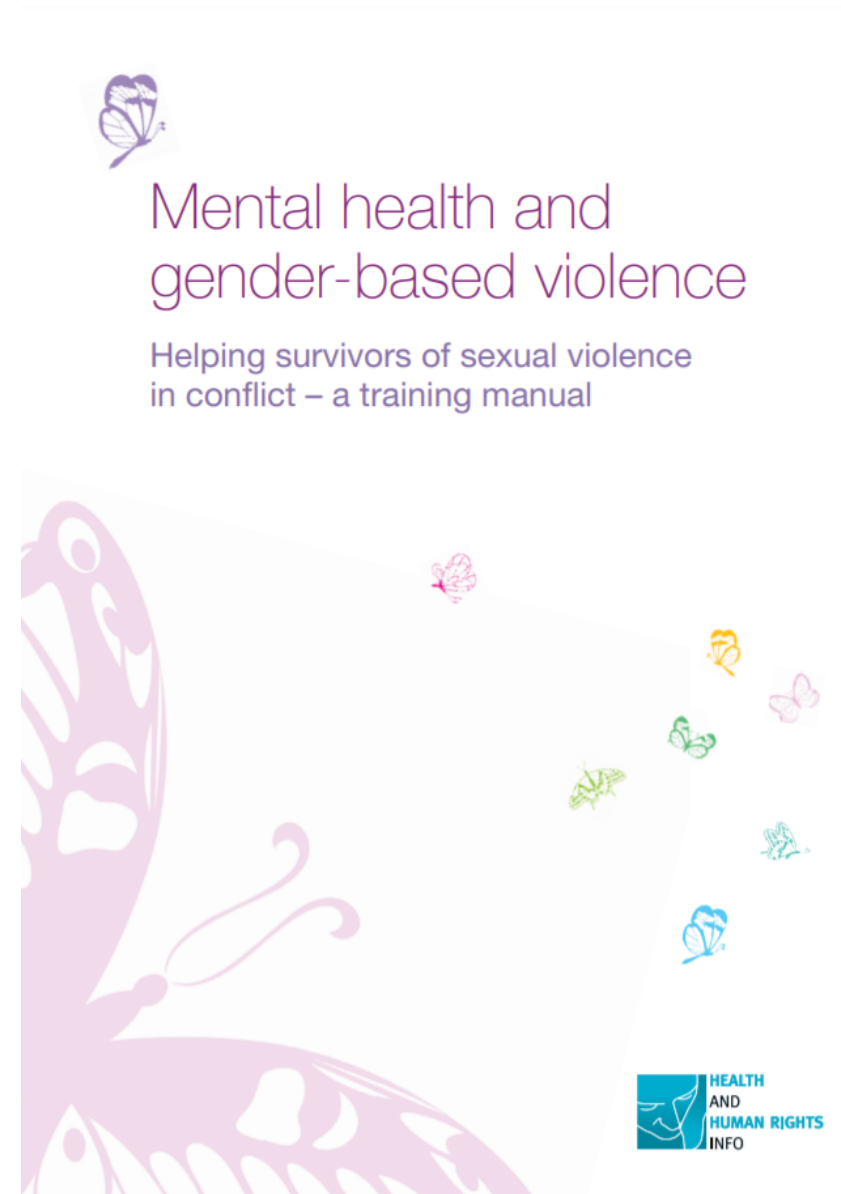
www.hhri.org

We share information in English and Spanish through:

- A database with more than 800 links
- A thematic page with selected topics
- A page for our Gender based violence manual (women, men, girls and boys)
- A page for you as a survivor



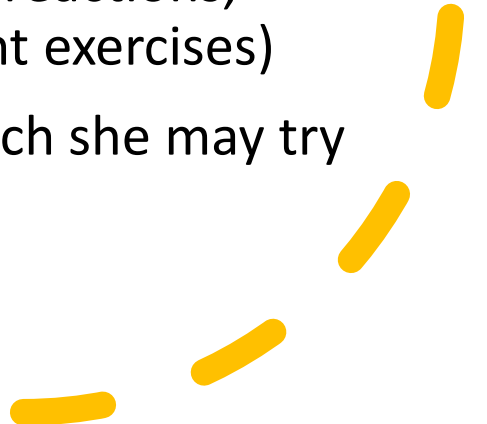
- **A human rights-based approach**
 - **GBV as human rights violations**
- **Gender sensitive**
- **Therapeutic metaphor**
 - **The Butterfly Woman**
- **Psycho-educative**
 - **Mental health and trauma**
- **Resource oriented**
 - **Survivor and helper**
- **Body-oriented exercises**
 - **Grounding exercises**
- **'Helping the helpers**
- **Cultural sensitivity and adaptations**



What can we say – what can we do? Some messages

- She has been exposed to a very serious crime, torture, war crime or crime against humanity – totally prohibited human rights violations – serious acts of injustice!!
- She does not need to speak or explain, as helper you know she is in deep pain, you are there for her, respecting her, wanting to be of help....but she decides - you try to establish some trust – and keep some physical distance if possible
- You can tell her that they have **not** taken her dignity or humanity away, nobody can do that, but «they make you feel differently about everything that you may have taken for natural parts of your life, including yourself» – this is part of the evil done to her

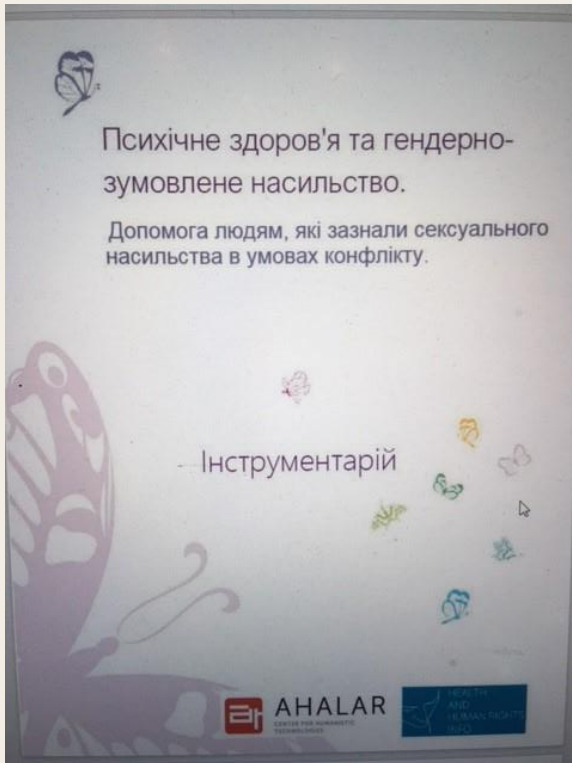
Problematic feelings and reactions

- She may feel that all control in her life is gone – her reactions, emotions and thoughts are overwhelmingly painful, different, not her any more – she is afraid she is losing her mind – her reactions frighten her
 - She may feel shame and have guilt-feelings following the violent incident – listen and try to reformulate – never argue, never push
 - She should be helped to understand that her reactions are reactions that very frequently follow such violence, they even be intended consequences (psychoeducation on trauma and trauma reactions)
 - She may learn ways of dealing with these reactions, including triggers, flashbacks etc. (different exercises)
 - And you can help her to learn ways in which she may try to calm herself, difficult but possible.....
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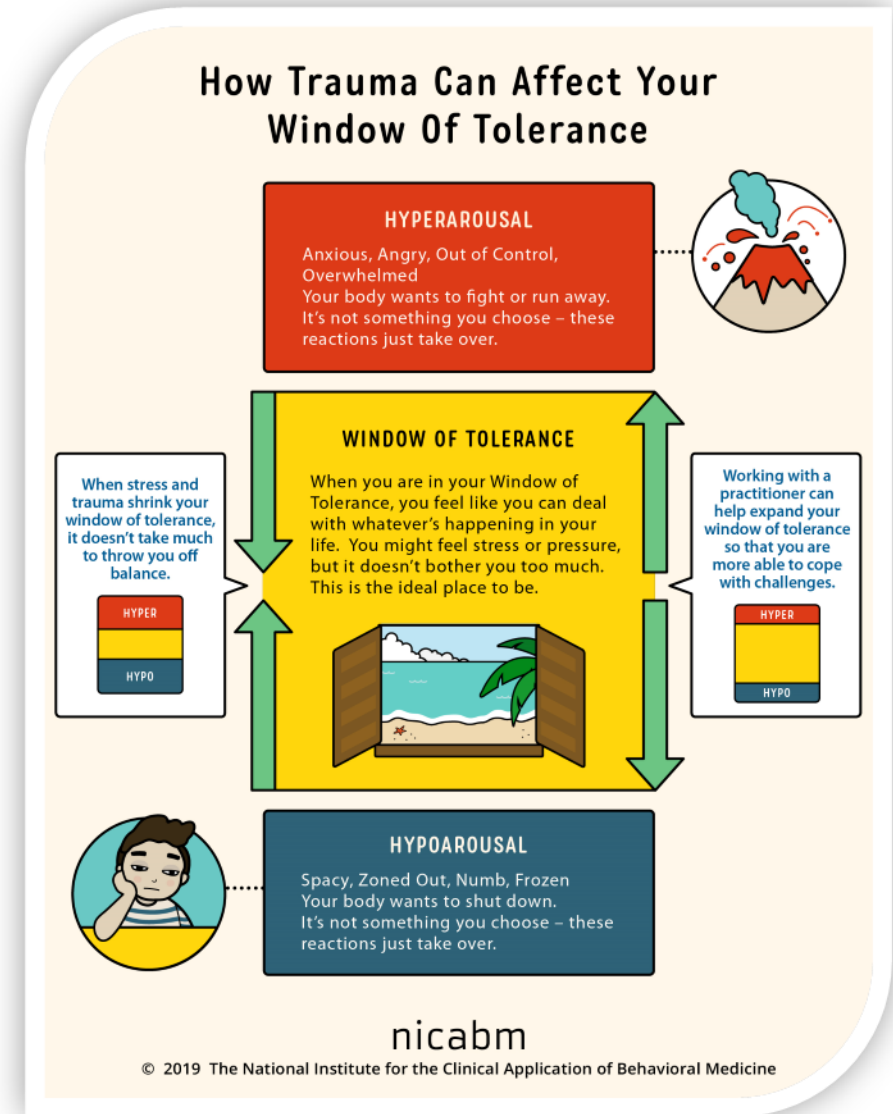
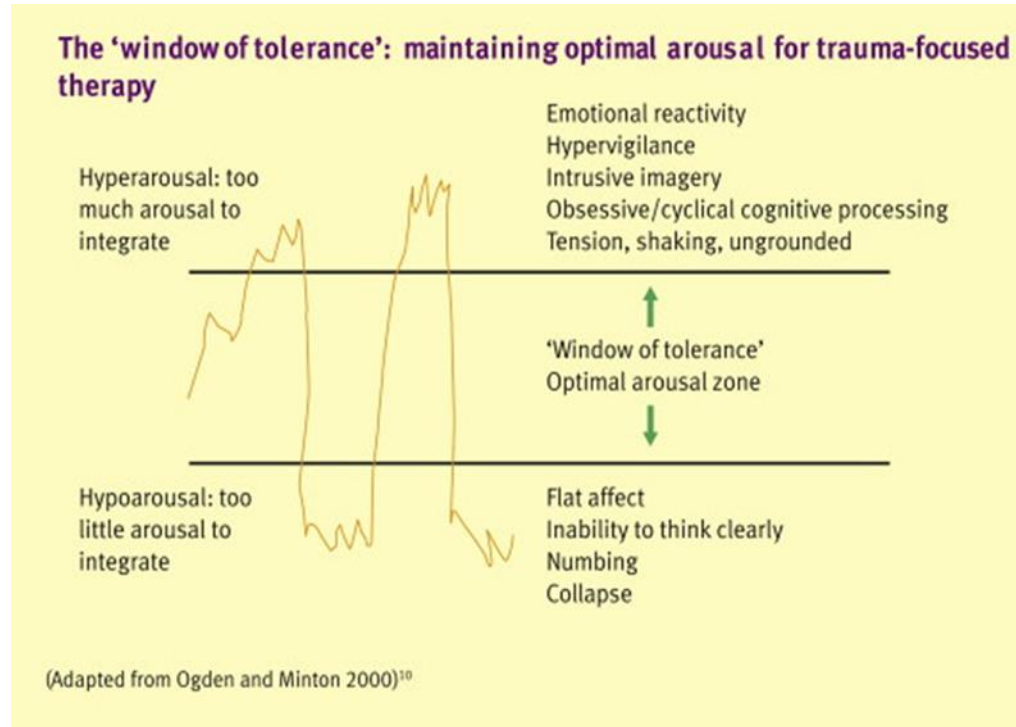
As helpers

- You must establish a safe a place as possible
- You understand the reactions of the survivors
- You assure her that you understand she is in pain
- You may try to explain her reactions by saying these are expected reaction in such violent situations
- You may use some of the tools f.e. the Window of Tolerance, and other metaphors – “Butterfly Women” to talk about the pain in a more indirect way
- You may try to calm her by using grounding exercises – working through the body
- And you must take care of yourself as a helper (you can use the same techniques to calm down)

The toolbox – a compilation of resource for helpers



The window of tolerance



A large orange circle is positioned on the left side of the slide, partially cut off by the edge.

Speak about Triggers - traumareminers

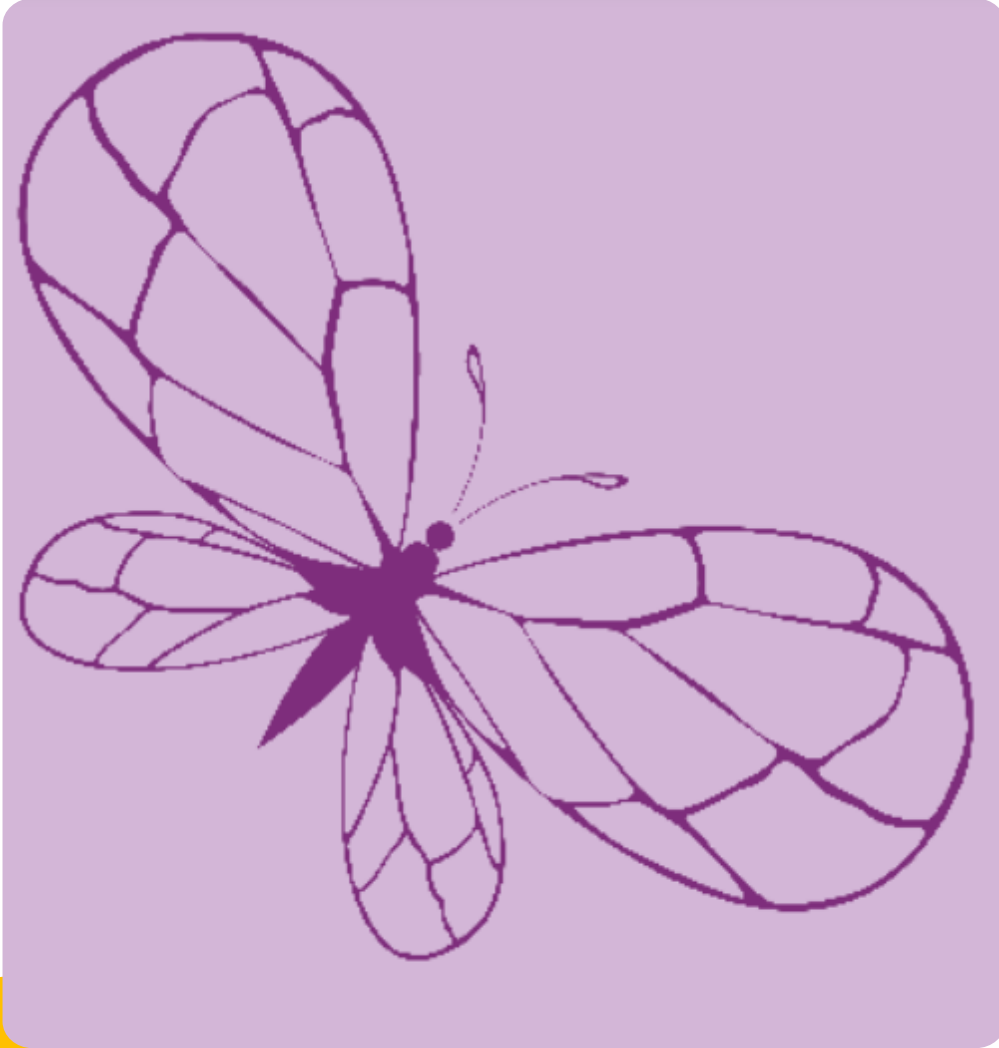
- “Triggers” are trauma-reminders - events or situations that remind victimised persons of their painful experiences and memories.
- Such reminders may elicit trauma reactions over and over again.



Identifying triggers


- It is important to recognize what causes you to be triggered.
- It can be a great help to sort out the different types of triggers.





To deal with triggers

- If you consistently try to avoid all triggers, they may be more comprehensive and stronger.
- The most important part of handling triggers is
 - to identify them,
 - to become familiar with them
 - to become familiar with your reactions to them
- Nevertheless, it may sometimes be necessary to prevent or limit exposure to certain triggers, in order to be able to deal with everyday life and stay within their "window of tolerance".




Stabilization and useful exercises

An approach that helps to

- handle trauma-related reactions
- improve the ability to be present in the here and now

Knowing about the effects of trauma helps survivors better understand their own stress responses.

Knowledge of coping strategies provides a sense of control over these responses.



What is stabilization?



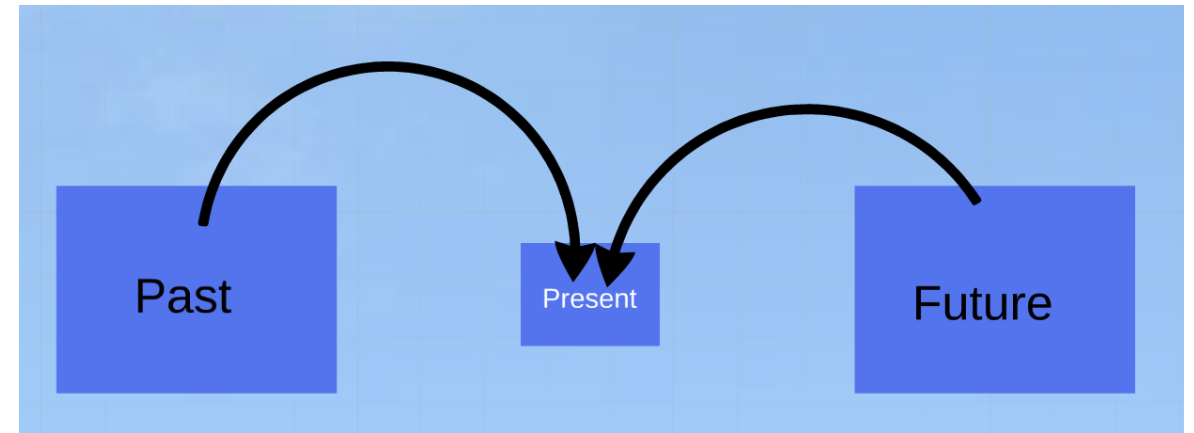
It is important that the survivor is present in the here and now.



That the survivor is stable. Some traumatized survivors can go from being stable to unstable during your meeting and need to be stabilized before we can start or continue talking.



This will be one of the tools you have working with survivors.



GROUNDING EXERCISES

- A method for handling strong emotions of fear or triggers, when a memory 'takes over' and is experienced as if it happens in the present. Grounding exercises can help a survivor to reconnect:
 - • With the present moment in time
 - • With the here and now
 - • With her body, and reassert personal control
 - • To the safe context of the room in which she is
- Grounding is one way to reduce reactions or symptoms of anxiety or panic that threaten to overwhelm a survivor.



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Thank you

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