




DESCHUTES COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Policy Title: Dealing with Persons Who Have Experienced Trauma	Effective Date: March 3, 2024	Policy Number: 5.40
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Attachments:	 L. Shane Nelson, Sheriff	

I. PURPOSE

To provide best practices for interacting with persons who have experienced trauma.

II. POLICY

The Deschutes County Sheriff's Office is committed to providing guidance regarding interactions in the community in compliance with ORS 181A.445.

III. DEFINITIONS

Trauma - an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being. Examples could include being the victim of a crime, witnessing an assault or vehicle crash, being neglected as a child, being sexually abused, or serving in combat operations.

IV. INTERACTING WITH PERSONS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED TRAUMA

When interacting with a person who has experienced trauma, members should understand that the person is likely to be anxious about disclosing events, may fear being victimized further, or may be hypervigilant as a result of the trauma or past traumas. It is important to try to make the person feel safe both physically and emotionally. When responding to a situation where a person has experienced trauma, members should:

1. Screen and assess ongoing safety issues ("is there a firearm in the home?") ("are you safe here?").
2. Connect the person to available resources, such as domestic violence shelters or victim's advocates.
3. Help the person obtain protective orders if appropriate.
4. Recognize that the person may fear law enforcement involvement based upon their own activities or status – such as illegal drug activities, their immigration status, or involvement in sex work – and work to reduce their fear of adverse consequences for disclosing the events.
5. Be transparent by explaining why certain events are happening or are going to happen.
6. Speak slowly when explaining complex processes or policies.

7. Clarify the individual's understanding throughout the conversation.
8. Do not overpromise, or be unrealistic about outcomes.
9. To the extent possible, provide the person with choices and options about how to proceed.
10. If available, members should attempt to connect the person who has experienced trauma with someone with similar experiences to provide peer support.

V. EMOTIONAL REACTIONS OF PERSONS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED TRAUMA

Members should understand that persons who have experienced trauma may display a wide variety of emotional responses, some of which may seem inappropriate – such as laughing or having no emotional response. These responses are a normal result of trauma, which can also affect a person's ability to recall events or the sequence of events. People who have experienced trauma may be operating in survival mode and they may have trouble focusing on details as they are looking for danger. These behaviors should be viewed as normal indicators of trauma, and do not indicate that the person is not credible. Trauma affects everyone differently, and some people will experience adverse effects immediately after the event while others may experience them later.

VI. INTERVIEWING PEOPLE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED TRAUMA

People who have experienced trauma are often placed in positions where they are coerced and forced to submit to the will of others. Members should be aware that their authority as a law enforcement official is a position of power, and they should attempt to engage in a way that reduces the power imbalance. Using first names instead of position titles, using simple, clear language to communicate, and encouraging the person to ask questions and engage in a dialogue are all good practices to make the person feel less anxious.

When interviewing a person who has experienced trauma, interviewers should:

1. If possible, conduct the interview in a private setting;
2. Allow people to use their own words when describing events and answering questions;
3. Remain calm and do not escalate;
4. If possible, allow the person to choose who they interact with (a female officer, an officer of color, etc.);
5. Allow the person the opportunity to take breaks to attend to personal needs, and check in with them to see how they are feeling;
6. Assure the person it is ok if they do not know the answer to a question they are asked.
7. Recognize that the person's gender, cultural background, race or other characteristics may impact how they respond to law enforcement and work to overcome those barriers.

