When Adults Can’t See Me: Navigating Youth Survivorship

Presented by Amanda Lindamood
Director of Training & Community Engagement, DC Rape Crisis Center
alindamood@dcrcc.org 202-618-5089
Aspects of Power to Consider

- Self interest
- Power level/position and or structure
- Consequences
- Methodology
- Expectations
- Associations/references
- Beliefs/priorities
- Rules for use/community agreements
- Dominant messages
- Contradictory messages
Types of Power

- Power Over (Differential, force, coercion)
- Power With (Consent)
- Power Within (Empowerment)

When accessing support, such as through a hotline or in counseling, we are in a power over relationship (provider plus client)

- *In our societal norms, adult and youth relationships function as power over relationships*
Power in Relationships

• Trust, boundaries and safety are closely related. Power and choice inform our understanding of who we can trust, who believes us, who we are safe with and when we are in control.

Group Think—what kind of relationship is this?
• Parent and child, Teacher and student, Principal and teacher, Two people dating, Two friends, Older and younger sibling, Police officer and kid, Doctor and patient, Waitress and customer, Faith leader and community member

Helpful Clues:
• Who makes decisions
• Who decides consequences
• Who controls information
Power over versus Power with

- Safety and trust are present in any kind of relationship you are in to varying amounts. Knowing what type of relationship you are in helps you make informed decisions about your boundaries and needs.

- Any relationship where power is not equally shared is an example of a power over relationship. Any relationship controlled by rules and policies includes an institution or a series of connected institutions.
Key Observations/Takeaways

• What power do we have in power over versus power with relationships?
• What decisions do we get to make for ourselves?
• Relationships can be between people, an institution, or a structure—a series of institutions.
Assessing for Power

Helpful Clues: Interpersonal
• 1) Who makes decisions
• 2) Who decides consequences

Helpful Clue: Institutional/Structural
• 1) What are the rules
• 2) Who controls resources
• 3) How do different parts talk about, work with and depend on other parts?
The Importance of Informed Consent

A crisis is a time of intense difficulty, trouble, or danger, restricting our access to problem solving.

When considering sharing personal information about yourself, especially in a state of crisis, it is APPROPRIATE to feel cautious. This isn’t just youth.

How do you decide where to seek support? Dynamics to remember:

- *Negotiating Boundaries: Balancing safety and consent concerns*
- Mandated reporting and advocate privilege-trust with people vs. systems
- “Power Over” Relationships vs. Peer to Peer Relationships
What is adultism?

- Power and Abusive Power—Impact and Vulnerability
- Responses: distrust, apathy, manipulation, anger, rebellion, secrecy, anger, angst, distance/dissociation, instability (crises and coping)

What do we let young people have control over?

- Needs: Honesty, Privacy, Safety, Control
- Factors: Dependency, Access and restriction, Available support
Allowing for consent..by providing informed consent to young people

Individual Question: What do these words mean to you? Please type your answers in the chat box. Feel free to think more broadly than SV.

Consent
Force
Informed Consent
Recognizing cues of non-consent
Consent as a mindset

Consent Communication examines the following questions:

• How is consent given and asked for?
• Whose responsibility is consent?
• What gets in the way of clear communication?
Consent as a skill set

*Consent Communication uses the following Skills:*

- Offering alternatives
- Voicing your needs
- Visible signs of asserting no and asserting yes
- Being able—do I feel comfortable?
- Am I equipped—do I have ways (examples & practice) to give and ask for consent?
- Language--How to ask
- Put words to likes/dislikes
- Practicing stopping when no is said, when stop is said
- How to respond when the other person says what you don’t want to hear
- Feelings and self awareness
Setting common language

What is consent?
• Consent is agreement to do something, permission for something to happen. It is given freely with a shared understanding of circumstances, and can be revoked by one or multiple parties at any time. Legally, consent is given freely and soberly.

What is rape culture?
• Rape culture refers to the attitudes, norms, and beliefs that reinforce that sexual assault is normal and tolerated. It is a way of socializing acceptance of sexual violence and promoting myths.
Sharing power...power with

Healthy Relationships

Accountability
- Admits mistakes (or when wrong)
- Accepts responsibility for behaviors, attitudes, & values

Safety
- Refusing to intimidate or manipulate
- Respecting physical space
- Expressing self non-violently

Cooperation
- Asking not expecting
- Accepting change
- Making decisions together
- Willing to compromise
- Win-win resolutions to conflict

Respect

Trust
- Accepting each others word
- Giving the benefit of the doubt

Honesty
- Communicates openly and truthfully

Support
- Support each others choices
- Being understanding
- Offering encouragement
- Listening non-judgmentally
- Valuing opinions

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Spiral Model

1. People's experiences
2. Patterns
3. Add information and new theory
4. Practice skills, strategies, and plan for action
5. Apply in action
Responsive, participant led
Creating a culture of safety
Reflection Question

• What things come to mind when we think of the needs of adult survivors?
  
  Confidentiality, physical safety, to be believed, control returned, etc.
Reflection Question

• Do teen survivors have different needs?
Examining Our Responses

• In the most literal sense, all of our thinking and responses to sexual violence experienced by young people is filtered through our understanding of child sexual abuse.

*What are the pros and cons of this approach?*

• **Pros**—acknowledges power dynamics, incentivizes institutional accountability

• **Cons**—one sized approach, disconnected from young person’s priorities
Reflection Question

• When you compare this to needs, what do you notice?
• What do we expect of kids that we do not expect of adults? Why?
Context & Unique Needs

**Impacting factors**: age, Identity, security, prior trauma, mental health, support system, family response, relationship of offender, etc.

**Coping and behavior changes**
- May have no physical signs
- Recognize symptoms of anxiety
- Sudden emotional or behavioral changes

**Misperceptions**
- Trauma often the root of what we label as difficult or bad behavior
- Many ways of coping involve high risk behaviors
- Nontraditional warning signs
Bringing in Child Development

A couple of points about how children learn

• Children rely on feedback from others to determine how to behave, manage emotions and draw conclusions to process their experiences
• Children have less experiences to compare new information against, accelerating the internalization of thoughts and feelings
• Children are aware of their dependency on adults to meet their needs
• Children are astute to contradiction of information and erratic vs. consistent responses
Child Development...A Lens

Stages of Psychosocial Development

- Infant
- Toddler
- Pre-schooler
- Grade-schooler
- Teenager
- Young Adult
- Middle-age Adult
- Older Adult

Proposed by Erik Erikson
A New Term...Developmental Trauma

• Developmental trauma occurs when a child experiences trauma, abuse and/or neglect during the first three years of their life. The trauma impacts the child’s cognitive, neurological and psychological development and attachment to adult caregivers.

• Complex trauma: the experience of multiple and/or chronic, ongoing usually interpersonal traumatic events, that usually start during childhood.
Developmental Trauma

• Necessary to look at developmental stage at time of trauma
  • Brain development
  • Level of reasoning and perception
  • Level of dependency
  • Experiences of attachment

• Symptom presentation will be different for infants, toddlers, school age and teenagers, adults

• Developmental stage is linked to access to support, available coping skills and tools for intervention and restored control
Limits of behavior

How does trauma shows up and inform behavior?

• *Symptoms and common responses to trauma are involuntary and intended to be time limited.*

• A traumatized person in crisis experiences disruptions in their support system, resulting in unmet needs.

• Frequently there is a breakdown in using community and internal resources for support.

• **Examples of survivor needs include**: an empowered voice, ability to self soothe, a sense of internal safety, social support and the ability to access outside support.
Reality confronts Perception

- Outside of pros and cons, there’s the reality of existing models. An aspect of that reality is that it does not adequately reflect the spectrum of scenarios and needs that youth present with, or their perceptions.
Expanding the Options

• Disclosure—voluntary versus involuntary; at the time versus after the fact; partial versus recanted; peer to peer; young person to adult; young person to caregiver; young person to school personnel; Adult on behalf of young person; “he said she said”; hotline

• Discovery—social media post; school camera; bystander account; witness an incident; rumors of an incident; in response to a mandated report; anonymous tip

• Suspicion—apparent mental health challenges; change in behavior; high risk behaviors; change in friend group; change in family dynamics; crisis state; self harm
What are the additional barriers/factors involved for youth?

- Perception of confidentiality—did the young person know what could happen next, were they involved in the process, were they informed as it was happening?
- Did the young person disclose to anyone—are they on our radar?
- Revictimization
- Recanting
- Perception of credibility
- Conflict in youth versus adult priorities
- What services did the young person access? What related needs are present?
- Multiple factors of unsafety—fear of being outed, homelessness, immigration status, lack of peer support, financial needs, ongoing relationships with perpetrators and bystanders, others involved/vulnerable to violence ability status, health status, etc.
- Response of first adult or peer
- Policies and procedures—what rights do youth have? Do they know their rights?
What young people are asking for

“The response that a person receives from the people around them after a traumatic event is neurologically, emotionally, and psychologically more important than the event itself.”

What Young People want to know after disclosure:

• Who is involved now
• Who has decision making power
• What are the consequences of those decisions
• How will information about me be used and shared
Considerations for you:

When working with a survivor:

- *Transference and counter transference:* Who am I to this person (a friend, a parent figure)? Who are they to me? Do they remind me of other children in my life? Is that impacting my choices?

- *Adultism:* Am I automatically assuming that I know better without listening first?

- *Informed Consent:* have I been completely clear about what is going to happen next, including what is required by law/my agency/my ethics?

- *Advocacy and Safety Planning:* Have I made the survivor my partner in making the decisions that have to be made? Have I given them as many choices as I possibly can? Have I helped them form a plan to manage what happens next?

- *Vicarious Trauma:* Did I take steps after this session to care for myself and assess my own needs?
Questions to Ask Yourself

• Informed Consent
What can I personally control? What can the young person control? Does this young person know this?

• Transparency
What do I need to know? What does the young person need to know?

• Advocacy
What is the young person’s perception of me? What are they asking for? What are their needs as I understand them? How can I support them in meeting their stated needs/making informed choices?

• Accountability
How can I build rapport? How can I increase the young person’s trust in me and decrease their experience of re-traumatization?
Institutional questions:

• Are the policies and procedures available and visible before the moment of disclosure?

• Have we as an organization taken steps to ensure that there is no discrimination at play in our agency?

• Do survivors know they can access other, confidential resources without disclosing (such as hotlines, etc)?

• Has your organization spoken about its capacity to serve sexual assault survivors? Does it understand its strengths and weaknesses in this area?

• Structurally: Structural Violence; Power Over Relationships, Service Gaps
Relationships with Institutions are ALWAYS Power Over...*for youth so are interactions with advocates*

- Age is linked to service eligibility and policies around reporting, police involvement and parental notification
- When you have less power in a power-over relationship, giving away personal information often means giving up independent control of a decision that affects you
- Control and access to resources can feel mutually exclusive—perception influences behavior
A Few Anecdotal Lessons

• Young people describe feeling out of control and powerless in decisions that affect them

• Youth developers articulate a tension between the limits of their role, policies they are bound to, an urgent desire to protect young people, and unresolved feelings from their own adolescence

• Environmental factors—including the imbalance of power between youth and adults--serve as additional sources of trauma, contributing to cycles of concealing coping mechanisms to manage ongoing periods of crisis
Take Aways for Advocates:
1. Alternatives to Systems Matter.
2. We Need to Invest in Community Based, Peer to Peer, Confidential (and Anonymous) Resources.

Engaging families and youth—coordinated responses
• Guidelines for engaging with adults
• Roles and Responsibilities
• Caregiver Discretion

Advocacy and Education—personal body safety and consent
• Guidelines for engaging with children
• How to respect children’s boundaries
• Guidelines for programming with children (Communication, boundaries, consent, emotions)
Outside of Formal Advocacy: Scenarios for Youth Initiated Safety Planning

Safety Planning that is Customized
• Utilizing available support in environment (resourcing in space)
• Self Advocacy (self directed)
• Peer to Peer
• Youth to Adult

For Chronic Crisis Periods
• Proactive plans deal with listening to our feelings

For Acute Crisis States
• For Reactive plans deal with recognizing crossed boundaries
Checklist for Providing Support

• Is it in my capacity? (personal limitations)
• Is it wanted? (person centered)
• Prioritizing needs
• Power dynamics
• Confidentiality
• Immediate concerns
• Communicating the process
• Informed consent
• Follow up and after care—outside resources