Providing Trauma-Informed Support as a Title IX Advisor
Introduction

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• Licensed Psychologist

• Research & Clinical Experience:
  • Impact of trauma in college students, positive psychology & post-traumatic growth
  • Young adult development, working with survivors of sexual abuse and intimate partner violence, LGBTQ issues, relationship concerns & anxiety
Why is trauma-informed support important for Title IX Advisors to understand?

- Others participating in the Title IX process are to remain neutral, impartial
- You will be there during the most stressful and potentially re-traumatizing steps of the process
- You may be the only person who knows the details of the case other than the Title IX personnel

Topics

- Trauma & Trauma-Informed Approaches
- Recognizing Personal Bias
- Empathy
- Active Listening

- Validation
- Trust
- De-escalation
- Empowerment
Introduction to Trauma
Definition of Trauma
• Subjective; real or perceived threat; manifests differently in each person

Consider your Party’s Experiences
• One or both parties may have already experienced trauma
  • Prior to the incident (childhood experiences, family history, collective memory, etc.);
  • During the incident;
  • As a result of being accused of the alleged incident; or
  • Through a combination of these experiences.
• One or both parties may be currently experiencing trauma during the Title IX grievance process

Healing Comes from Empowerment
Foundations of a Trauma Informed Approach

- Empathy
- Validation
- Active Listening
Is personal bias affecting your ability to connect with your party?

• Bias versus Conflict of Interest

• Introspection (Implicit Bias Tests)

• Having implicit bias does **not** make you a bad person. However, managing it will make you a better advisor.
  • When should you recuse yourself from a case because you are unable to overcome personal bias?

• What does the information at hand cause you to believe about those involved? Why?
Trauma Informed Communication
Empathy

What is Empathy?
• Empathy versus Sympathy

Focus on the Party & their Needs
• Refrain from sharing own stories & experiences
• Create an open space for them to talk (no judgement)
• Aim to understand your party’s perspective

Keep a Healthy Emotional Distance
• Self-care is important
• Boundaries are okay
• Direct your party to campus resources that can also provide support
What is Active Listening?

• A way of listening & responding to another person that improves mutual understanding (U.S. Institute of Peace)
• Genuine interest in understanding the party’s perspective

Strategies to Consider

• Pay attention & Avoid Distractions (no phones, knocks on door, etc.)
• Practice patience & Let them share their story, concerns, questions
  • Ask open-ended questions ("Can you tell me more...")
  • Allow plenty of time for answers
  • Provide feedback & request clarification when the party is finished speaking
Non-Verbal Communication

• Comfortable, open & calm demeanor
  • Your demeanor & body language will affect their demeanor
• Calm, reassuring tones
• Consider the meeting environment & their comfort
  • If in-person consider comfortable seating, tissues, water, etc.
  • If virtual, ask if they would be more comfortable with a phone or video call

Be Careful

• Avoid starting the conversation with the intention of “solving a problem”
  • Listening is critical
• Avoid providing unsolicited advice
  • Encourage them to ask for what they need & provide them with the opportunity to do so
Validation

What is Validation?
• Acknowledging that a person’s emotions, thoughts & behaviors have causes and are understandable
• Communicate understanding
• Listen without judgement

After the party is finished speaking:
• Repeat or summarize the information they have shared
• Ask clarifying questions, if necessary
  • “Would you mind clarifying for me...”
  • Validation does not have to be synonymous with agreement
Establishing trust with your party

• Validation, empathy & active listening have the potential to help advisors create a trusting, collaborative relationship with your party

Benefits of establishing trust may:

• Minimize the trauma experienced during the Title IX process
• Assist your party in staying calm during Title IX proceedings
• Help your party participate more confidently in Title IX interviews or hearings
Confrontation is Possible

• Title IX processes may be intense, and emotions may run high
• Confrontation may occur between your party & the other party, the other party’s advisor, you, or any combination thereof.

Strategies for De-escalation

• Keep personal emotions in check
• Create physical space
• Allow for silence & patience for decisions
• Practice validation, active listening & empathy
Promoting Empowerment
What could empowerment look like for your party?

Why & how does empowerment help heal trauma?
• Importance of choice

How can you, as a Title IX Advisor, identify resources to help empower your party?

What may your party consider to be possible obstacles to empowerment? How may you address them?
Tools for Empowering a Party

Ask the party:
- How are you feeling?
- Do you feel safe?
- How can I help you feel safer?
- What do you need right now?
- What do you need throughout the duration of the Title IX process?
- How do you feel about participating in the Title IX process?
- What steps of the Title IX process concern you?

As the advisor, remember:
- Validation
- Active Listening
- How can you best support your party & address their needs?
Importance of Choice

• Provide your party with choices & the space to make their own decisions
• Be consistent with allowing them to make decisions
• Allow for silences & be patient
• Step in to provide guidance or clarify choices, if asked
Up Next

Scenarios & Commonly Asked Questions