

Clinical Interview for Assessment of Trauma History

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This interview is designed to identify potentially traumatic events in your client's life. Each area of trauma is assessed first with a general question. If the client answers positively, then you ask them to describe it to you in more detail. If they answer in the negative, one then asks them several more detailed questions to probe further. When a traumatic event is uncovered or described, in whatever category, then one shifts to a separate set of questions (on page 6) and a detailed elicitation of the event and the person's reactions to it.

Index of Events:

Each event can occur directly to the person, indirectly by witnessing the event, or indirectly by occurring to relatives or loved ones.

I. General Screening Question

II. Sudden Loss

death of loved ones
abortion, still birth, miscarriage, birth of impaired child
loss of income, fired from job, loss of home
spousal affair, divorce

III. Illness, Injury, Disaster, or Combat

serious accident or injury
life threatening illness / surgery
severe mental illness
natural disaster, earthquake, fire, flood, explosion
combat, imprisonment / torture
arrest, jail term

IV. Physical Abuse

severe spanking or punishment
punched, kicked, hit in face
hit with object
choked, burned
tied up or locked in closet
threatened with weapon

V. Emotional Abuse

verbal abuse / humiliation
ignored, teased, ridiculed

shouted or yelled at
treated in a cold, uncaring way
severe control over activities

VI. Sexual Abuse

comments about sex
exposed to others genitals
touched in genital area
forced to watch sex acts
masturbation
rape (oral, anal, genital sex)
pose for photographs
spied on while undressed, in bath

Introductory Statement to Client

“Now I am going to ask you about personal experiences that for one reason or another have been bad, unfortunate or frightening to you, such as losing someone close to you, being physically or sexually mistreated, or being seriously injured. Some people can talk about these experiences without much trouble, and others find them very difficult to talk about them. Some of these experiences may even have been kept secret for years. I am interested in finding out about these experiences, since we have learned that often they have important effects on a person’s life, and understanding them may help us treat you in the best possible way. May I begin?”

I. General Screening Question

Looking back on your life, from childhood to present, has anything happened that you found to be extremely frightening, upsetting, unfortunate, or traumatic? (If they seem unsure:) For example, terrible events that involve death, injury, accidents, physical pain, sexual mistreatment, or natural disasters?

If yes: Tell me what happened (Go to page 5)

If no: then go to the next section.

II. Sudden Loss

Sometimes over the course of a person’s life, one has to deal with losing something or someone very valuable, such as the death of a loved one, loss of a child, sudden loss of income, job, a home, or divorce. Do you recall whether anything like this ever happened to you?

If yes: Tell me what happened? (Go to page 5)

If no, then ask the following:

Were you ever fired from a job?

Did a spouse or partner ever have an affair that you discovered?

Did you ever have an abortion, stillbirth, miscarriage, or give birth to an impaired child?

Did anyone close to you ever die?

Did you ever spend time on the streets, without a home or place to stay?

III. Illness, Injury, Disaster, or Combat

Sometimes people have to live through serious illness, accidents, military combat, natural disasters, being arrested or jailed. Do you recall whether anything like that ever happened to you, your family, or someone close to you?

If yes: Tell me what happened? (Go to page 5)

If no: then ask the following questions:

Were you or loved ones ever in a serious accident or severely injured?

Did you or loved ones ever suffer from a serious illness?

Did you or loved ones ever suffer a “mental breakdown?”

Did you or loved ones ever require major surgery or treatment in a hospital?

Did you or loved ones ever experience a flood, earthquake, fire or explosion?

Did you or loved ones ever experience military combat?

Were you or loved ones ever arrested or jailed for any reason?

IV. Physical Abuse

Sometimes people get spanked a lot, get hit or physically punished, or mistreated in other ways while growing up. People also can get beat up, mugged, or threatened with weapons during their adult life. Do you recall whether anything like that ever happened to you?

If yes: Tell me what happened? (Go to page 5)

If no: then ask the following questions:

How were you punished as a child?

Were you ever spanked, kicked, slapped in the face, hit with an object, burned, tied up or choked as punishment?

Were you ever mugged or attacked?

Were you ever threatened by someone with a weapon such as a knife or a gun?

Were you ever told by someone that they were intending to kill you?

V. Emotional Abuse

Sometimes either while growing up or as adults, people feel as if they can't do anything right in other people's eyes; they are often put down, yelled at, humiliated, or told they are no good. Do you recall whether anything like that ever happened to you?

If yes: Tell me what happened? (Go to page 5)

If no: then ask the following questions:

Have you been ridiculed, yelled at or humiliated by others?

Have you been ignored or treated in a cold, uncaring manner?

Did your parents or your spouse control areas of your life that other people usually handle on their own?
Did your parents or spouse make fun of you or tell you that you are no good?

VI. Sexual Abuse

Sometimes people have sexual experiences that make them uncomfortable, cause them to get upset, or that were forced upon them. Do you recall whether anything like that ever happened to you either in childhood or as an adult?

If yes: Tell me what happened? (Go to page 5)

If no: then ask the following questions:

Did you have any sexual experiences before the age of 15?

Did you ever have sexual contact with a relative?

Did someone make sexual comments to you that you found uncomfortable?

Were you ever raped, that is, forced to have sexual contact with someone that you did not wish to have sex with?

Did you ever have sex against your will while dating?

Were you ever forced to have genital sex with another person against your will?

Were you ever forced to have oral or anal sex with another person against your will?

Were you ever asked or forced to watch others perform sex acts such as masturbation or intercourse?

Were you ever asked or forced to pose for sexually oriented photographs?

Were you ever spied on while undressed or in the bath?

When an Event is Answered in the Affirmative

Ask the client to tell you what happened in as much detail as possible. As they describe the event, slow them down, and intersperse the questions listed below, where relevant. Notice when the client glosses over important moments with a catch phrase or leap in chronology. If it becomes evident that this event was not traumatic (e.g. client witnesses minor accident; client feels guilty when masturbating alone), then you can return to the main interview and continue questioning.

During Trauma

When did the event occur?
How old were you?
How long did it last? How often did it occur?
Who was the perpetrator(s)?
How sudden or unpredictable was it?
Level of fear, horror, shame, disgust anger.
How helpless did you feel at the time?

Immediate Post Trauma

After the event, how did you cope?
(withdrawal, panic, denial, anger, self-injury, secrecy)
To what extent do you feel somehow responsible for it?
Was there any physical injury?
How did you r family, spouse, professionals, police respond to you?
What treatment / support did you receive?

Present

What impact did this event have on your (emotional, work, social, family) life?
To what extent are your memories of this event still bothering you today?
How?

(You should then return to the main interview to continue questioning about other traumatic events.)