

UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA: WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOUR WORK

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Psychological Trauma

Trauma is the unique individual experience of an event or enduring condition in which:

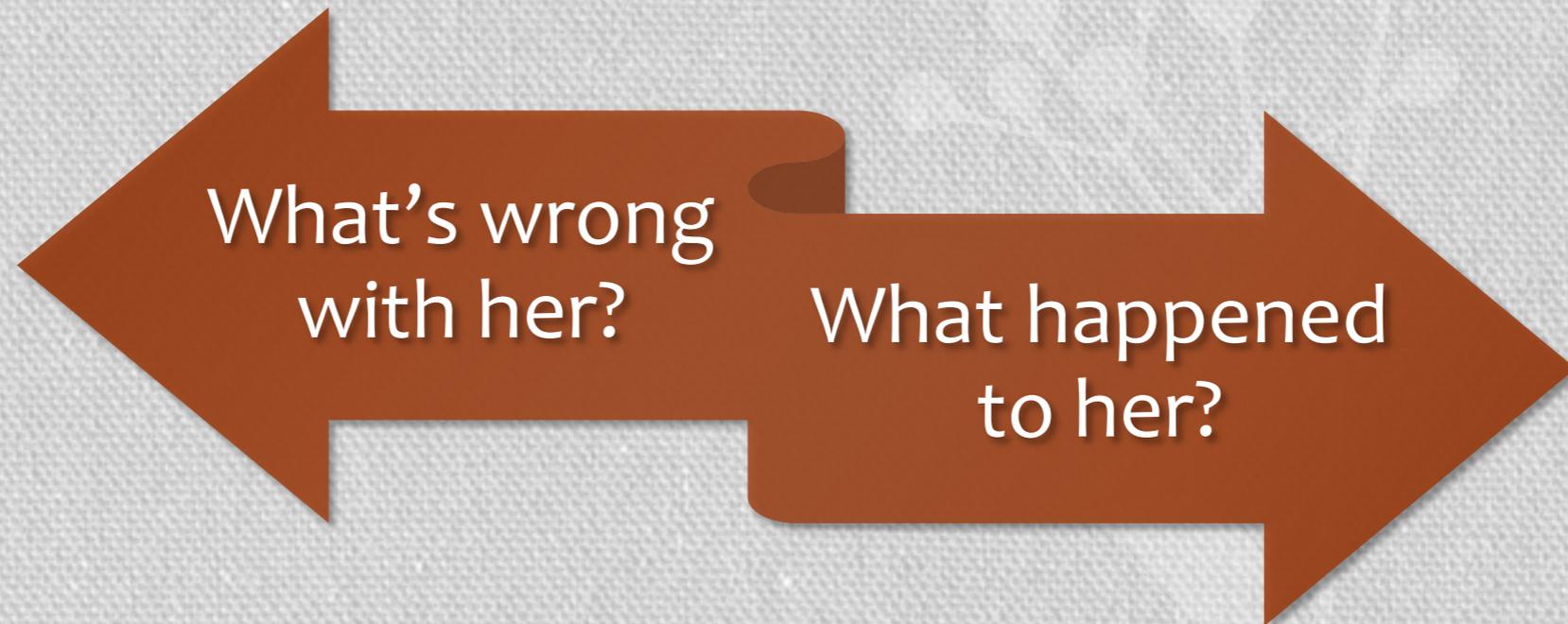
- The individual's ability to integrate his or her emotional experience is overwhelmed

OR

- The individual experiences a threat to life, bodily integrity or sanity

Why Consider Trauma?

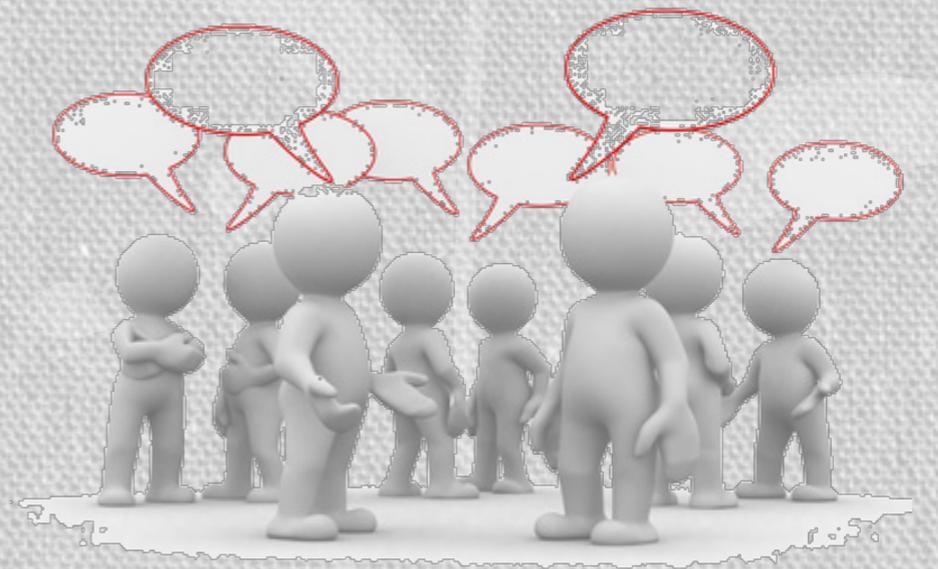
- Understand normal human response to violence
- Shift how we think about survivors



- We can identify biological, emotional, cognitive and interpersonal effects
- Improve our work with survivors

Discuss

- How would you find our family today?
 - Example, You would come across me or my brothers as a teacher in grade school...
- What could you do to help?
 - Formal interventions
 - Informal interventions





Normal Stress Response

- Sensory input of potential threat to brain
- Mobilizes rapid response – fight, flight or freeze, intense focus on immediate danger and/or dissociation
- Higher brain centers then evaluate threat, take appropriate action or disregard
- Return to baseline



Resilience

- Capacity for successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances
- Protective factors that promote resilience
 - Responses of caregivers and other caring adults
 - Social support or social fabric
 - Individual's capacities and talents – special, smart, creative, capable
 - Ability to positively engage others

Trauma and Dissociation

- Trauma and dissociation are intertwined
- Most people talk about trauma disorders but not about dissociation or dissociative disorders
- Signs of dissociation can be a guide to trauma

Dissociation

A protective coping mechanism used in the moment of trauma

- Often an automatic response to immediate danger
- A separation of mental and experiential contents that would normally be connected
- Prevents integration of ideas, information, affects, and experience

Dissociation

- Non-traumatic
 - Driving our car to work and not remembering the ride
 - Getting lost in a book or movie or task and losing track of time and surroundings
- As an automatic coping response to a traumatic or overwhelming event
 - Become absorbed or go into a trance
 - Avoids painful experience
 - Cannot be integrated without help
 - Can intrude into or dominate everyday life when “triggered”

How Dissociation Appears

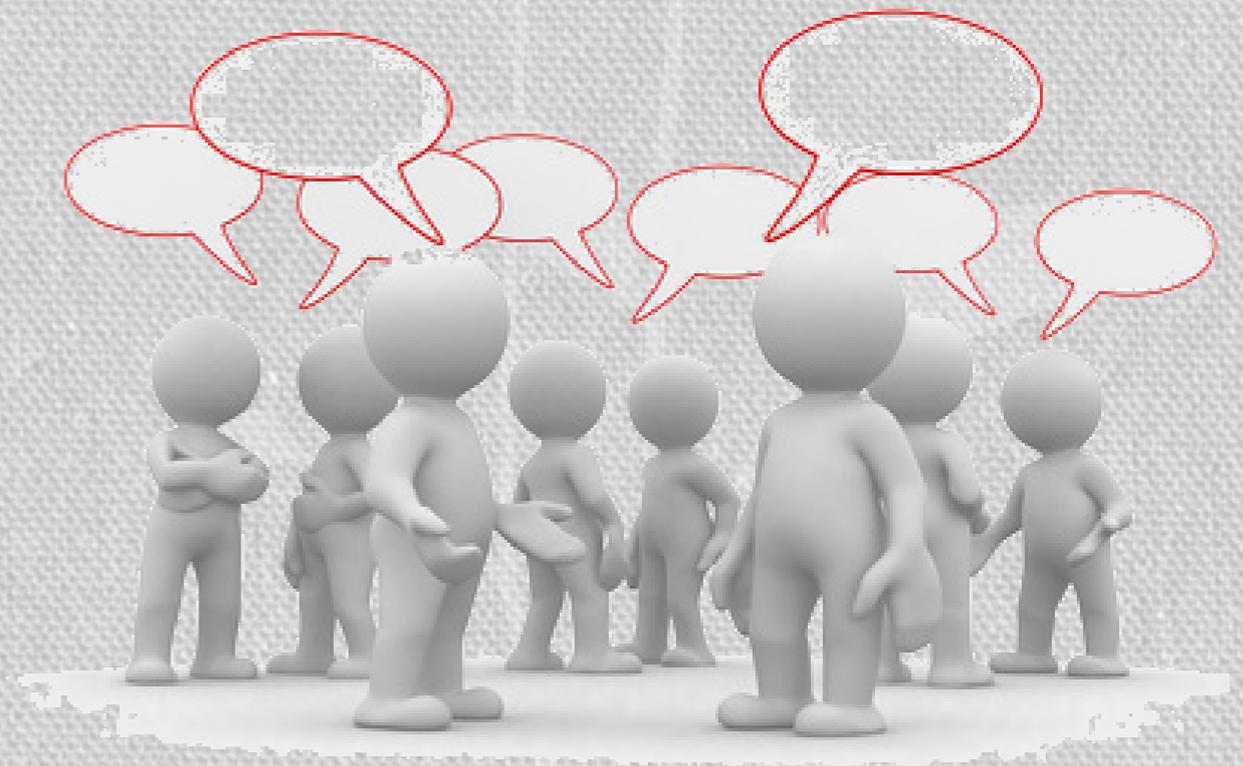
- Blank stare or spacey look
- Flat manner
- Appears to be bored, uninterested or not paying attention
- Fidgety, can't sit still or focus
- Singular focus, losing track of time or surroundings
- Angry, agitated or irritated
- Scattered talking – not linear or logical
- Unsteady when walking, unexplained bruises

How Dissociation Feels

- A numbing of emotions
- Slowing time
- Feeling of unreality or disconnected
- Quick or racing thoughts
- Spacey feelings that can't be controlled
- A sense of detachment from one's body
- Changing perceptions of people or surroundings
- Normal tasks become difficult
- Coping skills are decreased

Discuss

- What signs or symptoms of trauma have been most challenging to you?
- How did you deal with them?
- What do you think you could do differently?
- What else do you think you'd like to know?



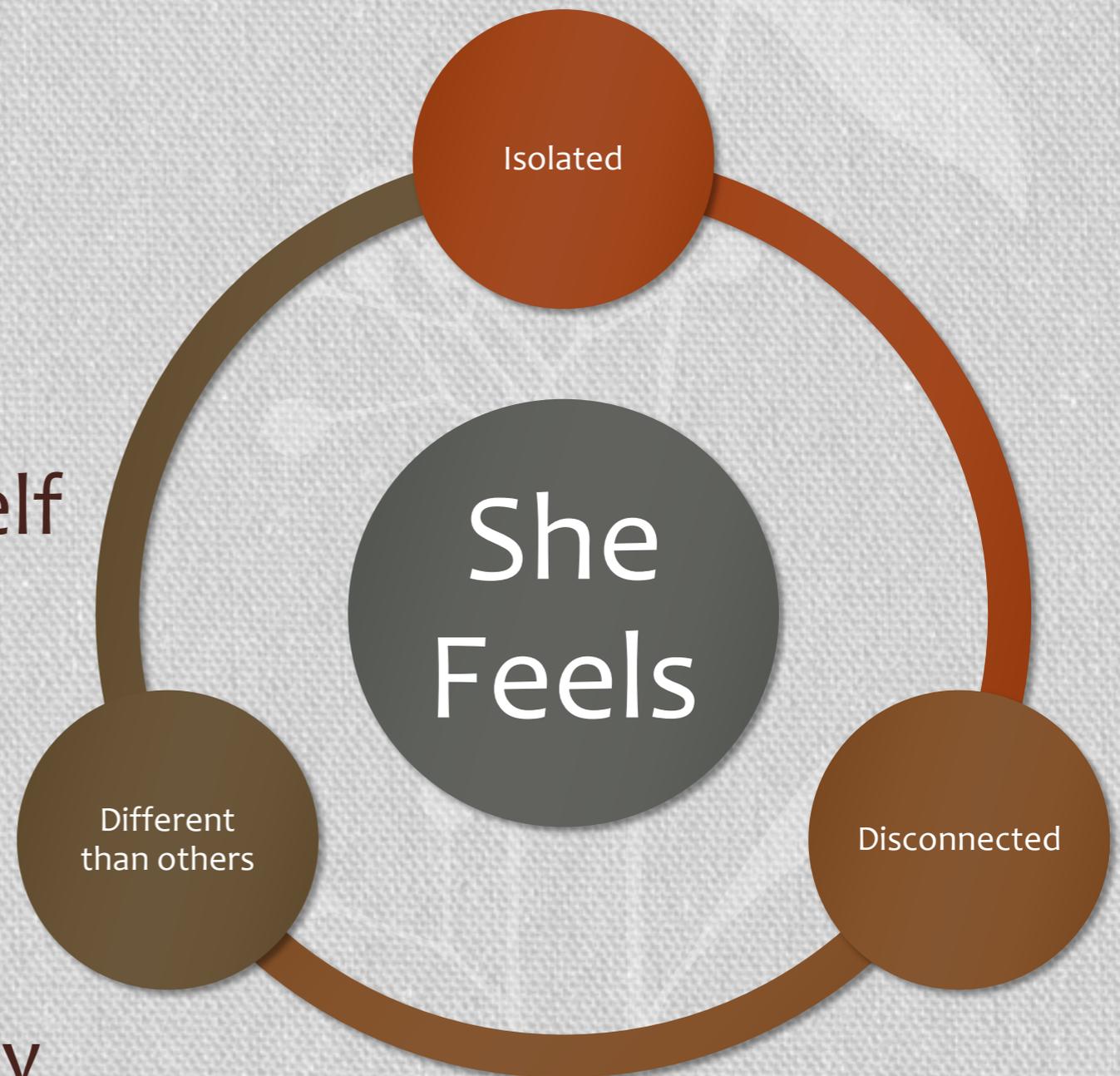
Discuss

- How do others see the signs of trauma?
- What do you think they should know to enhance their response?
- How would you help them deepen their understanding?

How Trauma Affects Survivors

Trusting other people can be challenging

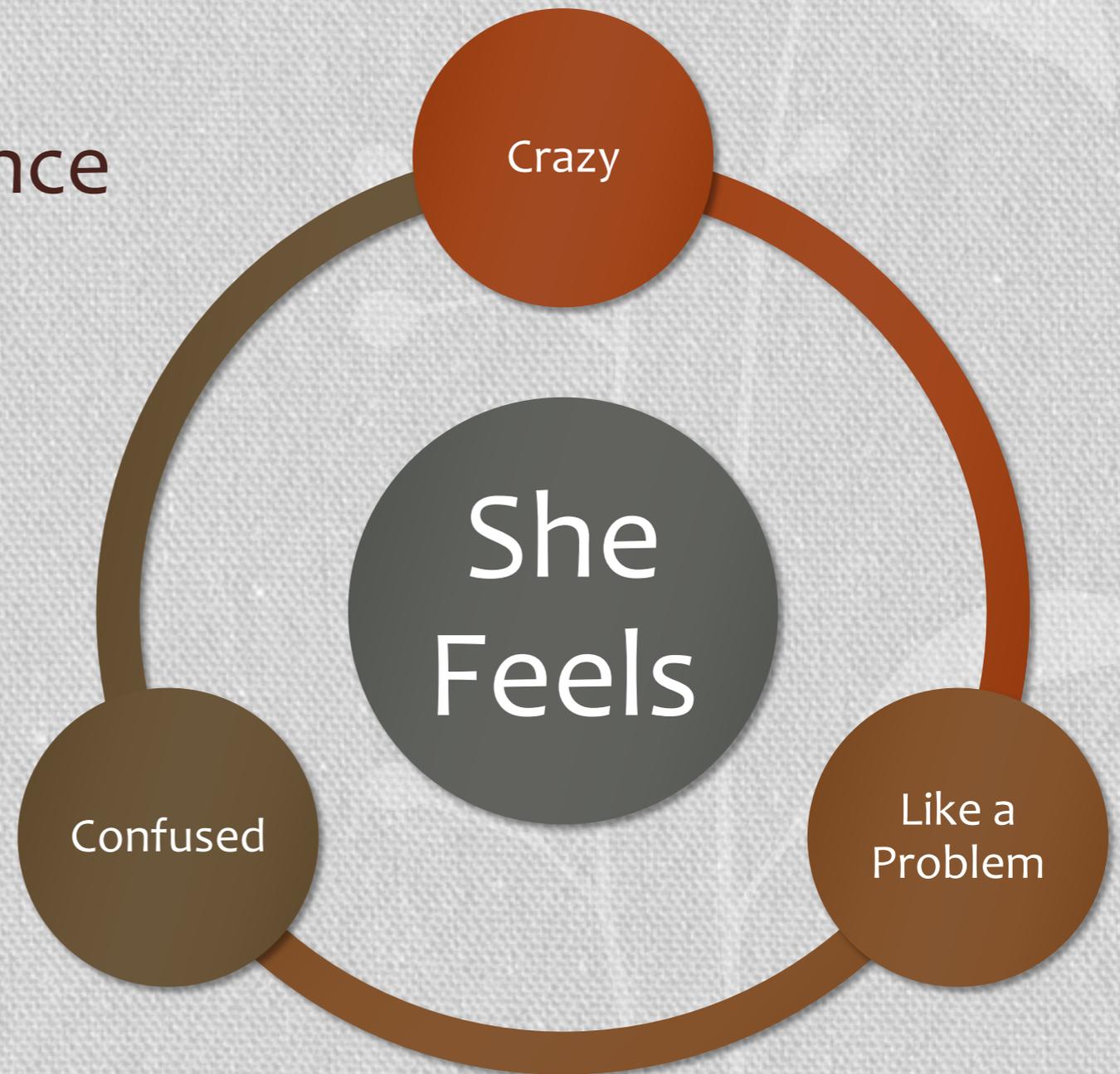
- Hard to reach out for or respond to offers of help
- Hard to experience herself as deserving and worthwhile
- Lack of connection can make it hard for her to develop and feel empathy



How Trauma Affects Survivors

Coping strategies can create other difficulties

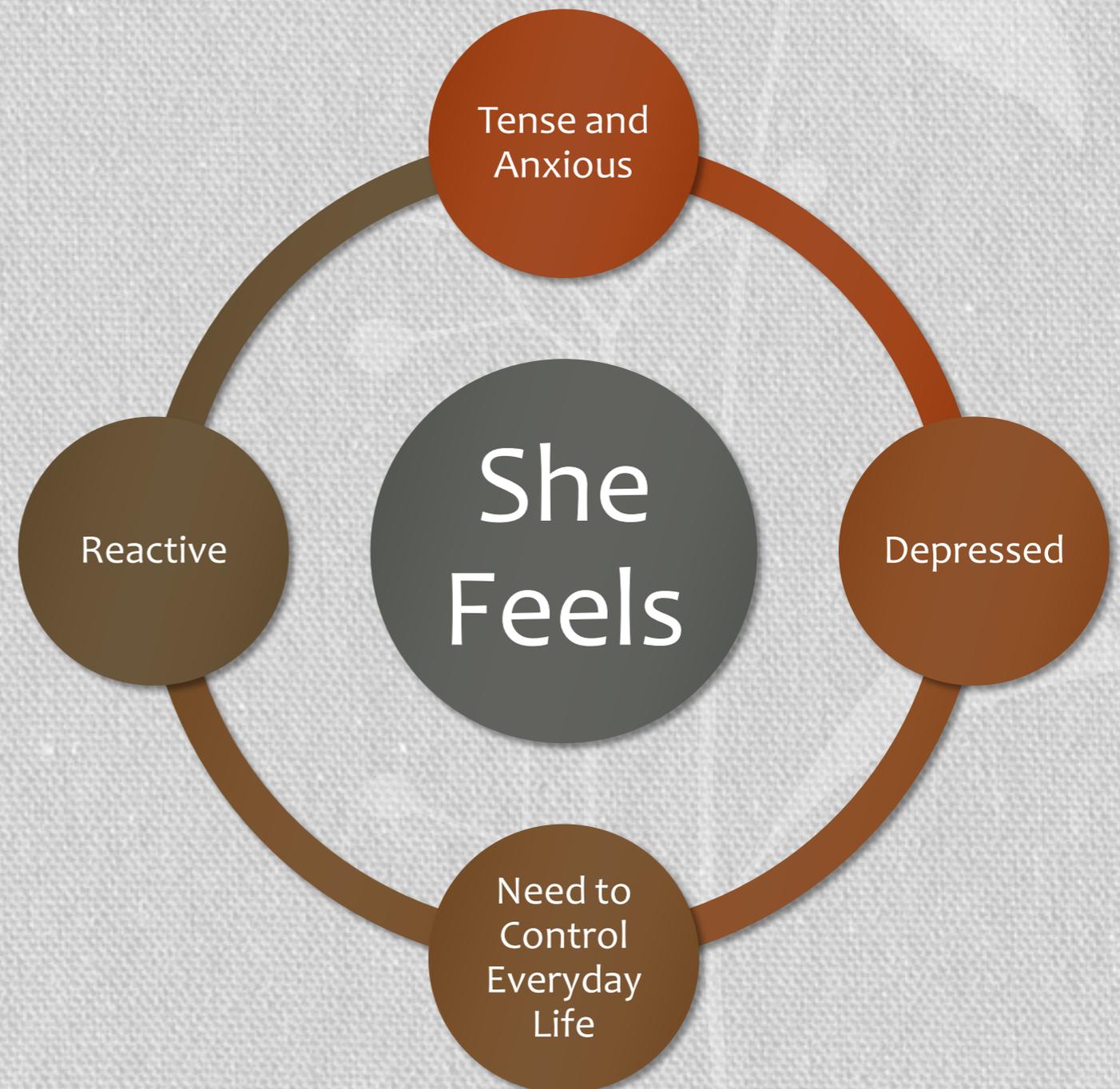
- Aggression
- Dissociation or avoidance
- Substance use
- Self-cutting
- Risky behavior



How Trauma Affects Survivors

Ability to manage feelings is compromised

- Recognize
- Tolerate
- Regulate
- Self-soothe
- Integrate
- Thoughtfully plan



Creating Trauma Informed Services

- Trauma informed approach is one that attends to a survivor's emotional and physical safety
- Assists survivor in strengthening her capacity to deal with the multiple complex issues she faces:
 - Accessing safety
 - Recovering from the traumatic effects of violence and other lifetime abuse
 - Rebuilding her life
- All survivors of violence have access to advocacy services that are:
 - Inclusive
 - Welcoming
 - Destigmatizing and not re-traumatizing

Components of Trauma Informed Services

1. Provide survivors with information about the traumatic effects of violence
2. Adapt programs and services to meet survivors' trauma related needs
3. Create opportunities for survivors to discuss their responses to trauma
4. Offer resources and referrals to survivors
5. Reflect on your program requirements and practices