

MODULE 4 TRAUMA REVERSE QUESTIONS & ANSWERS 4TH

SEPTEMBER 2025

MAIN TOPICS COVERED:

1. Why is starting a session on sexual abuse with a focus on safety so crucial, and how can I incorporate this into my practice?

Beginning with safety is vital to create a nurturing environment for survivors, whose sense of security is often deeply compromised. Here's how to approach it:

- A. Establishing a protective space: Guide clients to visualise protective figures—mentors, spiritual guides, or a universal sense of support—surrounding them, fostering a sense of being held.
- B. Inviting personal safety anchors: Encourage clients to identify a safe word, memory, or anchor that resonates with them, reinforcing their control over the process.
- C. Validating emotions without judgement: Assure clients that all feelings are welcome, creating a non-judgemental space to prevent re-traumatisation.
- D. Incorporating group safety: In group settings, extend safety to all participants, promoting collective compassion and acceptance through shared grounding exercises, like slow breathing.

- E. Using gentle meditation: Start sessions with a meditation to invite safety, helping clients feel grounded before exploring sensitive topics.

This approach builds a foundation of trust, ensuring survivors feel secure and empowered to engage at their own pace.

2. What does 'holding space' mean in the context of supporting survivors, and how does it apply in group settings?

Holding space is about being a compassionate, present anchor for someone's emotional journey. Here's how it works:

- A. Being fully present: Listen deeply without interrupting or trying to fix the client's experience, offering unwavering support.
- B. Validating feelings: Acknowledge emotions with phrases like "It's okay to feel this way," creating a non-judgemental environment.
- C. Using grounding techniques: Encourage slow breathing or noticing feet on the ground to maintain a calm, connected presence.
- D. Fostering collective safety in groups: Create a shared sense of safety by inviting group members to support each other, noticing and allowing tenderness without pushing.
- E. Acting as a steady presence: Serve as a reliable, empathetic anchor, not a rescuer, allowing clients to process at their own pace.

By holding space, practitioners create a compassionate container for healing, especially in group settings where shared support amplifies safety.

3. What are the main types of sexual abuse discussed, and why is it described as a 'violation' that cuts deep?

Sexual abuse is approached with sensitivity, recognising its profound impact. Key points include:

- A. Types of abuse: Includes unwanted touch, assault, childhood abuse, incest, rape (including marital rape), coercion, exploitation, and harassment.
- B. Described as a violation: Often occurs in vulnerable moments where resistance feels impossible, deeply affecting body, mind, and spirit.
- C. Impact on core needs: Erodes safety, a fundamental human need, and can disrupt identity and self-worth, including perceptions of gender.
- D. Empathetic approach: Practitioners must meet survivors where they are, honouring their pain without minimising its depth or complexity.

Understanding these aspects helps practitioners approach survivors with the care needed to support their healing journey.

4. What are the emotional and psychological imprints of sexual abuse, and how might they manifest in a client's life?

The session compassionately outlines how abuse leaves lasting imprints.

Key manifestations include:

- A. Shame and self-blame: Feelings like "I am dirty" or "Something's wrong with me," leading to internalised guilt.

- B. Powerlessness: Beliefs such as “I have no control” or “Speaking up is dangerous,” making decisions feel overwhelming.
- C. Fear of intimacy: Thoughts like “Love isn’t safe” or “I can’t let anyone close,” impacting relationships.
- D. Unique responses: Vary by individual worldview; some may avoid intimacy, others may repeat patterns unconsciously.
- E. Indirect presentations: Clients may not mention abuse but present with anxiety, depression, or relational challenges, requiring gentle validation without probing.

Recognising these imprints allows practitioners to meet clients with empathy, supporting their unique paths to recovery.

5. What can we learn from stories of survivors with varied responses, like forgiveness or seeking similar dynamics?

Survivors’ stories highlight the diversity of healing paths, shared with respect for anonymity. Key lessons include:

- A. Diverse responses: Some forgive and find compassion (e.g., grieving an abuser’s death), others seek intense dynamics in safe settings, or pursue multiple partners or revenge.
- B. No universal formula: Responses reflect personal worldviews; what feels right varies widely.
- C. Non-judgemental support: Practitioners must avoid judgement, supporting each survivor’s choices, whether forgiveness or setting boundaries.

- D. Complexity of healing: Honour the unique journey of each survivor, holding space for their process with empathy.

These insights encourage practitioners to embrace the individuality of each survivor's healing process with compassion.

6. What symptoms might survivors present with, and why are both emotional and physical aspects addressed?

The session holistically recognises that abuse affects the whole person.

Key symptoms include:

- A. Emotional symptoms: Anxiety, panic, phobias, depression, hopelessness, fear of intimacy, dissociation, numbness, self-blame, guilt, or shame.
- B. Physical symptoms: Chronic pelvic pain, menstrual issues, PCOS, thyroid imbalances, fatigue, difficulty with arousal, or painful intimacy (e.g., body "shutting down").
- C. Broader impacts: PTSD, suicidal thoughts, eating disorders, hormonal issues, autoimmune conditions, or self-harm.
- D. Across genders: More reported in females but occurs in all genders, requiring inclusive awareness.
- E. Holistic approach: Addressing both aspects acknowledges that the body holds trauma; symptoms are signals to validate gently, e.g., "What happened wasn't your fault."

This holistic perspective ensures practitioners address the full scope of trauma's impact, fostering comprehensive healing.

7. What are the key principles for working with survivors, such as pacing and avoiding blame?

The session emphasises compassionate principles to guide practitioners.

Key points include:

- A. Prioritising safety: Survivors often feel unsafe in their bodies; create a secure environment without pushing for details.
- B. Client-led pace: Let clients lead disclosures, waiting until they're ready, even if it takes multiple sessions.
- C. Avoiding blame or fixing: Steer clear of pressuring forgiveness or "moving on"; reject societal tropes like "You asked for it."
- D. Restoring agency: Focus on rebuilding boundaries, autonomy, and control, empowering clients to make choices.
- E. Gentle integration: Use paced release over reliving trauma, with grounding (e.g., slow breathing), validation, and permission-seeking to ensure safety.

These principles create a supportive framework that empowers survivors while respecting their boundaries.

8. How can practitioners navigate grey areas, like when physical responses conflict with mental boundaries during intimacy?

These situations require delicate handling due to their complexity. Key approaches include:

- A. Acknowledging confusion: Physical stimulation may feel good but conflict with mental desires, weakening decision-making as instinctual responses dominate.

- B. Building yes/no skills: Help clients clarify what they want beforehand, especially with abuse histories, to foster grounded choices.
- C. Non-judgemental support: Respect clients' choices without judgement, even if they pursue certain dynamics.
- D. Exploring gently: Use questions like "What happens in your body when you feel unsafe?" to reconnect mind and body, addressing regret or blame empathetically.
- E. Pre-framing boundaries: Set clear expectations to avoid misunderstandings, ensuring clients feel in control.

This empathetic approach helps clients navigate complex experiences while reclaiming agency.

9. What questions are recommended to gently explore a survivor's experiences?

Questions must be asked with utmost sensitivity to avoid feeling invasive. Key recommendations include:

- A. Pre-framing safety: Start by saying, "Stop me if anything feels uncomfortable," reinforcing client control.
- B. Suggested questions:
 - "What happens in your body when you feel unsafe or violated?"
 - "Do you notice times when you disconnect or go numb?"
 - "How does your body respond to closeness or touch?"
 - "What helps you feel grounded and safe?"

“If your younger self could hear kind words, what would they need?”

- C. Going slow: Read cues carefully, ensuring questions foster empathy and connection without pressure.
- D. Practising control: In groups, rehearse saying “stop” to empower clients to set boundaries.

These questions create a gentle pathway for survivors to explore their experiences safely.

11. In a demonstration addressing the belief “I am dirty,” what techniques were used to guide the process?

The process was handled with care, addressing a childhood abuse-related belief. Techniques included:

- A. Safety checks: Regularly ensured the client felt safe, exploring sensations like numbness or vibrations.
- B. EFT tapping: Used on points like the karate chop, with affirmations like “Even though I feel dirty... I choose to experience my body as a free spirit.”
- C. Grounding exercises: Stamping feet to discharge a freeze response, helping release stored tension.
- D. Gentle touch: Massaging feet upward and holding the pubic area with breaths to reframe it as “safe and sacred.”
- E. Outcome: The belief’s intensity dropped significantly, with trust noted as a future theme, blending talk, tapping, and somatic release empathetically.

These techniques offer a compassionate, multi-faceted approach to releasing harmful beliefs and restoring safety.

12. How should practitioners approach working with children who've experienced abuse?

Working with children requires extra gentleness, as they may not fully understand their experiences. Key approaches include:

- A. Educating on body awareness: Explain that touching their body is natural but private (like toilet habits), and inappropriate touch isn't okay.
- B. Looking for signs: Notice behaviours like anger or distress (e.g., upset from graphic talk), which may indicate trauma.
- C. Gentle check-ins: Ask, "How do you feel about this?" offering choice to engage or not.
- D. Respecting culture: Acknowledge cultural norms but educate that shaming the body can harm self-worth, advocating healthy boundaries.
- E. Subtle exploration: If past lives or borrowed trauma arise, explore delicately, prioritising the child's pace and safety.

This sensitive approach ensures children feel safe and empowered during their healing process.

13. How should practitioners manage their own triggers, self-care, and working with perpetrators?

This work can be emotionally intense, requiring careful self-management. Key points include:

- A. Recognising triggers: Acknowledge personal reactions (e.g., anger from past experiences) and stay grounded to serve clients fully.
- B. Seeking support: Get help afterward to process triggers, ensuring you can remain present for clients.
- C. Choosing comfort: If uneasy, opt out of this work until ready—your safety is as important as the client's.
- D. Supporting perpetrators non-judgementally: If remorseful, offer help as you would survivors, but report crimes if disclosed.
- E. Specialising with intention: If drawn to this area, set a heartfelt intention to be a safe haven for healing.

Prioritising self-care and ethical practice ensures practitioners can support all clients effectively.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS:

1. Do some people seek to gain control over their body, as if to be in charge?

Many individuals strive to assert control over their bodies as a way to reclaim personal agency or achieve specific goals. This can manifest through physical practices like exercise, dieting, or fasting—such as training for a marathon to master endurance or practising disciplined eating to regulate appetite. Mindfulness techniques, including yoga, meditation, or breathwork, are also common, helping individuals

manage emotions and physical responses. The drive for control often stems from a deep need for autonomy, self-improvement, or coping with external pressures. Psychologically, this can reflect high self-efficacy or a response to feelings of helplessness. However, the extent and methods of seeking control vary widely, influenced by personality, cultural background, or life circumstances. This pursuit empowers individuals to shape their physical and emotional experiences, fostering resilience and a sense of self-determination.

2. Can some individuals also exhibit contrasting behaviours, such as promiscuity?

Some people may lean towards behaviours like promiscuity, where they prioritise immediate gratification or emotional expression over restraint. This can be a way to explore personal freedom, rebel against restrictive societal norms, or address unmet emotional or social needs. For example, someone might engage in promiscuous behaviour as a reaction to feeling overly controlled or to seek validation. Such responses are shaped by factors like personality traits (e.g., impulsivity), life experiences, or cultural influences. Importantly, individuals can fluctuate between seeking control and more unrestrained behaviours, depending on their psychological state or circumstances. These contrasting responses highlight the complexity of human behaviour, requiring empathetic understanding of each person's unique motivations and context.

3. Is sexual abuse only when the body is touched? What about being followed or confined with harmful intentions but without physical contact?

Sexual abuse is not limited to physical touching; it encompasses any behaviour that violates a person's sexual autonomy, safety, or well-being. Non-contact forms of abuse include being followed with harmful or sexual intent (such as stalking), being confined in a space with threatening or inappropriate intentions, or experiencing acts like voyeurism, exposure, or verbal harassment with sexual undertones. For instance, being intentionally trapped in a confined space with malicious intent can constitute sexual abuse, as it breaches personal boundaries and creates fear or trauma. Many legal jurisdictions recognise these non-physical acts as forms of sexual harassment or abuse, particularly if they involve intimidation or coercion. Psychologically, such experiences can be just as damaging as physical abuse, causing significant emotional distress, such as anxiety or fear. Acknowledging all forms of abuse validates survivors' experiences, encouraging them to seek support through counselling or legal resources to address the resulting trauma.

4. What if I feel empowered and strong after resolving past abuse, but my sexual life isn't as fulfilling as desired due to the past, and I feel fidgety when answering questions about it?

Feeling empowered and strong after resolving past abuse while still noticing its lingering effects on your sexual life is entirely valid, as healing from trauma is not a linear process. Even after significant

progress, past experiences can subtly influence areas like intimacy, trust, or body image, making it challenging to achieve the fullness you desire in your sexual life. Feeling fidgety or confused when addressing questions about this likely reflects the complexity of processing trauma's long-term impact—it's normal for both past and present emotions to coexist. A helpful approach is to acknowledge your strength while being honest about ongoing challenges, such as saying, "I've made great progress and feel empowered, but I'm still working on my sexual life due to past experiences." Seeking support from a therapist specialising in trauma or sexual health can provide tailored tools to enhance intimacy and address discomfort when discussing these topics. Practices like journaling or open discussions with a trusted partner (if applicable) can also help clarify your thoughts and reduce unease, supporting a journey towards a more fulfilling sexual life.

5. How should we support a child who has experienced sexual abuse, especially when they may not realise what happened?

Supporting a child who has experienced sexual abuse requires a calm, compassionate approach, as they may not fully understand what happened due to confusion, manipulation, or lack of knowledge about boundaries. The first step is to ensure the child's immediate safety, such as removing them from contact with the abuser if possible. Listen to them without interrupting, judging, or showing strong emotional reactions that might cause them to withdraw, and reassure them that you believe them and that the abuse was not their fault. Seeking

professional help promptly is crucial—contact a child psychologist, counsellor, or organisation specialising in child abuse support to provide age-appropriate therapy that helps the child process trauma and rebuild trust. In many regions, reporting the abuse to authorities or child protection services is necessary to prevent further harm, but the primary focus should be on the child’s emotional needs. Long-term support involves creating a stable, nurturing environment, encouraging open communication about feelings, and monitoring for signs of distress, such as behavioural changes. With consistent care, children can heal and thrive in a safe, supportive setting.

6. Why might a child feel they must keep the abuse private, and what’s the best reason to encourage them to share?

Children often feel compelled to keep sexual abuse private for several reasons: abusers may threaten harm to the child, their family, or pets; the child might feel shame or guilt, believing they caused the abuse; they may fear not being believed or causing family disruption; or they could love or depend on the abuser and not want to get them in trouble. In some cases, they don’t disclose because they don’t recognise the behaviour as wrong, especially if the abuser frames it as a “secret game” or normal interaction. The best reason to encourage a child to share is to explain that telling helps keep them safe, stops the hurt from continuing, and allows trusted adults to protect them without any blame falling on the child. Using simple, age-appropriate language, such as, “Secrets that make you feel bad or scared aren’t okay to keep—telling helps make

things better, and I'm here to help you," builds trust and empowers them to speak up. This gentle approach reassures the child that they are believed and supported, fostering a sense of safety.