



# Refugee Services Florida Center for Survivors of Torture

Gulf Coast Jewish Family & Community Services

## Community Training Toolkit

*Advancing Promising Practices in the Torture Treatment Field*

# What is Torture?

## U.S. Definition of Torture

### 18 U.S.C. § 2340

An act committed by a person acting *under the color of law* specifically intended to inflict severe physical or mental pain or suffering (other than pain or suffering incidental to lawful sanctions) upon another person within his custody or physical control

Every act of torture is a violation of human rights.

# Why Does Torture Exist?

- To **destroy** the spirit of an individual
- To **break apart** families and diminish the strength of their support
- To **divide** communities by instilling fear and mistrust
- To **repress** societies through intimidation and control



# Common Forms of Torture

There tend to be patterns by country and region. Our Country Condition reports can help to expose these patterns.

- **Physical:** forced postures, electrocution, sexual torture, falanga (beating bottom of feet), strategic beating, burning, pharmacological torture
- **Psychological:** mock executions, forced to witness torture, deprivation (of food and/or medical attention), repeated and systematic threats, isolation, sensory stress

*This is not an exhaustive account of all torture practices.*



# Consequences of Torture

Individuals will manifest consequences of torture in different ways.

- Affliction: physical, psychological, social and/or spiritual
- Limited ability to function day-to-day
  - Difficulty maintaining relationships
  - Difficulty with adjustment process in new community
  - Limited ability to adapt and cope with stressful situations
  - Limited ability to problem-solve
  - Lack of self-confidence
- Enhanced resiliency
  - Traumatic events can be transformational experiences



Mollica, R. (2008)

# Key Questions for Identifying Torture Survivors

Individuals and families are targeted based on race/ethnicity, religion, national origin, political opinion or membership in a particular group.

- Were you ever detained, arrested or jailed in your home country for one of the reasons listed above?
- In your home country, did you experience violence or fear of losing your life for one of the reasons listed above?
- Was anyone in your family threatened because of your beliefs or actions?

Perpetrators are often individuals acting in an official capacity or those who act on behalf of officials from the government, military/militia, rebel groups, police and political groups.

- Were you or a family member ever hurt physically or emotionally by members of the groups listed above?
- Did any of the above groups use your beliefs against you to intentionally cause you physical or emotional harm?

# In Summary...

- Even if we cannot see symptoms we must respect the impact of trauma and violence.
- Such impact has long-term consequences.
- Labeling torture experiences using mental health terms is too simplistic.
- Resilience and healing are **POSSIBLE**.



# Key Needs for Rebuilding Lives

Medical

Mental Health

Employment

Legal

Social Services

Education

Spiritual Needs

Community Engagement



# When Supporting the Survivor

- **Create a trusting relationship**
  - This requires patient, consistent, honest, realistic and open communication
  - Practice empathy
    - The [Harvard Program for Refugee Trauma](#) defines **empathy** as: the picturing of the life experience of the survivor in the service provider's mind and the sharing of the survivor's emotional state
- **Establish an accepting and warm environment**
  - Be sensitive to the survivor's cultural norms (e.g. appropriate eye contact, greeting style and closeness)
  - No judgments
- **Provide guidance and cultural orientation**
  - Explain the system of taxation, credit and debt
  - Describe the process for seeking employment (including creating resumes and cover letters as well as dressing for an interview)
  - Discuss the options for receiving medical coverage and any temporary benefits they may be entitled to.
  - Explain the requirements for obtaining housing either by rent or purchase including down payments, lease agreements, mortgages, etc.

# When Supporting the Survivor

- **Minimize language barriers**
  - Enroll clients in ESL classes
  - Orient ESL teachers about working with survivors of torture
  - Identify peer mentors of the same culture to provide ESL tutoring to clients
- **Encourage community involvement**
  - Survivors can connect with one another
  - Helps to reduce the survivor's sense of isolation and disconnection
- **Support survivor's determination, courage and hope**
  - Treat individuals as *survivors not victims*
  - Role play using basic language skills to help prepare survivors to apply for employment, use public transportation, and other daily activities.

# Be Aware of Cultural Realities

- **Appreciate cultural norms**

- Language
- Relationships with government and people in positions of authority
- Appropriate distance of physical space and eye contact during communication
- Act as cultural facilitator

- **Consider survivor's strengths**

- Life pre-torture
- Support survivor by acknowledging their role as a parent, professional and community member



# Helping Torture Survivors **Self-Heal**

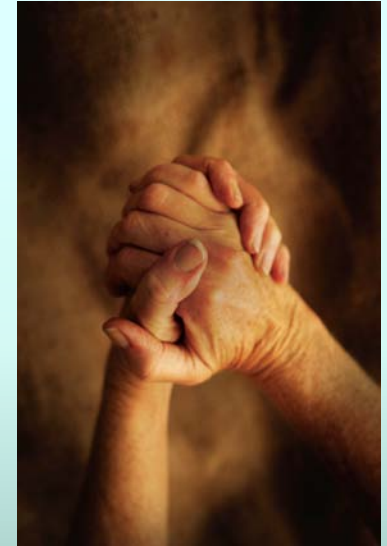


## Three Aspects of Self-Healing

Altruism

Work

Spirituality



## Steps to Self-Healing

Good nutrition

Exercise

Reducing the feelings of betrayal

Importance of laughter and humor

Encouraging social activities

Education about the effects of stress and traumatic events

# Self-Care Practice for Service Providers

Service providers can reduce the accumulated stress and pain of their relationship with clients through informal and organized collegial, peer support that focuses on the self-care of group members.

- Important practices
  - Diet and exercise
  - Having a local, well-rounded team responsible for the different aspects of the rehabilitation process
  - Promote a unified, team-oriented work environment
  - Daily informal sharing among colleagues of clinical problems
  - Encourage patient and community support
  - Family involvement
  - Don't forget to have some fun!

# About NPCT...

➤ The National Partnership for Community Training (NPCT) is a technical assistance project aimed at promoting and disseminating the best and promising practices in the torture rehabilitation field from existing torture treatment centers in the United States and around the world. NPCT assists and supports providers nationally through training and technical assistance in areas of the country where there are no torture treatment centers. Using these promising practices NPCT promotes practical and applied techniques to identify, refer, assist and effectively serve torture survivors. *This project is funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement.*

➤ NPCT is a partnership between the Florida Center for Survivors of Torture (FCST) in Tampa Bay and Miami, Florida; the Harvard Program for Refugee Trauma in Cambridge, Massachusetts; and the Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture in New York, NY. Together, NPCT provides technical assistance to those working with refugees, asylum seekers and other immigrant populations, to increase awareness in serving this population.



# Refugee Services Florida Center for Survivors of Torture

Gulf Coast Jewish Family & Community Services

As a *Center Without Walls*, FCST provides linkages to community based medical, psychological, legal, educational and social services. The program's unique design allows for the maximization of community resources by establishing and training a network of service providers throughout the Tampa Bay and Miami-Dade areas.

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Gulf Coast Jewish Family & Community Services

*Our purpose is to provide  
essential human services  
to individuals and families  
in times of need.*