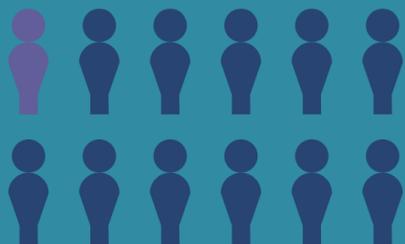


RBHS VPVA

Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences
Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance Newsletter

In a year, about 1 in 12 children are sexually abused.



For cases reported to authorities, 93% of those inflicting harm are known to the child.



Sources: Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, & Hamby (2005) and DOJ (2000)

Adult Survivors of Child Abuse: Long Lasting Impact

The long-term impact of abuse experienced in childhood varies differently for adult survivors. Some may have minimally noticeable effects, some experience debilitating and continuous issues, and some discover that the coping skills they used as children are now hurting them as adults.

Here are some common reactions to experiencing abuse and neglect in childhood:

- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms.** After experiencing a trauma history such as abuse in childhood, adult survivors may experience symptoms that center around the trauma. This can mean re-experiencing the event through intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, or nightmares; turning away from the event through numbing and avoidant behaviors like substance abuse or self-injury; or experiencing increased activation related to the event, like triggers, jumpiness, hypervigilance, and inability to sleep.
- **Impaired views of the world and self.** Unhelpful thinking patterns for survivors often center around perceiving the world as dangerous and difficult, making it more difficult to navigate. They also may evaluate themselves harshly, in a way that leads to low self-esteem or self-worth and difficulty setting boundaries.
- **Emotional distress and risky behaviors.** Adult survivors frequently report issues with regulating emotions, which can lead to problems with depression, anxiety, and anger. Sometimes adult survivors handle this trauma by engaging in behaviors that are harmful to their health, including disordered eating, substance use, aggression, suicidal behaviors, and high-risk sexual behaviors.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Let's talk about it

RBHS VPVA has gone virtual! Keep an eye out for our "Let's Talk About It" series, happening throughout May on our social media pages. We will be creating space for open dialogue on different issues, allowing our community to better understand, reflect, and take action. Have an idea for our series? Reach out and let us know!

STAY IN TOUCH

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- **Interpersonal difficulties.** Past abuse influences adult relationships! Adult survivors may struggle with trusting others, building relationships, or wanting emotional or physical intimacy with those in their lives.
- **Physical health problems.** The body and the mind are connected. Survivors may present with chronic issues like fibromyalgia, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), pelvic pain, headaches, and fibromyalgia. Studies also show increased risk for stroke, heart disease, and diabetes.

Though responses vary, each survivor has an opportunity to work towards healing. If you or someone you know experienced abuse in childhood, reach out to RBHS VPVA for support.

“You can indeed become strong in the broken places.”

-**Kezia Boban**, SPH student and RBHS VPVA Ambassador (quote and article contribution)

How to Show Up for Survivors in the Health Care Setting

Those in the health professions have the opportunity to bring trauma-sensitive practices to their daily interactions with patients. As a health care practitioner, you will likely encounter adult survivors of childhood abuse, whether or not they disclose that history to you. The “Umbrella of Safety” depicts the elements that can help patients to feel safe while receiving care.

Here are some ways that you can further empower these patients to feel comfortable or safe during your time together:

Share Control & Information:

- Be transparent about each step of the examination process.
- Ask the patient about their comfort levels regarding aspects of the visit.
- Inform patients that they can stop or pause the procedure or examination at any time. Let them develop ways to indicate that they need a break.
- Allow them to share their needs and offer options or alternatives for them to choose.



Respect & Boundaries

- Before entering the room, remember to knock first and wait for permission to enter.
- If gowns are used, ensure that there are sizes for all body types.
- Ask for consent from the patient continuously throughout the process.
- Watch for body language that indicates discomfort and be comfortable with checking in.

Understand Sexual Abuse & Healing

- Educate yourself on childhood abuse and the effects and symptoms of trauma.
- A patient may not be ready or willing to disclose the abuse or trauma. Give them opportunities to make adjustments without having to share their stories.
- All survivors do not have the same response to trauma, and responses can be different each visit. Identify how their needs may change over time.

The most important thing a health care provider can do is show they are willing to have the conversation about ways to make the patient feel most comfortable.

Interested in training on trauma-informed care?

RBHS VPVA offers a training about addressing interpersonal violence in these settings. If interested in this training, reach out to vpva@rbhs.rutgers.edu.



Spotlight on one of RBHS VPVA's Graduate Student Assistants: Laura Bruce, MSc

Laura has been working on social media, promotion, and design for RBHS VPVA for the past two semesters. She has a background in biology and human genetics, and is currently a graduate student at the School of Public Health working towards her MPH, with a focus on pharmacoepidemiology and biostatistical computing. Laura has loved stretching her creative side in this role while having the opportunity to support survivors and address interpersonal violence on the RBHS campus as a public health issue. Hearing from other students about these important topics and making connections at all of the RBHS schools has been her favorite part of her time on the team!

*Do you enjoy puzzles? Try out our VPVA jigsaw puzzle by visiting:
<https://puzzel.org/en/jigsaw/play?p=-M5SmShVNrWpUCg1iq91>*



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