



# Clearinghouse on Supervised Visitation Phone Conference/Webinar Agenda



March 17, 2021  
12PM/11CT

## Discussion

1. Welcome and Announcements – Everyone is invited!
2. Check the listings on the website to ensure your program information is up to date and correct for the quarterly report. If you need to add or change anything email Lyndi Bradley at [lbradley2@fsu.edu](mailto:lbradley2@fsu.edu).
3. Questions from Directors –
4. Don't forget—Next month (April) is Child Abuse Awareness Month. Check out the Pinwheels for Prevention Campaign for more resources! <https://www.ounce.org/CAPMonth.html>
5. Trauma and Memory
6. Domestic Violence and Animals
7. What is Digital Self Harm?

**Prevent Child Abuse Florida** is gearing for **Child Abuse Awareness Month** (April). Check out the statewide initiative ***Pinwheels for Prevention*** for resources.

<https://www.ounce.org/CAPmonth.html>



# Trauma and Memory



## Introduction

This phone conference will explain how stress and trauma affects the formation and retention of memories. This chapter will describe how the consequences of trauma can have profound implications on victims' ability to remember details about the abuse they have suffered

## Objectives:

After completing this phone conference, supervised visitation staff will be able to:

1. Describe the impact of trauma on the human brain
2. Demonstrate the impacts of trauma on memories, including disordered thinking, flashbacks, and compulsive or intrusive memories

## How Are Memories Formed?

It is useful to describe the process of memory formation, before considering factors that contribute to memory impairment.

- An individual's memory is composed of information that is perceived and stored for later retrieval.
  - Information is first received through our senses: what a person sees, hears, feels, and understands.
  - These bits of information are then encoded and stored in different parts of the brain, including the hippocampus and amygdala.
- The **hippocampus** is critical to form new explicit memories in the prefrontal cortex.
  - The hippocampus gives our experiences a chronological order and integrates the information into narratives with context and perspectives.
  - These explicit memories can then be consolidated and stored in long-term memory in the neocortex.
- The **amygdala** is responsible for memories, decision making, and emotional regulation.
  - The amygdala also links the fragmented sensory memories (smells, tastes, smells, etc.) to intense feelings like fear, threat, or anger.
  - These sensory fragments of implicit memories can be triggers for intense fear reactions at a later time.

## Effect of Trauma on Memory Formation

- Normally, the amygdala and hippocampus work together, and the hippocampus can give emotional memories from the amygdala some context and perspective.
- But if a memory is formed during a very stressful or traumatic event, stress hormones cause the amygdala to be overactive, and overwhelm the hippocampus and impair its functioning.
- This prevents successful encoding of narrative/cognitive memories, and results in the sensory, fragmented memories (Cozolino, 2017).
- Victims of trauma sometimes report “flashbulb” or very vivid memories that can occur during a traumatic event when a burst of adrenaline strengthens the pathways that encodes and stores core memories (McGaugh, 2000).
- Flashbulb memories often capture the initial moments of a traumatic event.

### **Brain Activity and Memory**

Through the use of magnetic resonance imaging (MRIs) and neurocircuitry modeling, neuroscientists have demonstrated that trauma can affect the brain’s structure, and thus, a person’s reaction to trauma. Neurocircuitry models show that when a person has experienced trauma, the most notable changes in the brain activity occur in the hippocampus (Akiki et al., 2017; Apfel et al., 2011) and in the amygdala. The amygdala is the part of the brain primarily responsible for the regulation of emotion. Research shows that tremendous stress causes an increase in activity in the amygdala. The hippocampus is the area of the brain primarily responsible for memory. When an individual suffers from trauma, the hippocampus shows less activity, which helps explain some of the impairment in narrative memory creation.

Researchers have pointed to the role of the hippocampus to explain the following in victims of violence:

- Memory problems
- Irritability
- Mood swings
- Confusion
- Chronic fatigue
- Loss of consciousness
- Cold sweats
- Hyperactivity
- Disorientation
- Loss of impulse control
- Speechlessness and memory loss of traumatic events may last anywhere between hours, weeks, or years

(Torrise et al., 2019)

The way in which the brain stores memories of traumatic events is complex. However, we do know that traumatic memories are often first stored as sensory information (sight, smell, sound, touch, and taste). This means that some of the clearest memories for victims may involve sensory information regarding the event. At the same time, because the hippocampus provides syntax (or speech) context to memories, when the hippocampus is impaired by stress hormones, victims may not clearly remember exactly what was said during a traumatic event.

### **Tunnel Memory**

Researchers have found that victims' memories of highly traumatic interpersonal events such as sexual assault and domestic violence are less clear, demonstrate a reduction of chronological order, and are often not as well remembered (Bown et al., 2019) as other negative memories. For comparison, researchers studied reactions to incidents including car accidents (Scher et al., 2008), shootings (McLaughlin & Kar, 2019), seeing a victim of an accident (Ryb et al., 2009), and verbal accounts of other traumatic events.

Tunnel memory may explain this difference in reaction. The presence of emotional stress may lead to a very high **restriction or narrowing** of attention to the central details of the situation. This results in the memory of **central details** being clearer or sharper in memory than memory of the peripheral information – the sequence of events, others present, the environment, etc. (Arntz et al., 2005). This dynamic is called tunnel memory (Steinmetz et al., 2012).

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# Domestic Violence and Animals



## Introduction

Victims often want to leave domestic violence perpetrators and take their vulnerable pets with them. This chapter describes how s. 741.30, F.S. was amended to allow petitioners to include their pets in injunctions for protection against domestic violence. Exemptions are also discussed.

## Objectives

Supervised visitation programs will be able to:

- Describe how some perpetrators of domestic violence may use family pets in power and control tactics to manipulate victims.
- Understand the need for the new protections.
- Explain how s. 741.30, F.S. was amended in 2020 to allow petitioners to include pets in petitions for injunctions for protection.
- List the exceptions to the law.

## Background: Power and Control

Perpetrators of domestic violence may use tactics to manipulate, control, and punish victims; this can include perpetrators injuring or killing beloved pets, or threatening to do so. A victim's fear for the safety of a family pet may be one of many reasons as to why it is difficult to leave a perpetrator. In 2020, s. 741.30, F.S., was amended to allow people who apply for injunctions for protection against domestic violence a way to protect their pets by including them in the injunction for protection.

Research indicates that pet ownership is common, and many victims of domestic violence have witnessed animal abuse. Specifically:

1. 67% of American households have at least one pet (American Pet Products Association [APPA], 2021).
2. More households in the US have a pet than have a child (Fuoco, 2019).
3. In one survey, 71% of pet owning survivors of domestic violence reported that their abuser threatened, injured, or killed their pets (Ascoine et al., 1997).
4. As many as 48% of domestic violence survivors with pets delay seeking safety, fearing what would happen if they left their pets behind (Riggs et al., 2018).

5. The problem is not limited to the U.S., or to heterosexual relationships. In a study of survivors who were either living in Australia or the United Kingdom, one-fifth of those who witnessed intimate partner violence also witnessed animal abuse by the perpetrator. The study also noted that women who had previously witnessed animal cruelty reported higher psychological distress levels and lower levels of support systems. Lesbian and bisexual individuals who participated in the study and who had witnessed animal cruelty also reported lower levels of social support (Riggs et al., 2018).

## **The Importance of the Human-Animal Bond**

Numerous groups have emphasized the value of a human-animal bond for the comfort and sense of security it provides to individuals. Researchers have determined that interacting with pets can lower a person's blood pressure and reduce stress. Those valuable interactions between animals and humans can assist individuals in the healing process after surgery and ease their loneliness. Animals are used for veterans with PTSD, children with developmental disabilities, and those at risk for engaging in antisocial behavior. The relationship is regarded as mutually beneficial because animals receive care, protection, and nurture from their humans.

(National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, 2014)

## **Overview of Changes to Florida Statute 741.30**

As of July 1, 2020, s. 741.30, F.S. authorizes the court to award (as part of the relief in a civil injunction against domestic violence) the petitioner the exclusive care, possession, or control of an animal that the petitioner, the respondent, or a minor child residing in the home of either party owns, possesses, harbors, keeps, or holds, except an animal owned primarily for a bona fide agricultural purpose or a service animal, if the respondent is the service animal's handler.

The statute also allows the court to order the respondent to have no contact with the animal and prohibit the respondent from:

- Taking,
- transferring,
- encumbering,
- concealing,
- harming,
- or otherwise disposing of the animal.

## **Some Important Considerations**

- Note that the new law authorizes courts to award temporary custody of the household pet to the petitioner based on whether the respondent has committed domestic violence against the **petitioner** (or if there is reasonable cause to believe they are in imminent danger of domestic violence).
- Allegations regarding respondent's actions of threatening to hurt or hurting a pet **alone** would likely not be sufficient to support the entry of a temporary injunction or final injunction for the protection of a person from domestic violence.

- The petitioner must allege violence or threats of violence by respondent against petitioner and may add allegations regarding the family pet if relevant.
- The petitioner need not show threats or harm to the family pet in order to be ordered temporary custody of the family pet and for the court to prohibit the respondent from taking or harming the pet in the future.
- If the respondent has intentionally injured or killed a family pet, the petitioner should report it in the petition Fla Family Law Form 12.980(a), Section III, paragraph 4(e).
  - According to s. 741.30(6)(b)4, F.S., the court must also consider that abusive behavior toward a pet when determining whether the petitioner has reasonable cause to believe he or she is in imminent danger of becoming a victim of domestic violence and is entitled to relief under the law.
- Although the law has changed, as of early 2021, the Florida Supreme Court authorized forms for petition and temporary injunction have not been updated to include a specific paragraph requesting or awarding pets.
- For the court to consider awarding a petitioner with the pet, the petition must specifically request that the court award or place the pet with the petitioner.

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# What is Digital Self Harm?



## Introduction

The behavior "digital-self harm" was named after a 14-year-old girl made negative posts about herself on social media leading up to her death in 2013. Since then, the frequency of digital self-harm as increased around the world. Digital self-harm among adolescents has risen as a result of COVID-19 because more time is being spent online, rather than in person.

## Objectives

- To understand what digital self-harm is and how it is done
- To understand the warning signs and risk factors of digital self-harm
- To gain resources relating to digital self-harm

## What is Digital-Self Harm?

Digital self-harm is when someone creates an anonymous social media account and uses the account to publicly post or send hurtful and abusive messages to one's self. To others, it appears as if someone is cyber-bullying the adolescent. In Florida, about 10% of middle schoolers and high schoolers have reported digital self-harm.

## Risk Factors for Engaging in Digital Self-Harm

Risk-factors for engaging in digital self-harm include:

- Deviant behavior
- Drug use
- Experience with school bullying
- Experience with cyber-bullying
- Sexual orientation
- Symptoms of depression



## Warning Signs of Digital Self-Harm

Warning signs of engagement in digital self-harm could include:

- High stress levels

- Lack of support system
- Low self-esteem
- Previous experience with bullying
- Poor coping mechanisms
- Struggles with social interactions
- Symptoms of depression

### Why are Adolescents Digitally Self-Harming?

There are many different motivations for why adolescents engage in digital self-harm. Motivations for digitally self-harming differs by gender. Out of 5,593 middle schoolers and high schoolers that participated in survey related to digital self-harm, it was found that males (7.1%) were more likely to digitally self-harm than females (5.3%).

Motivation	Those who identify as male	Those who identify as female
A joke	41%	21%
To show resilience	21%	29%
Looking for sympathy	17%	31%
To see if someone was really their friend	17%	29%
They do not know	14%	24%
Looking for attention	14%	9%
Looking for help	10%	6%
Another reason	5%	5%
Did not want to answer	2%	3%

### What Parents Can Do

Parents can have open, honest, and judgement-free conversations with their teenager about difficult topics regarding mental health. From there, parents can:

- Help their teenager build a support system
- See if their teenager would feel comfortable going to therapy to learn how to manage stress levels, regulate complex emotions, problem solve, and boost self-esteem
- Monitor social media if necessary

### Resources for Parents and Adolescents

If you suspect your teenager is engaging in digital self-harm, you can:

- **Contact a local therapist or counselor**

**Resources adolescents can utilize are:**



- Talking to a parent or trusted adult
- Talking to a school counselor
- Utilize Headspace, a meditation app
- Texting or calling 211
- Contacting the Crisis Text Line – text “HOME” to the number 741741
- Calling 1-800-273-TALK (Suicide hotline)

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