

Effective Approaches to Working with Older Victims of Trauma

Marty McIntyre
Executive Director
Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Services

Factors informing response

▶ Disclosure

- Purposeful (Intentional)
 - Direct
 - Coded
- Accidental (Inadvertant)

▶ Timing of trauma

- Current
- Historical



Understanding Disclosure

▶ Purposeful (Intentional)

◦ Direct

- CHOOSING to tell you
- Choosing to tell YOU
- Want/need something

◦ Coded

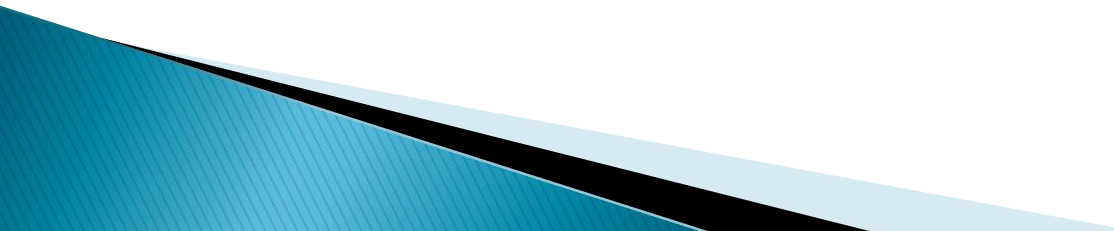
- Feeling unsure/conflicted about telling
- Hoping you will “get it”

Understanding Disclosure

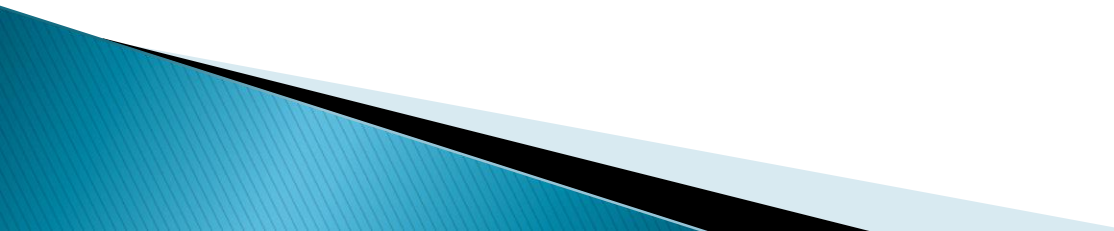
- ▶ Accidental (inadvertant)
 - Know the red flags which indicate abuse
 - Observe something/hear something/read something
 - Person has NOT decided to tell
 - You may be seen as a threat
 - May be
 - Defensive/denying
 - Fearful
 - Angry
 - Uncooperative

► Indicators

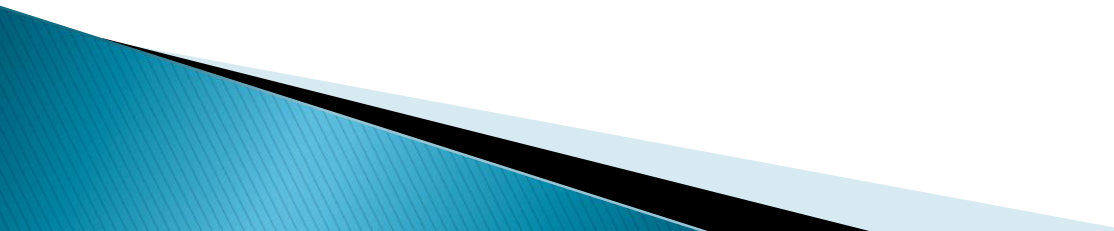
General Indicators

- ▶ Frequent or unexplained bruises and other injuries
 - ▶ Signs of a struggle
 - ▶ Victim unaware of income or resources
 - ▶ Older adult being deprived of opportunities to socialize
 - ▶ Genital, anal or breast redness, swelling, bruising
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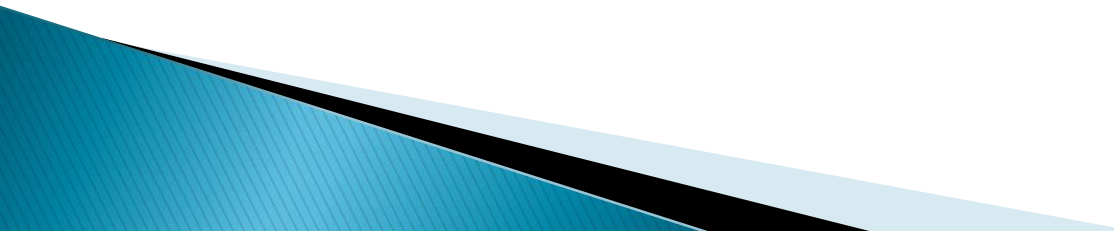
Possible Abuser behaviors

- ▶ Does all the talking; won't let victim speak for him/herself
 - ▶ Tells conflicting stories
 - ▶ Won't let victim visit with others alone
 - ▶ Abuser has mail, especially financial statements, sent to her/himself
 - ▶ Often has reappeared in victim's life at a time of stress (illness, death of spouse)
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Possible behaviors of people being abused

- ▶ Unexplained change in eating or sleeping habits
 - ▶ Increased substance use
 - ▶ Wearing layers of clothing when it is not called for by the weather
 - ▶ Seeming afraid of family member or caregiver, or hesitant to speak in front of them
 - ▶ Difficulty sitting comfortably, eating, drinking, or swallowing
 - ▶ Hypervigilance, easily startled
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Environmental “red flags”

- ▶ Abuse of pets
 - ▶ Signs of a struggle
 - ▶ Accounts closed or large withdrawals
 - ▶ Checks or ATM withdrawals of cash
 - ▶ Unpaid bills
 - ▶ Basic needs not met
 - ▶ Discrepancy between income, resources, and living conditions
 - ▶ Older adult is deprived of their mobility
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- ▶ Ok, so now you have noticed, what do you say?

Some opening questions

- ▶ Share your observation and your concern:
 - “I’ve noticed you’ve had a lot of bruising lately. Is everything alright?”
 - “I’m concerned about you. Would you like to talk?”
 - “You sound scared. What can I do to help?”

- ▶ Why might older people be reluctant to disclose abuse?

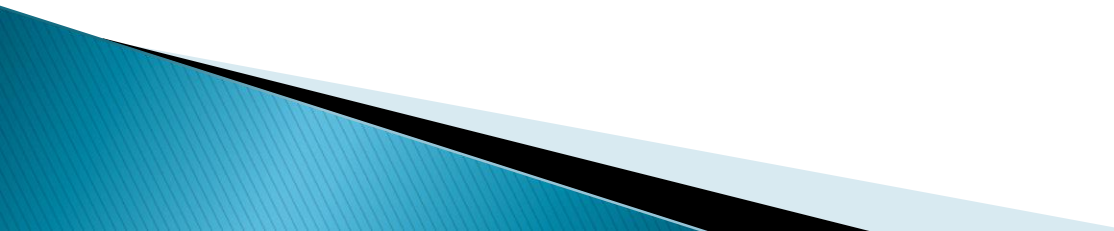
Timing of trauma

▶ Current trauma

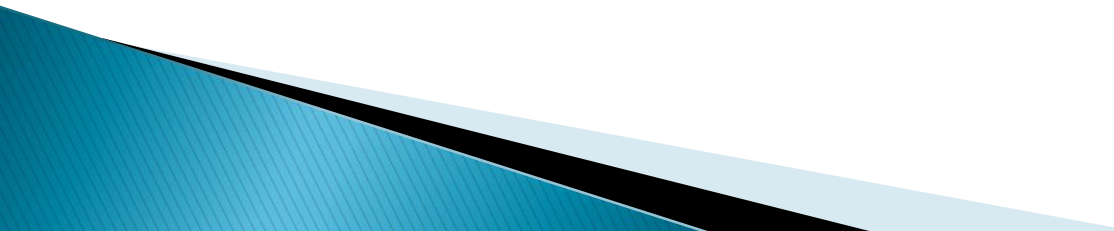
- Requires a response, depending on situation
 - Assess immediate needs
 - Secure appropriate help/treatment
 - Safety planning for now and for later
 - Ongoing health and welfare needs
 - Mobilizing resources
- Give older person as much control as possible

Timing of trauma

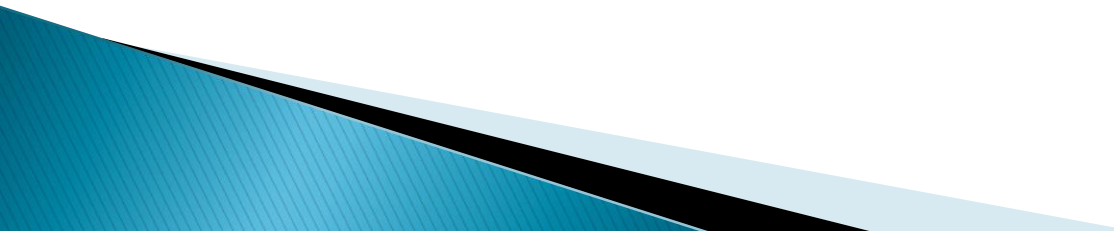
▶ Historical trauma

- Does not generally require immediate action, but does deserve immediate response
 - May take more time to unfold
 - Requires that you get to understand the impact of the trauma on their life
 - Requires that you understand and appreciate the significance of their feelings
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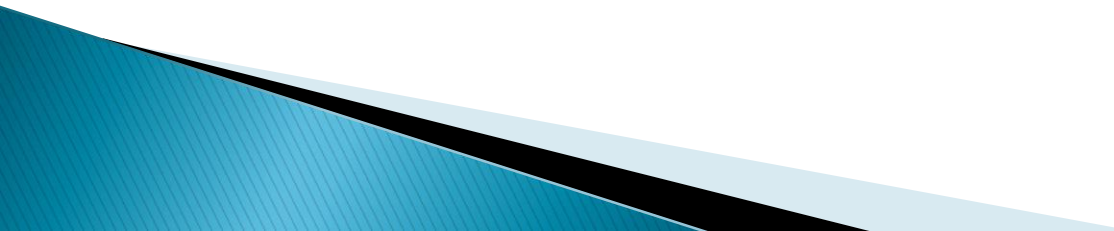
General guidelines forResponse

- ▶ Make no assumptions
 - ▶ Be kind
 - ▶ Be patient
 - ▶ Be calm
 - ▶ Be clear
 - ▶ Be gentle
 - ▶ Be YOU
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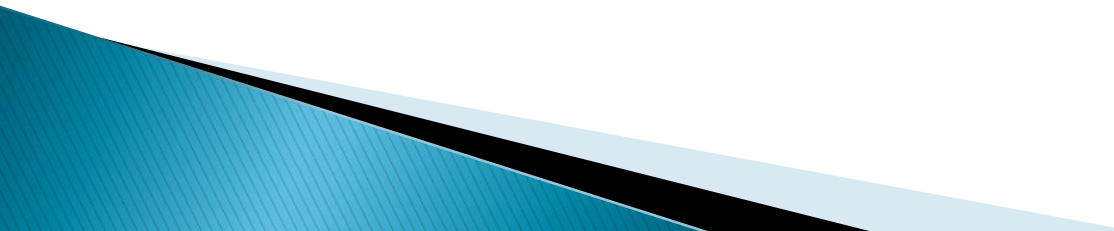
Has the older adult ever talked about this before? If yes, what was the response?

- ▶ Take the time to find out
 - ▶ Their reactions/responses/worries are likely informed by the response they received before
 - ▶ Respond to how they were treated
 - Be careful not to criticize the responder—take your lead from the older adult
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If no....

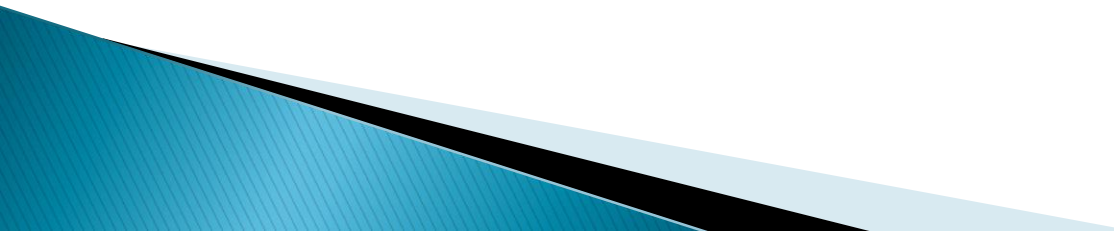
- ▶ Understand that they may not have the language to talk about what happened to them
 - ▶ Understand that they may be very fearful about losing control of the information
 - ▶ Understand that this may be a conversation that happens over time
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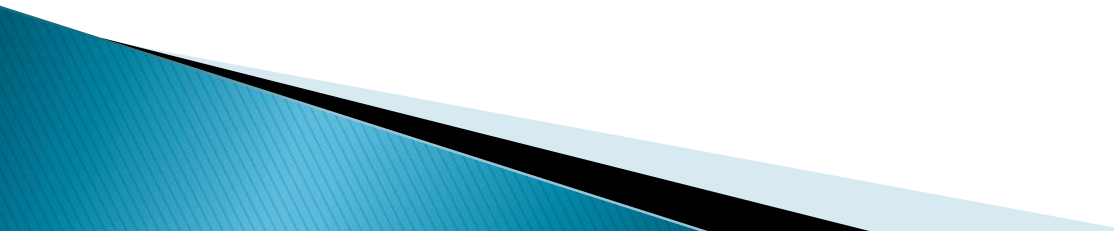
Setting the stage

- ▶ Private/comfortable/appropriate setting
 - ▶ Ensure that person is not tired or unwell
 - ▶ Time of day
 - ▶ Language
 - ▶ Do they want someone else to be present?
 - ▶ Be respectful of their needs—take cues from them
 - ▶ Position yourself at eye level
 - ▶ Lighting/eye contact
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- ▶ Understand and explain your role and goal

Issues to consider/understand

- ▶ Lack of comfort/experience with describing abuse
 - ▶ Filling in the gaps
 - ▶ Impact of the trauma on their lives
 - ▶ Worries and fears
 - ▶ Understand the significance of things
 - ▶ Additional traumas will create greater impacts
 - ▶ Relationship of trauma to mortality
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- ▶ Profound impact of betrayal
 - ▶ Nature/effectiveness of support system
 - ▶ Sometimes a traumatic event is part of a different traumatic event. Dig deeper.
 - ▶ Potential for greater physical damage
 - Soft tissue damage
 - Broken bones
 - Pelvic injury
 - Blood loss/internal bleeding
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Response

- ▶ Listen. Listen. Listen.
 - ▶ Understand feelings associated with trauma—more important than understanding details
 - ▶ Build strategies to maximize safety
 - ▶ Evaluate/Educate/Mobilize Support network
 - ▶ Connect with appropriate resources if possible. Think creatively
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