

TRAUMATIZED CLIENTS

IMPLICATIONS FOR ATTORNEYS



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Part 1

Trauma 101, Effects on Client & Attorney



Potentially Traumatic Experiences

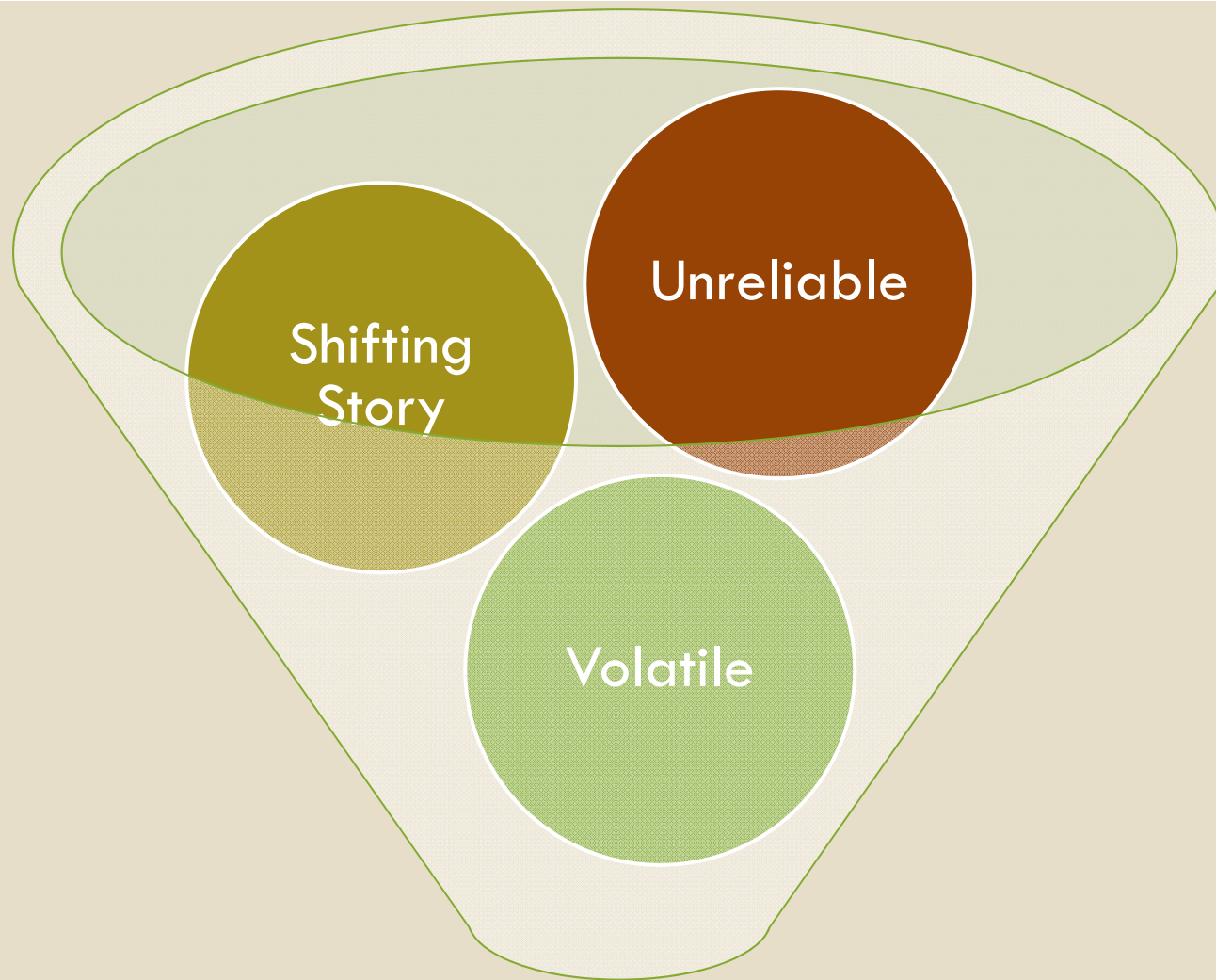
- ❑ Believing that one's own life is in danger
- ❑ Witnessing another's death/near death
- ❑ Traumatic Bereavement
- ❑ Intensive Care Unit Treatment
- ❑ Car accidents
- ❑ Natural Disaster
- ❑ Violent Crime

Symptoms of Trauma/PTSD



Symptoms of Trauma/PTSD

- Intrusive thoughts
- Flashbacks
- Feeling detached or withdrawn
- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty sleeping
- Outbursts of anger
- Avoiding things that remind you of past traumas
- Feeling as if you don't have a future
- Spending time thinking about why these events happened to you
- Feeling as though you have fewer skills than you had before
- Difficulty with new situations
- Bodily pain
- Poor memory
- Hopelessness
- Feeling guilty for having survived
- Feeling powerless to help others



Challenges for Attorneys



Frustrated

Angry

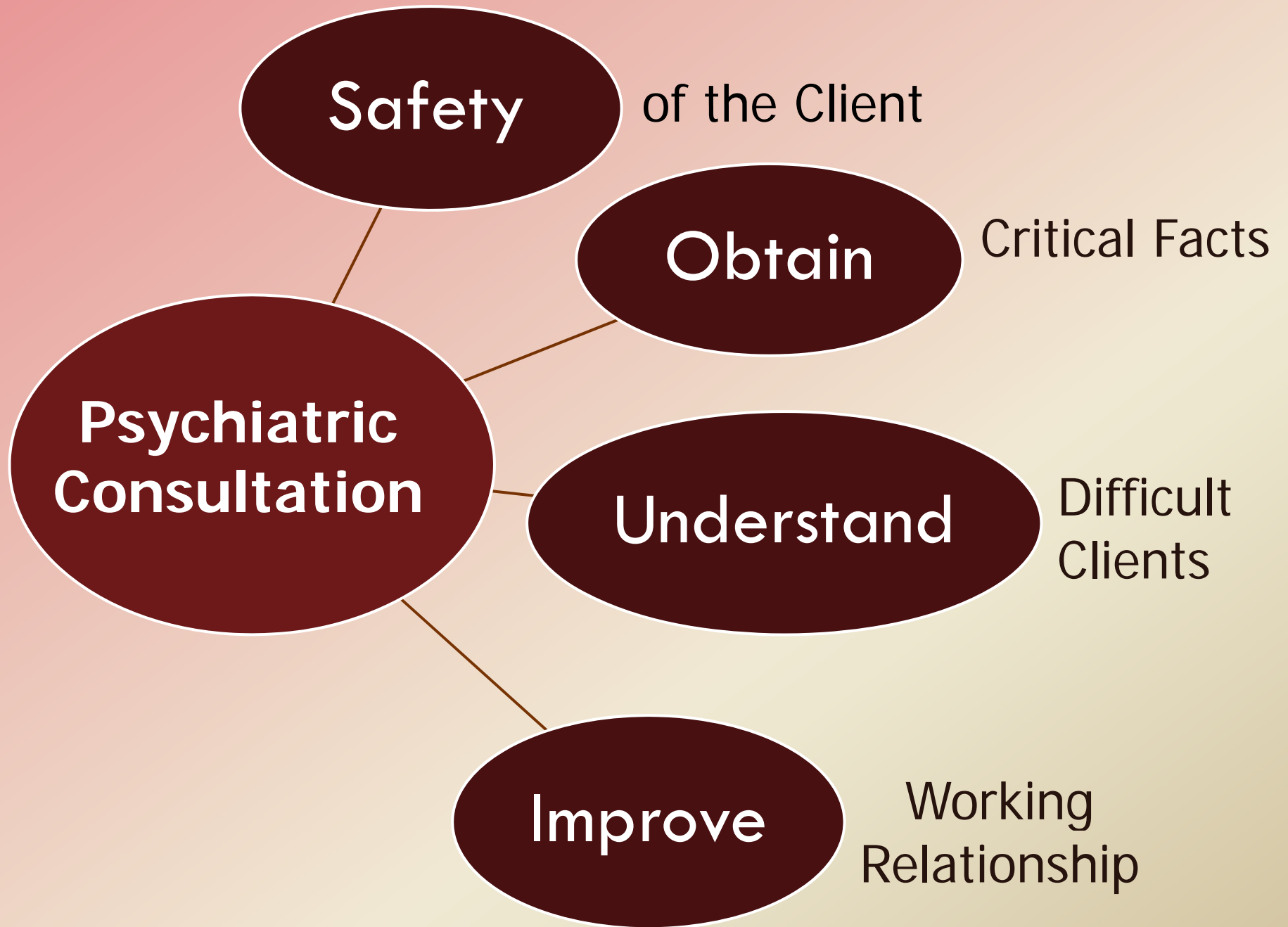
Avoidant

Burnout and Poor Performance



Part 2

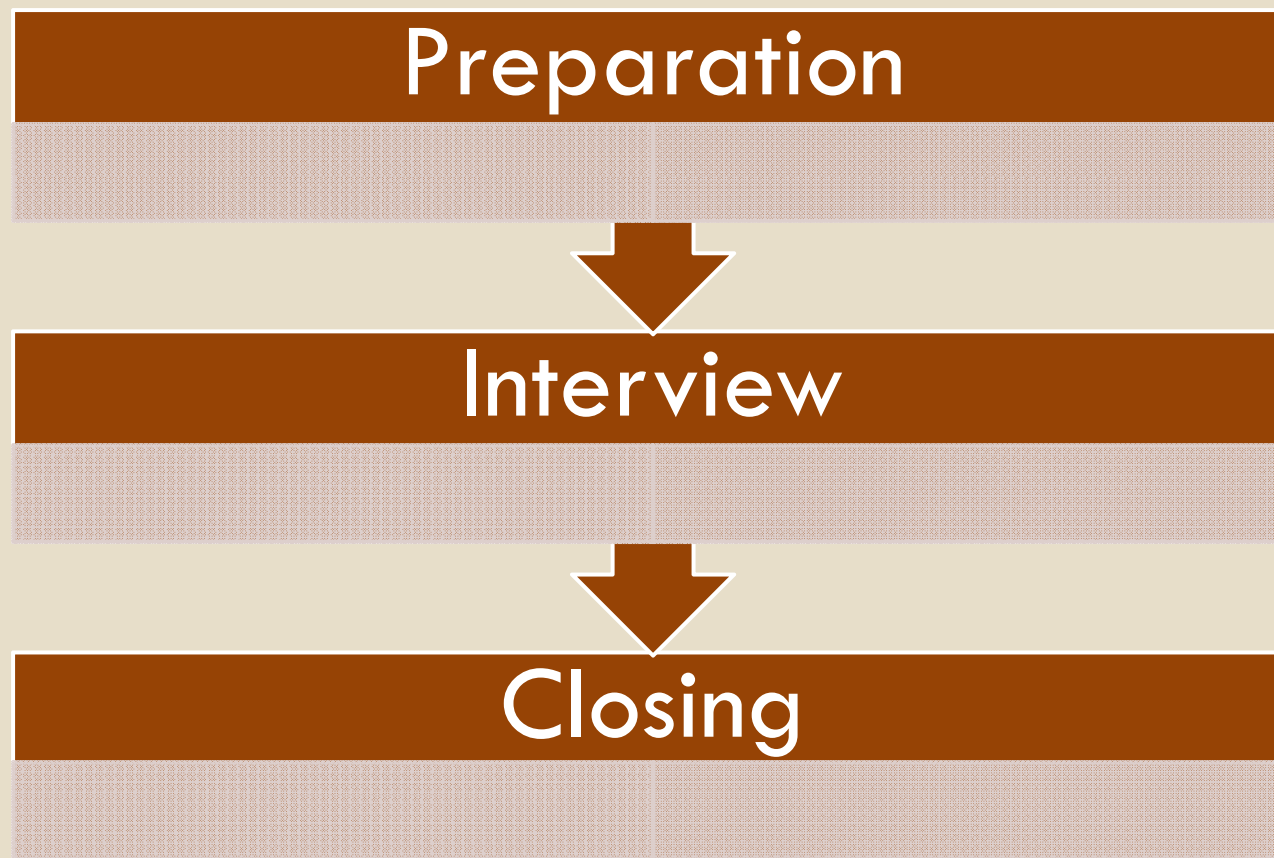
Legal Work with Traumatized Clients



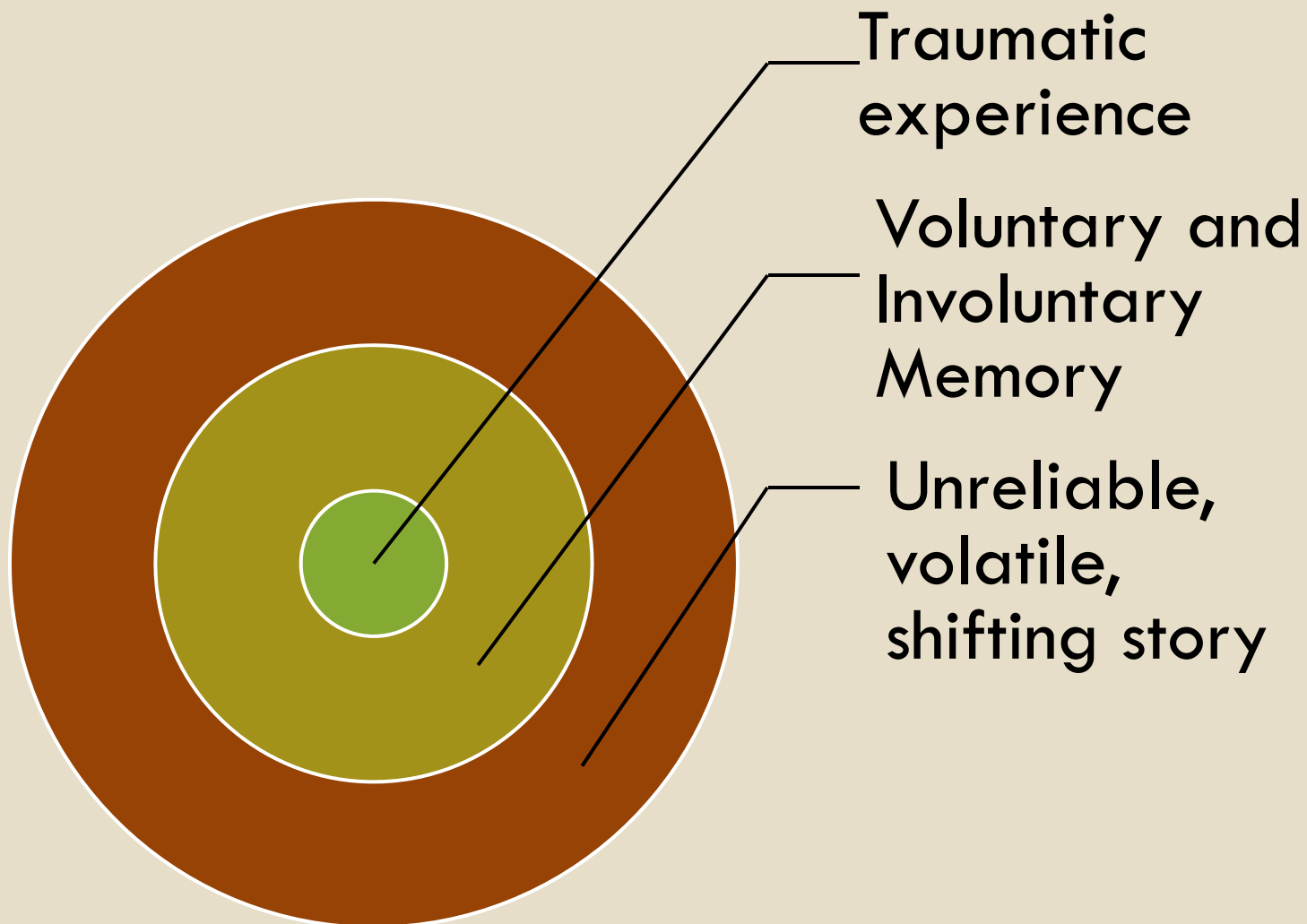
Safety and Health of the Client

- Recognizing acute need for mental health care
 - Suicidality
 - Homicidality
 - Grave Disability: food, clothing, shelter
 - “5150”
- Less acute need for mental health care

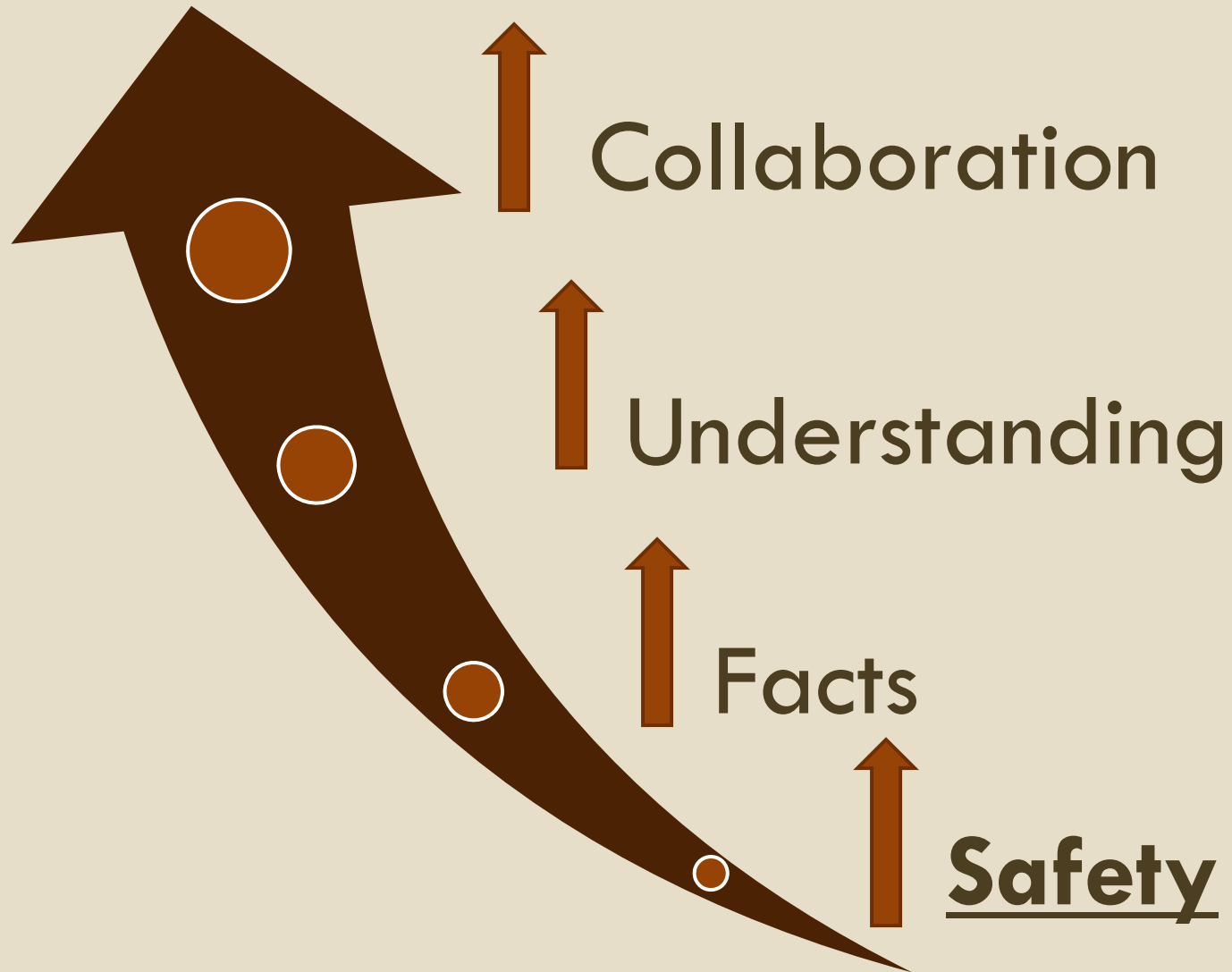
Obtaining the Trauma Story



Understanding Traumatized Clients



Improve the Case



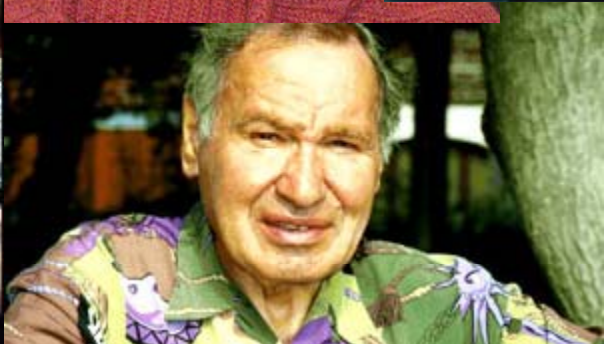
Part 3

Vicarious Trauma among Attorneys





Outrage



Sorrow



Shock



Symptoms of Vicarious Trauma

- Re-experiencing the trauma of the person who was traumatized in imagery, flashbacks, and nightmares
- Avoidance of reminders of those traumas
- Increased arousal including disturbed sleep, increased startle, and irritability

Robert Motta, Ph.D. Hofstra University, New York

Barriers to Recognizing Secondary Trauma

- ❑ “I can handle it.”
- ❑ “I don’t see any problems.”
- ❑ “I am trained to separate facts from emotions, so I don’t need help.”
- ❑ “Talking about it makes me look weak.”
- ❑ “I barely make it to the gym. I don’t have time to think about this!”
- ❑ Cultural barriers in the legal profession



*Inca Warrior, Peru
~ 1200 A.D.*



The Battle for Justice



Pakistan Attempts to Crush Protests By Lawyers

Pakistani uniformed and plainclothes police beat a lawyer during a protest in Lahore.

New York Times

JANE PERLEZ and DAVID ROHDE

Published: November 6, 2007

Photo: David Laundy



V - played by Hugo Weaving

vforvendetta.com





The major finding of our study was that attorneys working with traumatized clients experience significant symptoms of secondary trauma and burnout. Second, the attorney group demonstrated higher symptom scores in all areas of secondary trauma (intrusion, avoidance, and arousal) and burnout compared to mental health providers and social services workers. The relationship between secondary trauma and burnout was moderately positively correlated with

Attorneys working with traumatized clients experience significant symptoms of secondary trauma and burnout.

Levin, A.P. & Greisberg, S. (2003). Vicarious trauma in attorneys. *24 Pace Law Review* 245.

Maladaptive Coping

- ❑ Overuse of alcohol
- ❑ Other recreational drug use
- ❑ Overuse of prescription medications, such as pain or sleeping medications
- ❑ Physical or emotional isolation from friends/family
- ❑ Overworking
- ❑ Overuse of high adrenaline distractions – e.g., car racing, hang gliding, parachuting, kite surfing, etc.
- ❑ Leaving the profession

Case Discussion

- Cairo, Egypt, non-profit assistance for political asylum applicants*
 - ▣ Systems issues
 - ▣ Personal care issues

*Meffert, SM, Musalo, K, McNiel, D, Binder, R. “The Role of Mental Health Professionals in Political Asylum Processing.” *In submission.*



Solutions

Social Support

Peer Support

Consultation

It is not (only) about you!

Being professional requires being in control of your emotions.

Consistent, frequent, purposeful self care is job requirement for any professional

-because-

Clients will suffer if you do not take the time to understand your reactions.

And if your family's health depended on it ... ?

- Trauma is infectious.
- It spreads from your client to you.
- It WILL spread from you to your loved ones unless you take the time to recognize and cope with it.

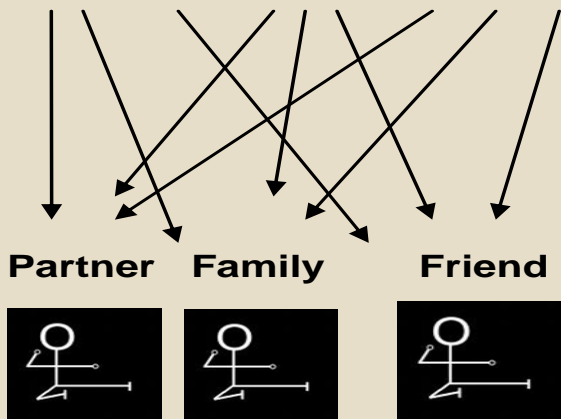
Trauma

Traumatized Client

Horrendous Stories, Trauma, Depression

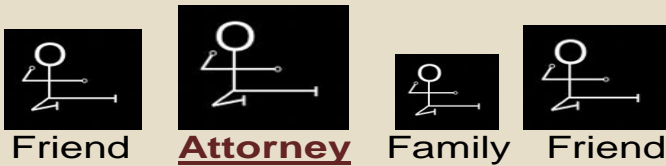


Trauma Fatigue Depression

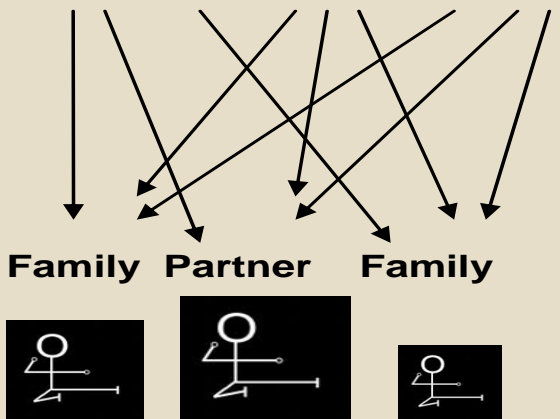


Traumatized Client

Horrendous Stories, Trauma, Depression



Trauma Stress Depression

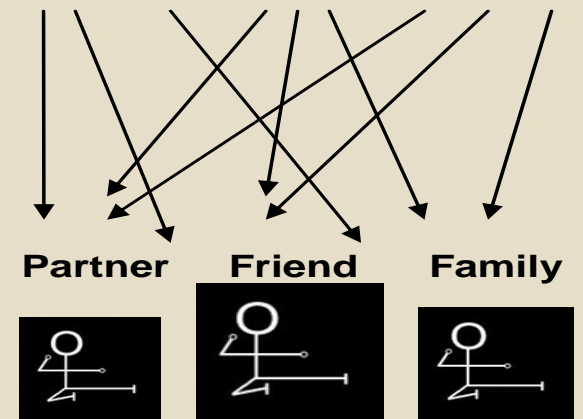


Traumatized Client

Horrendous Stories, Trauma, Depression



Trauma Fatigue Depression





Use psychiatric consultation to assess safety, obtain the trauma story, contextualize inconsistencies, improve rapport.

You will harm yourself, your clients and others if you shirk the professional duty of self care.

Trauma is infectious, protect the people you love by planning ahead.

Questions?

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