Defining Triggering, Retraumatization & Revictimization

**Triggering.** A trigger is a reminder of past traumatizing events. Many things can be a possible trigger for someone. A person might be triggered by a particular color of clothing, by the smell of a certain food, or the time of year. Encountering such triggers may cause us to feel uneasy or afraid. For example, what seems like an “ordinary” request such as, “Make sure the children are ready for school on time,” can be a trigger for a survivor whose abusive partner terrorized and punished her if the children were late for school. Once we become aware of triggers, we might feel an impulse to “get rid of all the triggers.” Of course, we will avoid violent images or angry tones in our speech and try to make the environment calm. But there will always be trauma triggers that we cannot anticipate and cannot avoid. Part of trauma-informed work is supporting survivors as they develop the skills to manage trauma responses both in our service settings and elsewhere in the world. (Understanding Traumatic Triggers, National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health)

**Retraumatization.** Retraumatization occurs when any situation, interaction, or environmental factor replicates events or dynamics of prior traumas and evokes feelings and reactions associated with the original traumatic experiences. Retraumatization may compound the impact of the original experience.

**Re-victimization.** Experiencing abuse—including child physical or sexual abuse or sexual assault—increases our risk of experiencing violence or abuse in the future. Revictimization may occur in a similar or different context. When examining the prevalence of revictimization, it is important to analyze the social context and ask what factors put people at greater risk for being victimized. (Kimerling, Alvarez, Pavao, Kaminski, & Baumrind 2007; Lindhorst & Oxford 2008; Classen, Palesh, Aggarwal 2005)