Understanding Trauma

**Trauma:** an experience or situation that is emotionally painful or distressing and that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope

**During traumatic event:**
- Hippocampus (responsible for chronology) shuts down
- Amygdala (responsible for emotional memory) on overdrive
- “Freezing”: individual’s ability to speak and/or move is compromised

**Effects:**
- Fragmented memories with intense emotional association
- Triggers: anything internal or external that recalls sensory/emotionally memory of trauma
- Freezing even more common in SA survivors than other kinds of trauma
- High instances of repeat victimization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptoms of Trauma</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arousal</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyper-arousal: on guard or easily startled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irritability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Healing is facilitated by

- Regaining a sense of control
- Supportive responses from family, friends & first responders
- Positive social supports
- Opportunity to integrate experience
- Engagement with positive coping strategies