

Angela Diaz: Hi, my name is Angela Diaz, and I would like to talk about trauma in particular, sexual trauma. At the Mount Sinai Adolescent Health Center, we see young people that come for a number of services. And something that people may not be aware of is how common trauma is in the life of the young people that come to us. The young people that come to the Mount Sinai Adolescent Health Center, about 70% of them has significant trauma, sometimes complex chronic trauma. Our young people may have been traumatized by a history of childhood, neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, incest, rape, tender age violence, domestic violence.

Angela Diaz: So we also see young people who are being sex-trafficked, and there are other things that can be quite traumatic. Like when you have community violence, when you are a victim of discrimination, whether it's racism or because of your gender or sexual orientation. So we work with a highly traumatized population. And it is very important when you work with traumatized population to understand and be aware of how common trauma is, the negative impact that trauma has in the victims, and what are those signs and symptoms that they present with.

Angela Diaz: The Mount Sinai Adolescent Health Center is a trauma in form center. Everything that we do is without trauma lens because we know how prevalent trauma is in the life of our young people. So just by having a teen-friendly system where people are warm, welcoming, respect for the young person, feel connected, all those things are very important for a trauma victim. Because they usually have been living in isolation with their history and what happened to them. So when you help them feel connected, when they know that they are not alone, that help them also heal, is extremely important. And more specifically we actually do services for trauma.

Angela Diaz: So we have the mental health staff, all are trained on doing trauma focus, cognitive behavioral therapy, and many other modalities of therapy that work for this population. We provide individual therapy around the trauma. We do groups that are specific for the trauma. For example, we run groups for young people who are victim of incest. And the entire support group and psychotherapy group is about dealing with a trauma and help to heal and do that. We also know that especially if the trauma is happening at home, you need to work with the entire family to understand what's happening and help the family heal.

Angela Diaz: And we need to have those staff to be very accessible to young people, to really be able to be reached when the young person need to talk to someone because maybe something is coming up about the trauma, what happened to them as a child, they really need to feel that they're not alone. There is a place where they can come with whichever way they are feeling. They can call us, they can come in and all that is part of the healing process for a young person with a trauma history.

Angela Diaz: We also have lawyers. Part of our services are legal to help them with if there's anything that they need a lawyer for. So we have legal services to do that. We are very involved in advocating on their behalf. For example, if they were raped in their school and they don't want to go back to that school because of what happened to them and they remind her of that or because they are worried or afraid, we also help them.

Angela Diaz: So if we need to talk to, whether it's the police or Child Protection or anyone on their behalf, we help them with all those things. If they need to bring their parents to tell them or to disclose what happened to them, we say, "Bring your parents, we will sit down with you to help you disclose." Because sometimes it's very hard for them to do this by themselves and they may be worried or they may not know how to do it. And in the safety of the clinic, the young person is able to do sometimes things are they will not be able to do on their own.

Angela Diaz: At the Mount Sinai Adolescent Health Center, we are mandated reporters. So if we see a young person who's being abused, whether it's physical abuse or sexual abuse, we have to report that. We also provide confidential services. So the way we do it is that when the patient comes to us and if the family comes with them, we tell everyone, "Here, we provide confidential services except if there is ongoing abuse or if there is abuse or if the life of the young person is in danger, like they are suicidal or if they know that somebody else's life is in danger. Like they know that a gang may be about to do something to somebody else. We cannot keep those things confidential."

Angela Diaz: When the young person discloses that they are being, for example, sexually abused, we explain to them because we said it before we took the history that if there's any issue of abuse, we need to actually need to call Child Protection. We need to be able to tell Child Protection about the abuse and that in our clinic we work closely with the mental health people including the social workers to be able to do that.