

## **Louisiana Dept. of Justice Law Enforcement Training: June 2021**

In June 2021, A Law Enforcement Training hosted by the Louisiana Department of Justice in New Orleans, focused on dealing with child victims. The training included law enforcement personnel, social workers, and Children's Advocacy Center employees, offering a unique perspective on the intersection of law enforcement and child welfare. The session was led by Monica Taylor from the Attorney General's office, specializing in human trafficking.

### **Key Insights from the Training:**

#### **1. Impact of Trauma on Brain Function:**

- Trauma affects brain function, leading to a shutdown of the pre-frontal cortex (responsible for rational thought and impulse control) and an overactivation of the amygdala (which drives fear responses).
- Victims may struggle to articulate their thoughts or answer questions due to this trauma response, which can manifest as fight, flight, or freeze.

#### **2. Young Victims and Impulsivity:**

- Individuals under 25 are particularly vulnerable due to incomplete brain development, leading to impulsive behaviors during trauma.
- Approaching young victims with anger or intimidation is counterproductive; creating a safe environment is essential for accurate communication.

#### **3. Adolescent Mental Health Crisis:**

- Teen suicide rates have doubled since 2006, with suicide now the second leading cause of death among ages 10 to 24.
- The pandemic has exacerbated mental health issues, leaving many youth without crucial support systems.
- Budget cuts to mental health initiatives in schools have limited available resources.

#### **4. Understanding Responses to Threat:**

- The traditional "fight/flight" model should include "freeze" as the initial response to danger. This can manifest as tonic immobility, where individuals may appear unresponsive until they feel safe.
- Once the freeze response is addressed, individuals may choose to flee or fight. It is vital for law enforcement to remain calm and validate these responses, facilitating a safer environment for communication.

#### **5. Connecting Youth to Resources:**

- Quick access to mental health resources is crucial. If a child expresses suicidal thoughts, consider psychiatric hospitalization rather than punitive measures.
- Encourage connections to trained counselors and support networks, emphasizing that addressing mental health is a priority.

By understanding these dynamics, law enforcement officers can improve their interactions with child victims and witnesses, ultimately fostering better outcomes for those in vulnerable situations.