UNIVERSITY of **HOUSTON**

DEPARTMENT of PSYCHOLOGY
Trauma And Stress Studies Center

TaSSC

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Trauma-Informed Practices and Instruction

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Trauma-Informed Education

"We acknowledge the harmful impacts of the past and hold out hope for a future of healing. We create a safe environment for students to share their lives yet maintain professional boundaries. We provide our caring and our help to others, but have to pay attention to our own well-being, too. We work in our classrooms but depend on the support of our community."

(Venet, 2018)

> "Trauma-informed educators recognize students' actions are a direct result of their life experiences. When their students act out or disengage, they don't ask them, 'What is wrong with you?' but rather, 'What happened to you?' (HUANG ET AL., 2014)

Trauma-Informed Teaching Philosophy

Defining Trauma
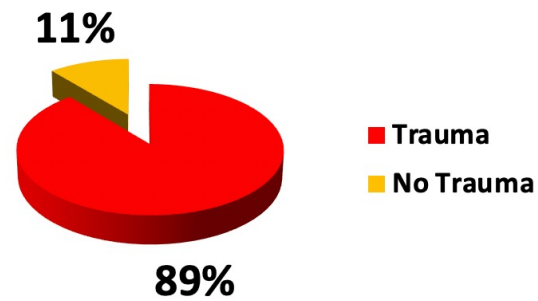
DSM-5 (APA, 2013):

Exposure to **actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence** in one (or more) of the following ways:

- Directly experiencing the traumatic event

- Witnessing, in person, the event as it occurred to others

- Learning that the trauma occurred to a close family member of close friend. *In cases of actual or threatened death of a family member or friend, the event must have been violent or accidental.*

- Experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic events

(DSM-5: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition)

Trauma among General Population

**% of General Population Exposed
to Trauma (DSM-5)**

11%

89%

- ■ Trauma
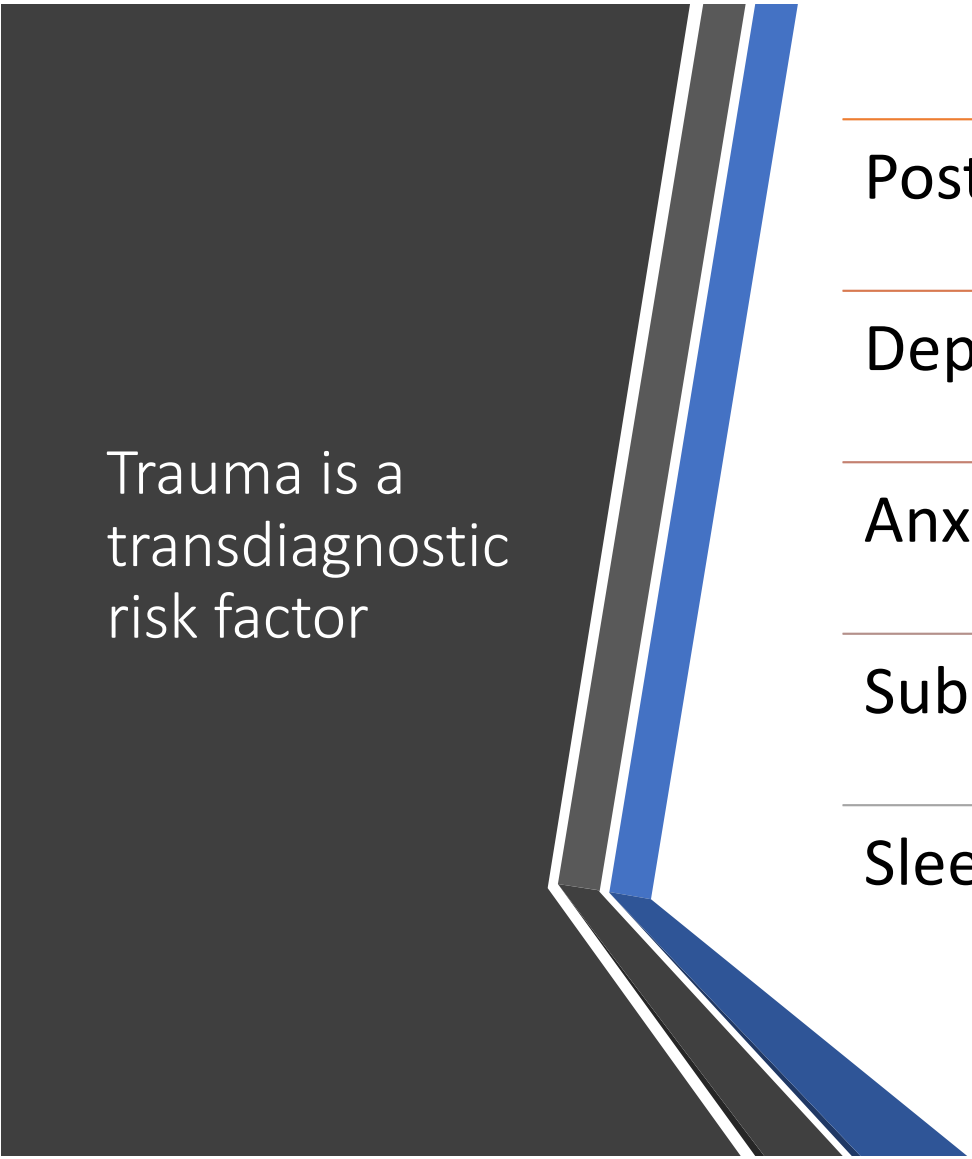- ■ No Trauma

(Kilpatrick et al., 2013)

Defining Trauma

"an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being."

(Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration)

- By the time they reach college, 66 to 85 percent of youth report lifetime traumatic event exposure with many reporting multiple exposures (Read, Ouimette, White, Colder, & Farrow, 2011; Smyth, Hockemeyer, Heron, Wonderlich, & Pennebaker, 2008).

- Sixty percent of adults have reported experiencing abuse or other difficult family circumstances during childhood (National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, 2012).

- College students are particularly vulnerable to experiencing a new potentially traumatizing event (PTE); as many as 50 percent of college students are exposed to a PTE in the first year of college (Galatzer-Levy et al., 2012).

- Female college students with a history of sexual trauma are at higher risk for repeated trauma (Griffin & Read, 2012).

Trauma is a transdiagnostic risk factor
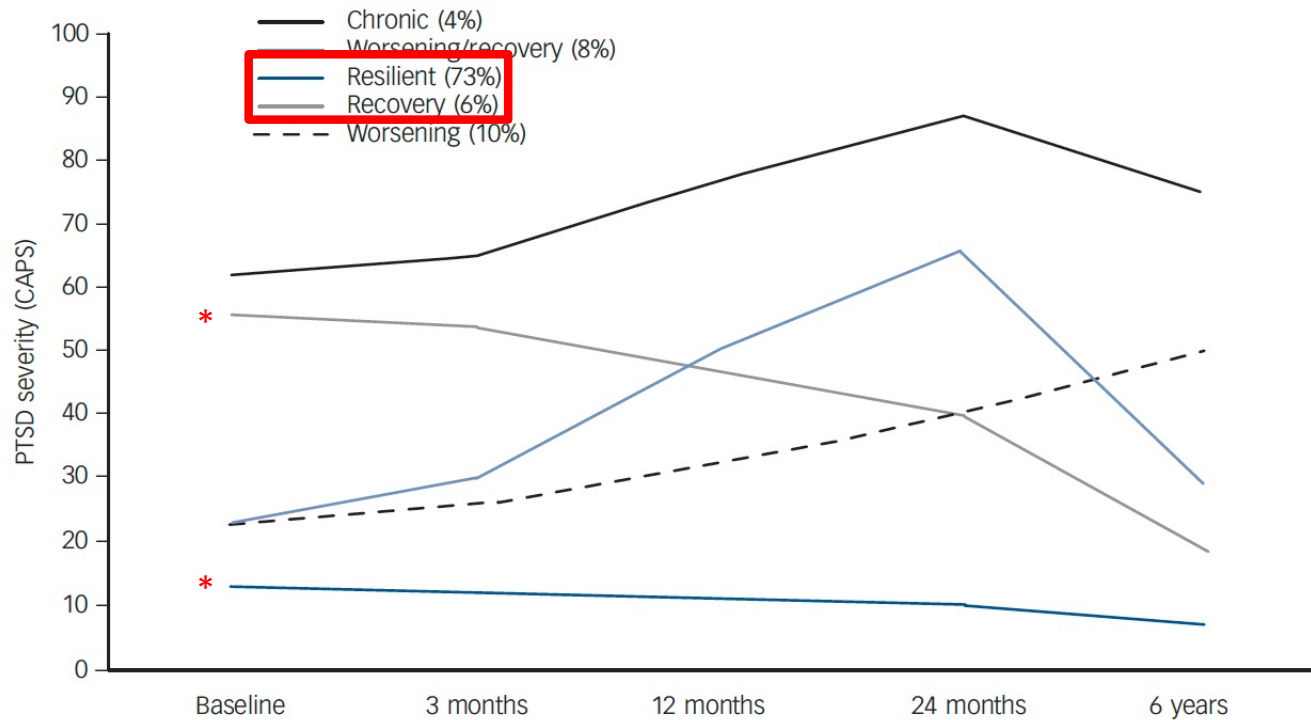
Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Depression

Anxiety

Substance use

Sleep disturbance

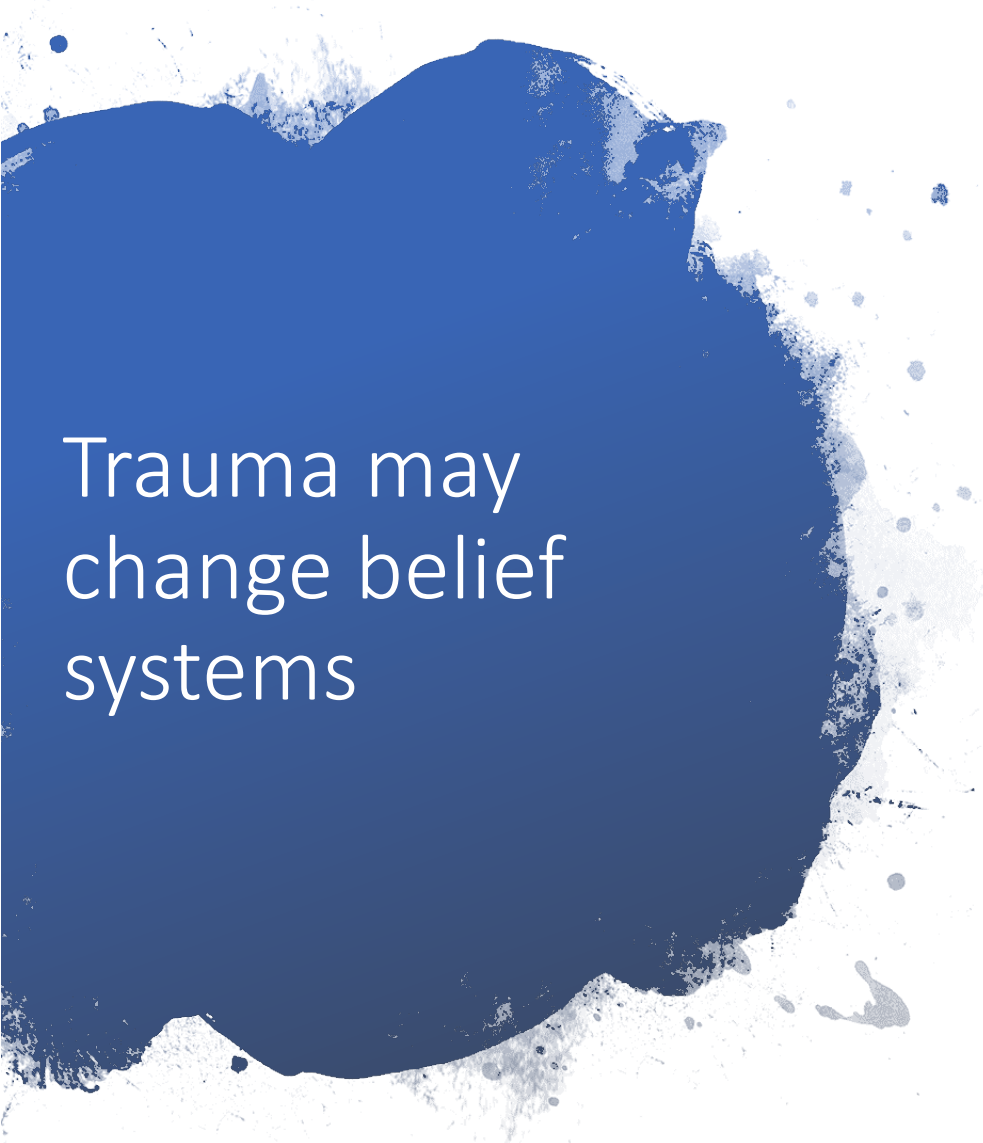**Fig. 1** Trajectories of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) response after traumatic injury.

Patients followed five distinct trajectories: a chronic class (4%), a recovery class (6%), a worsening/recovery class (8%), a worsening class (10%) and a resilient class (73%).
CAPS, Clinician-Administered PTSD Scale for DSM-IV.

(Bryant et al., 2015)

**Trauma in postsecondary learners:
What you might see**

- Difficulty focusing, attending, retaining, and recalling
- Tendency to miss a lot of classes
- Challenges with emotional regulation
- Fear of taking risks
- Anxiety about deadlines, exams, group work, or public speaking
- Anger, helplessness, or dissociation when stressed
- Withdrawal and isolation
- Involvement in unhealthy relationships

Source: Hoch et al., 2015.

Trauma may change belief systems

- **Trust**
  - "No one can be trusted"
  - "I can't trust myself"
- **Safety**
  - "The world is dangerous"
  - "I cannot keep myself safe"
- **Power/Control**
  - "I have no power or control"
  - "Others have power over me"
- **Esteem**
  - "I am damaged"
  - "I am no good"
- **Intimacy**
  - "I can't get close to others"
  - "If I let others close, they will hurt me"

Trauma-Informed Principles for Promoting Wellness and Resilience

Understanding Trauma & Stress

Resilience & Recovery

Cultural Humility & Equity

Systems/ Institutions

Community

Individual & Interpersonal

Collaboration & Empowerment

Safety & Stability

Compassion & Dependability

San Francisco Department of Public Health, Trauma Informed System Initiative (2014)

Table 1. Core values of trauma-informed practice

Core values	Questions to guide the development of trauma-informed practices
Safety (physical and emotional)	• How safe is the building or environment? Are sidewalks and parking areas well-lit? Are there easily accessible exits? • Are directions clear and readily available? • Are security personnel present? • Are signs and other visual materials welcoming, clear, and legible? • Are restrooms easily accessible (e.g. well-marked and gender neutral?) • Are first contacts or introductions welcoming, respectful, and engaging?
Trustworthiness	• Do students receive clear explanations and information about tasks and procedures? • Are specific goals and objectives made clear? • How does the program handle challenges between role clarity and personal/professional boundaries?
Choice and control	• Is each student informed about the available choices and options? • Do students get a clear and appropriate message about their rights and responsibilities? Are there negative consequences for making particular choices? Are these necessary or arbitrary consequences? • Do students have choices about attending various meetings? • Do students choose how contact is made (e.g., by phone or mail to their home or other address)?

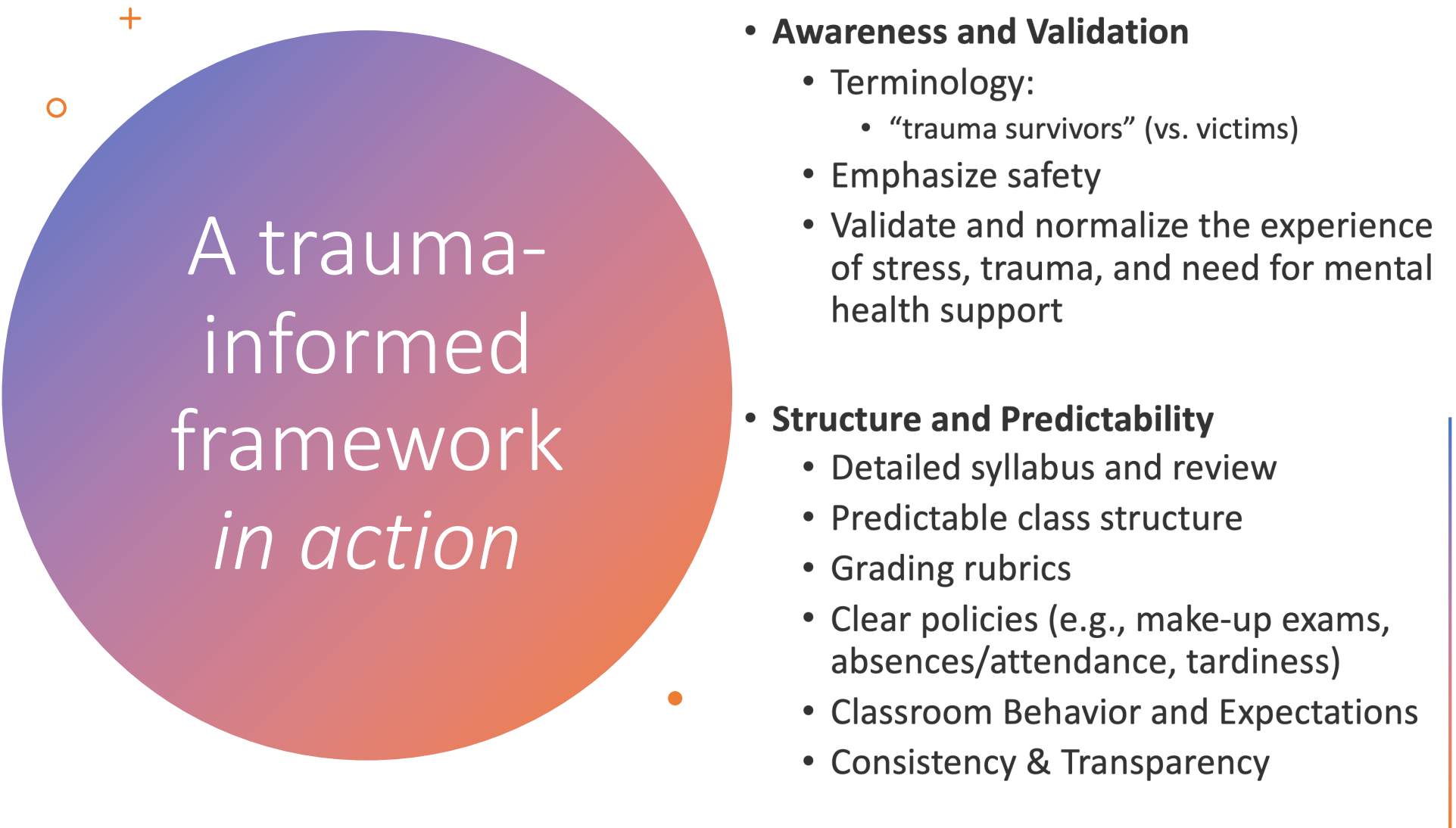| Collaboration	• Is there a student advisory board, and does it have a significant role in planning and evaluation of services? Are there members who identify as trauma survivors or are from a targeted group (such as veterans, foster youth, etc.)?
	• Is student input and preference given substantial weight in service planning, goal setting, and the development of priorities?
	• Do educators identify tasks on which they and students can work simultaneously (e.g., information gathering and committees)?
Empowerment	• How are each student's strengths and skills recognized?
	• Do educators communicate a sense of realistic optimism about students' capacity to achieve their goals?
	• How can each class, contact, or service be focused on skill development or enhancement?

Source: Fallot & Harris, 2009.

SAMHSA's Key Principles of Trauma-Informed Practices

1. Work to ensure student's emotional, cognitive, physical and interpersonal safety.

2. Foster trustworthiness and transparency through connection and communication among students.

3. Intentionally facilitate peer support and mutual self-help in your courses.

4. Promote collaboration and mutuality by sharing power and decision making with your students.

5. Empower voice and choice by identifying and helping build on student strengths.

6. Pay attention to cultural, historical and gender issues.

A trauma-informed framework *in action*
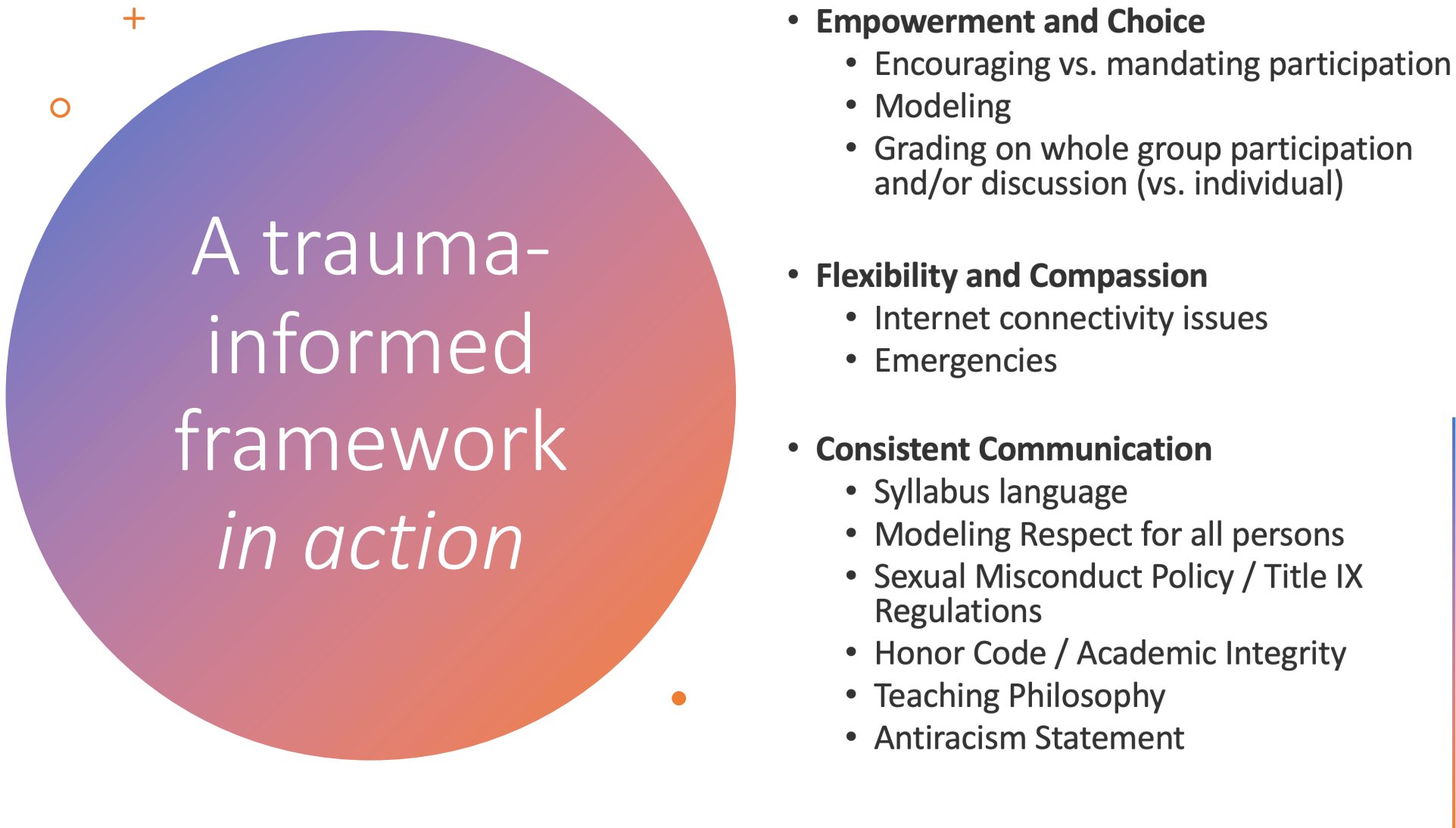
- **Awareness and Validation**
  - Terminology:
    - "trauma survivors" (vs. victims)
  - Emphasize safety
  - Validate and normalize the experience of stress, trauma, and need for mental health support
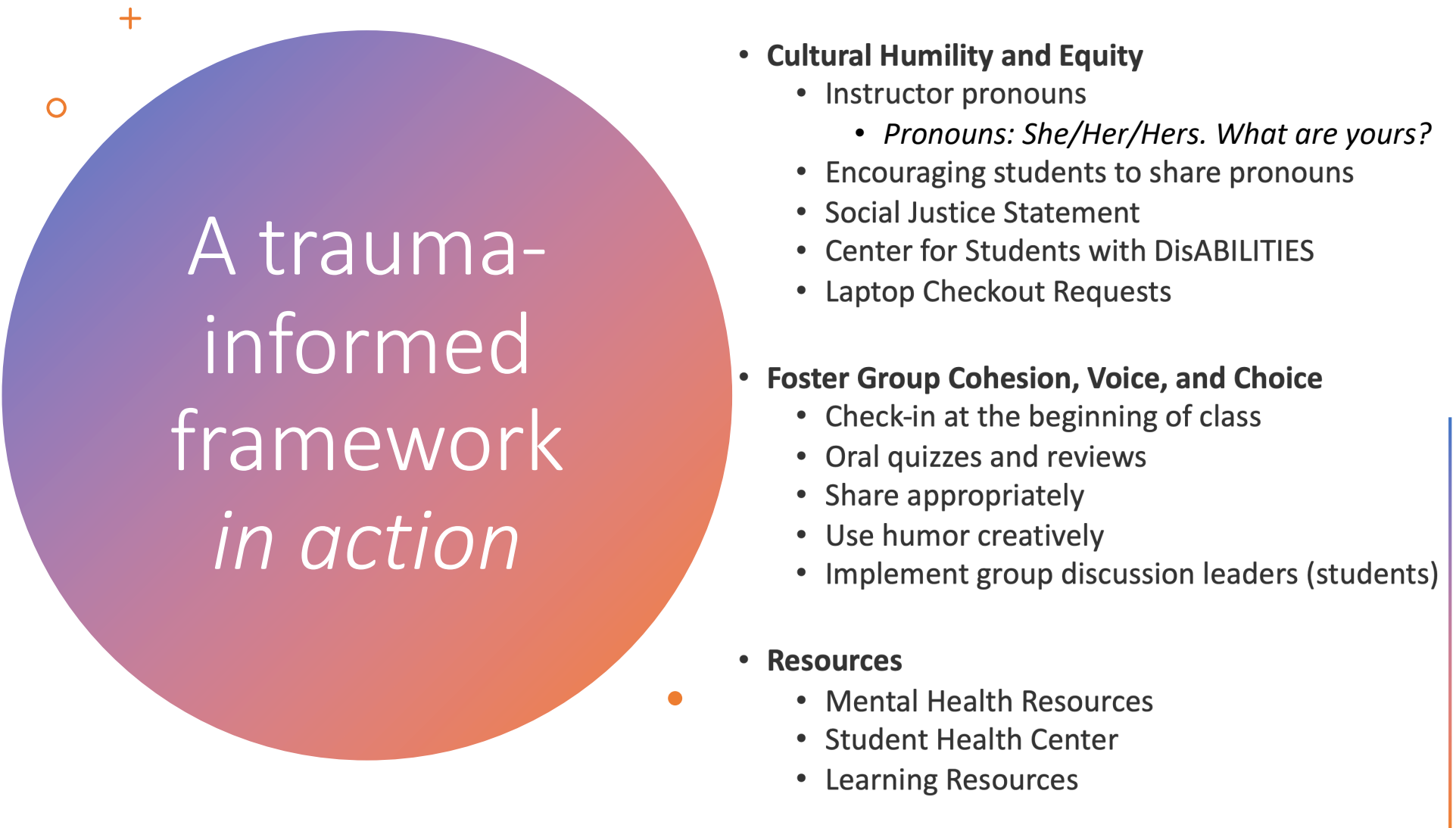
- **Structure and Predictability**
  - Detailed syllabus and review
  - Predictable class structure
  - Grading rubrics
  - Clear policies (e.g., make-up exams, absences/attendance, tardiness)
  - Classroom Behavior and Expectations
  - Consistency & Transparency

A trauma-informed framework *in action*

- **Empowerment and Choice**
  - Encouraging vs. mandating participation
  - Modeling
  - Grading on whole group participation and/or discussion (vs. individual)

- **Flexibility and Compassion**
  - Internet connectivity issues
  - Emergencies

- **Consistent Communication**
  - Syllabus language
  - Modeling Respect for all persons
  - Sexual Misconduct Policy / Title IX Regulations
  - Honor Code / Academic Integrity
  - Teaching Philosophy
  - Antiracism Statement

A trauma-informed framework *in action*

- **Cultural Humility and Equity**
  - Instructor pronouns
    - *Pronouns: She/Her/Hers. What are yours?*
  - Encouraging students to share pronouns
  - Social Justice Statement
  - Center for Students with DisABILITIES
  - Laptop Checkout Requests

- **Foster Group Cohesion, Voice, and Choice**
  - Check-in at the beginning of class
  - Oral quizzes and reviews
  - Share appropriately
  - Use humor creatively
  - Implement group discussion leaders (students)

- **Resources**
  - Mental Health Resources
  - Student Health Center
  - Learning Resources

Class Format:

This class will follow a similar format each week:

(1) <u>Oral Quiz:</u> Students will answer questions about the readings (~20 minutes).
(2) <u>Diagnostic Skills Exercise:</u> Students will observe a video case description and provide a written answer to justify a diagnosis (~30 minutes).
(3) <u>Break:</u> 10 minutes
(4) <u>Lecture:</u> Instructor will give a lecture emphasizing the key aspects of the topic (~ 60 minutes).
(5) <u>Break:</u> 10 minutes
(6) <u>Critical discussion:</u> Students will participate in a critical discussion of the scientific, ethical, and professional themes associated with a particular topic. To this end, the assigned papers for the week will be assigned to 2 students who will lead the discussion on the papers. The discussion may relate to the scientific, ethical, and professional themes associated with a particular topic (~ 45-60 minutes).

Teaching Philosophy:

The COVID-19 pandemic has created serious, unprecedented, and challenging circumstances and a context of chronic stress for all of us. I am cognizant of just how deeply this pandemic affects each and every one of us on an individual level. There is still much that we do not know about the course or impact of the pandemic on individuals, society, or our global community. I encourage us all to be safe, first and foremost, and to be conscious of and sensitive to the struggles that we and our fellow community members may be facing. We are all in this together.

As we struggle as individuals and as a nation to heal from a history of pervasive, systemic racism and to create and foster antiracism [Kendi, I. X. (2019). *How to be an antiracist*. New York: Random House.], I am letting you know, especially students of color, that I am here for you. I see you, hear you, and I stand with the Black community and all oppressed communities against systemic, social, and racial oppression. Together, we will assert that racism, discrimination, classism, xenophobia, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and other weapons of divisive hate have no place on college campuses or in civil society. We are all in this together.

We will move forward through these challenging times with flexibility and compassion as a class and as a community.

Our classroom is a safe space. My teaching philosophy is rooted in a nonjudgmental acceptance of diverse ideas, questions, and perspectives. I hope to cultivate an atmosphere of social justice, comfort, and openness, so that we can learn together without worry about judgment or disrespect. An optimal learning environment is open-minded, active, and engaging, emphasizing a collaborative exchange of thoughts, ideas, and perspectives. Students are encouraged to reflect analytically upon the material, to ask questions, and to participate actively in the course.

Sexual Misconduct Policy:

In accordance with the University of Houston Systems Sexual Misconduct Policy, your instructor is a "responsible employee" for reporting purposes under Title IX regulations and state law and must report incidents of sexual misconduct (sexual harassment, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual intimidation, intimate partner violence, or stalking) about which they become aware to the Title IX office. Please know there are places on campus where you can make a report in confidence. More information can be found on the Title IX website at https://uh.edu/equal-opportunity/title-ix-sexual-misconduct/resources/

Title IX Policies

Outside the classroom

- Keep confidentiality parameters clear
- Offer validation
- Maintain consistency
- Model predictability
- Create and enforce professional boundaries
- **SHARE RESOURCES**

Maintain
Self-Care

In closing

Gloria Watkins published her first book, "Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism," under her pen name, bell hooks. Monica Almeida/The New York Times

In *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, bell hooks argues for us to "make the classroom a place that is life-sustaining and mind-expanding, a place of liberating mutuality where teacher and student together work in partnership."

Questions?

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