

September 2025

# Fall Statewide Sexual Assault Workshop



On September 4th and 5th, the South Dakota Network Against Family Violence and Sexual Assault hosted a two-day workshop in Sioux Falls for professionals to improve how they respond in cases involving sexual violence. The workshop kicked off with the Sioux Falls Chief of Police, Jon Thum, delivering a welcome address to attendees and discussing the work happening within the Sioux Falls Police Department (SFPD). Minnehaha County Senior Trial Attorney, Crystal Johnson and Detective Pat Mertes followed the opening by exploring the complexities of a sexual assault case from start to finish. The audience was able to follow the case and its progression from the time of the assault through the criminal justice system, highlighting challenges, success and working towards improving how professionals respond to sexual violence.

The day continued with information from Jen Canton, IAFN Forensic Nursing Project Director, on an overview of the sexual assault exam, and updates on current work happening by South Dakota's Sexual Assault Workgroup, by CPCM Director, Christina Young. The day wrapped up with our Keynote Speaker, Dr. Christine Murray, on trauma-informed practices when working with survivors of sexual assault.





Crystal Johnson and Rachel Lindsay

Day two showcased a mock-trial presentation facilitated by Tracey Decker and attorneys Crystal Johnson and Rachel Lindsay as they took the audience through the direct and cross-examination of SANE Jen Canton. This allowed the audience to have a courtroom experience while allowing time for questions and discussions on best practices.

The workshop came to a close with a deeper understanding of the long-term healing for survivors of interpersonal violence by Dr. Christine Murray.

Stay tuned for future sexual assault meetings and conferences by checking the network Facebook page and website.



From left: Dr. Christine Murray, Jen Canton, Crystal Johnson, and Pat Mertes



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# Spotlight: Dr. Christine Murray

Licensed Therapist, Counselor, and Professor



How has your own lived experience as a survivor influenced the way you support others in their healing journeys?

As a survivor of an abusive relationship, my lived experiences have deeply informed my professional work as a counselor, researcher, and professor. I was doing work related to interpersonal violence and abuse long before I publicly shared my personal experiences as a survivor, and I had to wait until the right time for me to start sharing parts of my personal story. I don't think any survivor "has to" share their story or experiences publicly, and there are many valid reasons survivors may choose not to do so, including that it might not be safe. Both before and after I publicly shared my experiences with abuse, I've always believed it's so important to remember that each survivor's journey is unique. Even if I can relate to another survivor's experiences, I always try to keep in mind that their experiences won't be exactly the same as my own. I believe it's important for any professionals working with survivors to focus on meeting each person where they are and understanding

their unique stories and experiences.

# What message of hope or encouragement would you most like survivors of sexual assault to take away from your work?

I always hope that survivors will know that healing is possible. To survivors: You didn't deserve to experience the abuse that you faced. It was wrong, and it's not your fault. It's understandable if you are facing negative effects, such as traumatic memories, mental health challenges, nightmares, and physical health consequences, to name a few. Help is available, and there are trained professionals in local community organizations and national resources like the RAINN Hotline (<a href="https://hotline.rainn.org/online">https://hotline.rainn.org/online</a>) that are available to help you navigate the challenges you're facing and move toward a brighter future. You are worthy of healing, and please remember that your healing journey is your own - trust your instincts about the steps to take and the pace to move throughout your healing process.

### Why did you create The Source for Survivors, and what role does it play in your career and the community?

I officially launched The Source for Survivors (<a href="https://www.sourceforsurvivors.info/">https://www.sourceforsurvivors.info/</a>) in early 2024, and its mission is to offer survivors and the community supports around them an overarching framework and practical tools that foster hope and healing. Starting a resource like The Source for Survivors was important to me because I felt like there was a real void of information about the long-term healing process for survivors of abusive relationships and other forms of interpersonal violence. I saw this through my professional work and past research with survivors, and I definitely also felt it at a deep personal level. I figured if I had questions and struggles in my own healing journey-even as someone who has done a lot of research, teaching, and other professional work on the topic-then it was likely that others had similar challenges as well. The Source for Survivors is a fully online resource, and I'm proud of the growth of our online community already. I hope that this resource will continue to grow and offer resources that can support survivors and their supporters in navigating the long-term healing journey following experiences of abuse.



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# How do you see financial abuse and sexual violence intersect, and what resources are most helpful for survivors navigating both?

Parts of my experiences with my past abusive relationship were related to financial abuse, and so a big part of my healing journey has been learning about financial literacy and working toward financial healing alongside other aspects of healing. There are a lot of potential intersections between financial abuse and sexual violence, and survivors of sexual violence can experience significant financial repercussions from the abuse they faced. For example, they might have major medical expenses, the costs associated with therapy, and lost income if they miss work for court dates. About a year ago, my co-author, Eileen Martin, and I published our book, Financial Abuse Recovery: Financial Healing & Empowerment After Surviving an Abusive Relationship, to offer information, resources, and tools to help survivors move toward financial empowerment as part of the abuse recovery journey. up a freelv available section οf The Source for https://www.sourceforsurvivors.info/financialabuse.html, which offers an extensive list of resources to support survivors as they move toward financial well-being.

# From your experience, what are some of the biggest challenges survivors face in the long-term recovery process?

Every survivor's experiences are unique, so there are a number of potential challenges that survivors can face in the long-term healing process. Here are three common ones. First, it's natural to feel unsure about what the long-term healing process looks like. Many survivors wonder if they'll ever feel truly healed, and they may wonder if their experiences are "normal." Second, survivors often face barriers in accessing the types of services and resources that might be helpful and supportive along the healing journey, such as mental health services. Even when mental health services are available in survivors' communities, mental health professionals may lack training in working with clients impacted by trauma and abuse.

Here's a link to a blog post with some suggestions for how to find a qualified, trained counselor or other mental health resources: <a href="https://www.sourceforsurvivors.info/survivorsblog/seeking-counseling-as-a-survivor-of-an-abusive-relationship">https://www.sourceforsurvivors.info/survivorsblog/seeking-counseling-as-a-survivor-of-an-abusive-relationship</a>. And third, survivors might feel alone or isolated, like others in their lives can't understand or aren't sensitive to their experiences. Having the right social support along the healing journey is incredibly important, and so it can help to get connected with local support groups and credible online resources. The long-term recovery process can indeed be challenging, but I encourage survivors to be persistent in seeking out the support and resources they need along the way.

# What do you see as the most important role community members can play in helping survivors feel supported and believed?

I really believe that every single community member can play an important role in supporting survivors of sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and other forms of abuse.

This is why there's a whole section of The Source for Survivors website that's specifically for community supporters: <a href="https://www.sourceforsurvivors.info/communityblog">https://www.sourceforsurvivors.info/communityblog</a>. Community supporters include professional helpers, but survivors often turn to their informal social support networks (e.g., their friends, family members, and coworkers) for support

as well. Given all the complexities that many survivors face, it's natural to feel overwhelmed and unsure what to do or how to help. However, it's often the most basic types of support–such as avoiding being judgmental and asking survivors what kinds of help they may need–that can go a long way toward helping survivors feel supported and believed. Here's a community supporter-focused Source for Survivors blog post that covers some more basic tips: <a href="https://www.sourceforsurvivors.info/communityblog/5-steps-for-helping-someone-who-is-involved-in-an-abusive-relationship">https://www.sourceforsurvivors.info/communityblog/5-steps-for-helping-someone-who-is-involved-in-an-abusive-relationship</a>.



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# **Recap of Legislation Changes**

During the 2025 session, the South Dakota legislature passed the following bills that have an impact on sexual assault.

An important funding bill was passed, HB 1221. This bill provided an appropriation of \$5 million to fund direct service providers serving sexual assault survivors, as well as victims of commercial sexual exploitation, human trafficking, domestic violence, and abused or neglected children. The bill would not have been passed without strong work by Network member agencies talking to their legislators about the important work direct service providers engage in every day in South Dakota communities.

SB 99 provided one-time funding of \$180,000 to the Department of Health for the purposes of purchasing, storing, and distributing sexual assault kits.

SB 115 was passed to add a prohibition of sexual contact by a family member related by consanguinity or affinity within the fifth degree. This statute, SDCL 22-22-7.8, previously only prohibited sexual contact by a person in a position of authority. This statute has a slightly expanded definition of what "sexual contact" entails from the original statutory definition found at SDCL 22-22-7.1.

SB 123 clarified what counties are expected to pay for when covering the costs of a forensic medical exam for victims of sexual assault. See SDCL 22-22-26. This bill also added a definition of "forensic medical exam," which can be found at SDCL 22-22-26.5.

HB 1096 prohibits anyone convicted of second-degree rape (forcible) or third-degree rape (incapable of consenting due to physical or mental incapacity) from being granted a suspended imposition by the sentencing court. See SDCL 23A-27-13.3. This prohibition does not apply to a person adjudicated as a juvenile or a juvenile tried as an adult.



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# Jen Canton: New Role with the International Association of Forensic Nurses (IAFN)



The International Association of Forensic Nurses (IAFN) is a professional organization of more than 6,000 nurses from 25 countries who provide specialized healthcare for patients impacted by violence and trauma. The Association establishes the standards of practice for forensic nursing; defines and advances the global research agenda to enhance forensic nursing's evidence-based response; develops, promotes, and disseminates information about forensic nursing science; and serves as a global network for forensic nurses to exchange ideas, serve as mentors, and enhance their practice.

The IAFN offers more than 100 courses, including sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE) trainings and certification exam prep, case reviews, IPV nurse examiner program, expert witness training, "No SANE in Sight" training for all healthcare providers, and many more. They also hold an annual conference that hundreds of forensic nurses attend for the opportunity to advance their education on numerous

topics related to forensic nursing and network with forensic nurses from around the world. The IAFN currently offers two certifications: the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner-Adult/Adolescent (SANE-A) and the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner-Pediatric/Adolescent (SANE-P). A certification for IPV nurse examiner is being developed.

The Journal of Forensic Nursing (JFN) is the official journal of IAFN. The journal features empirical studies, review and theoretical articles, methodological and concept papers, and case reports that address the provision of care to victims and perpetrators of violence, trauma, and abuse.

Published works that the IAFN has developed include:

### IAFN-Established Forensic Nursing Standards:

- Forensic Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice
- Education Guidelines: Intimate Partner Violence Nurse Examiner, Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner, Forensic Nurse Death Investigator
- Core Competencies for Advanced Practice Forensic Nursing
- Non-Fatal Strangulation Documentation Toolkit

#### In collaboration with US government agencies:

- National Sexual Assault Protocol: Adults/Adolescents
- National Sexual Assault Protocol: Pediatric
- National SAFE Training Standards
- Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) Program Development and Operation Guide
- National Protocol for Intimate Partner Violence Medical Forensic Examinations

In the Spring of 2025, the IAFN and the IAFN Foundation, the organization's charitable arm, announced the launch of the Global Forensic Nursing TeleConnect Center (GFNTC). The GFNTC will use a hub-and-spoke model to connect providers via telehealth with an expert forensic nurse as they care for patients experiencing violence. The initial phase of the project will start with 3 pilot sites, yet to be selected, and is funded by a grant from the Cynthia Parker Matthews Family Foundation. Jen Canton, MSN, BSN, RN, CCRN, CEN, TCRN, SANE-A, SANE-P, was hired as the Forensic Nursing Director to build and develop the GFNTC. Prior to her new role, Jen was the SANE Supervisor at Avera McKennan in Sioux Falls, SD, and is credited with building and developing their forensic nursing program, growing it to serve a total of 70 facilities across 6 states via in-person or telehealth support. Please find more information about the new Global Forensic Nursing TeleConnect Center at <a href="https://fundforensicnursing.org/forensicnursing-teleconnect-center/">https://fundforensicnursing.org/forensicnursing-teleconnect-center/</a>. Information about the IAFN can be found at <a href="https://www.forensicnurses.org/">https://www.forensicnurses.org/</a>.



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# Bryant Jackson: Interview with USD's Chief of Police



# What prevention programs does the USD Police Department currently run to reduce sexual assaults on campus?

The University of South Dakota Police Department (UPD) takes a comprehensive, prevention-focused approach to reducing sexual assaults on campus. We recognize that this issue requires more than just enforcement; it requires education, outreach, and strong partnerships across campus.

Our overall philosophy is that preventing sexual assault requires both a community-wide culture of respect and a safety net of supportive, proactive policing. We see our role as not only responding when incidents occur, but also creating an environment where students feel safe, informed, and supported to

prevent incidents in the first place, and to report them should they happen.

### How do you partner with student organizations, athletics, and residence halls on prevention Initiatives?

Partnership is really the key for us. With student organizations, we support their awareness events, help with bystander intervention training, and just make sure they know how to connect with us as a resource. With athletics, we work directly with coaches and teams on consent, respect, and self-defense training. Student athletes are leaders on campus, so their involvement really sets the tone. In the residence halls, our officers meet with RAs and students to have real conversations about safety and resources. We strive to meet the students where they are. Our goal is to be approachable and present in those spaces, not just when something happens, but as a partner in prevention and education.

### How do you ensure prevention efforts are inclusive and responsive to diverse student populations?

We recognize that prevention efforts have to meet students where they are, because each student's background and experience can shape how they understand safety and support. To make sure our programs are effective, we listen closely to student feedback and work with a wide range of campus partners, such as student organizations, athletics, residence life, student services, Title IX, and counseling services, so that prevention messages are accessible and relevant to everyone.

We also make sure our officers and staff present information in different formats, whether that's large group trainings, small discussions in residence halls, or one-on-one conversations. That way, students have multiple entry points to engage with us.

### What steps does your department take when a student reports a sexual assault?

When a student reports a sexual assault, our first priority is their safety and well-being. We start by making sure they're in a safe place and then offering immediate access to medical care, advocacy services, and counseling support. We want students to know they are not alone and that there are people here to help them through the process. From there, we carefully explain their options, both with the criminal justice system and through the university's Title IX process, so they can make informed choices about how they want to proceed. We respect the student's decisions at every step. If they want to move forward with a police investigation, in coordination with the Vermillion Police Department, we will conduct that with sensitivity, confidentiality, and professionalism, keeping them informed along the way. At the same time, we coordinate closely with our partners in Student Services, Title IX, and local advocacy groups to make sure the student has ongoing support. For us, it's not just about an investigation; it's about making sure the student feels heard, supported, and safe moving forward.

### How do you support survivors who may be hesitant to involve law enforcement?

We understand that not every survivor feels ready or comfortable involving law enforcement, and that's okay.



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### Continued: Bryant Jackson Interview

Our role is to support them wherever they are in their process. When a student comes forward, we start by believing, listening, making sure they feel safe, and connecting them with resources like advocacy services, counseling, and medical care. We explain their options clearly, without pressure, so they know what choices are available, whether that's pursuing a criminal case, going through the university's Title IX process, or simply receiving confidential support. Even if they choose not to file a police report, we remain available as a resource and partner. The most important thing is that the survivor knows they are believed, supported, and that help is accessible to them on their terms.

### What protections are in place to ensure confidentiality and reduced retaliation concerns?

Confidentiality and protection from retaliation are critical when a student reports a sexual assault. At USD, we have several safeguards in place. First, we limit information sharing to only those who need to know, such as investigators, Title IX staff, or advocates directly supporting the student. We make it clear to survivors that their privacy will be respected throughout the process. We also work closely with the university to ensure students are aware of their rights under Title IX, which includes protections against retaliation. If a student feels unsafe, we can coordinate safety planning, no-contact directives, housing adjustments, or academic accommodations to help them continue their education without added stress. Our officers and staff are trained to handle these cases with sensitivity, and we reinforce that retaliation of any kind will not be tolerated. The goal is to give students the confidence that they can come forward, share their experience, and receive support without fear of judgment, exposure, or retribution.

#### How are officers trained to respond sensitively and effectively to survivors of sexual assault?

Our officers receive specialized training to ensure they respond to survivors of crime with both sensitivity and professionalism. This includes understanding trauma-informed practices, active listening skills, and the importance of creating a safe and supportive environment from the very first interaction. We also train officers on how to explain reporting options clearly, connect survivors with resources such as advocacy services and counseling, and maintain confidentiality throughout the process. Scenario-based training helps officers practice real-life situations so they can respond calmly, respectfully, and appropriately under pressure. The goal is to ensure that every survivor feels heard, believed, and supported, and that our response reinforces trust in both the police department and the broader campus safety system.

### How does your department collaborate with campus resources like Title IX, counseling, and health services?

We work closely with Title IX, student counseling, student services, and other campus partners to make sure students get the support they need right away. From the first report, we coordinate with these offices so survivors have access to advocacy, counseling, and medical care. We also partner on training and prevention programs so students hear consistent messaging and know help is available.

### Do you partner with local community organizations (like shelters or advocacy groups) for survivor support?

Yes, we partner with the RiverCity Domestic Violence Center to make sure survivors have access to counseling, medical care, and other support services outside of the institutional support networks. These partnerships help students feel supported and safe, both on and off campus.

# What role does the police department play in campus-wide awareness events, such as Sexual Assault Awareness Month?

UPD plays an active role in campus-wide awareness events, including Sexual Assault Awareness Month. We partner with student groups like PAVE to support educational programs and outreach initiatives. Our officers participate in events such as Walk a Mile in Her Shoes and Denim Day, helping to raise awareness and start conversations about sexual assault prevention. We see these events as an opportunity to be visible, approachable, and supportive, while reinforcing the message that preventing sexual assault is a shared responsibility across the entire campus community.



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# **UPCOMING EVENTS**

| OCI |   | RI | TD |
|-----|---|----|----|
| UU  | W | DI |    |

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### Advanced Sexual Assault Investigations in Winner (8am to 5pm CT)

A free law enforcement training on advanced sexual assault investigations. Topics include facts and myths about sexual violence, trauma-informed response, South Dakota laws, investigation and interviewing, prosecution, and victim services. Register at:

https://sdnafvsa.coalitionmanager.org/eventmanager/trainingevent/details/151

### **NOVEMBER**

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### Monthly Check In Call (10am CT/9am MT) FOR NETWORK MEMBERS

This space is set aside on the first Monday of each month to receive updates from The Network and SD DPS Victims' Services, and for those on the call to share any updates and ask questions. Send an email to <a href="kathy@sdnafvsa.com">kathy@sdnafvsa.com</a> for the Zoom link.

### **DECEMBER**

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### **FEBRUARY**

17-18

### Membership Meeting and Legislative Events in Pierre FOR NETWORK MEMBERS

More information coming soon.

# **APRIL**

13-17

# Basic South Dakota Victim Assistance Academy in Pierre

The application will be open in January and participants will be selected in the beginning of February. This is open to professionals who work with victims of crime with less than 3 years of experience. More information will be released when the application opens.

# **APRIL**

**22-23** 

### Strategic Planning in Sioux Falls

More information coming soon.

heck the network website or Facebook page for the most up-to-date information on upcoming events.

#### Do you want to have access to trainings and information throughout the year from the Network?

Membership benefits include opportunities for free trainings and conferences, both in-person and virtual, all year round. Receive emails with current state and federal announcements, opportunities, and news. Share information and network with other members through email, Network meetings, and director calls. Receive legislative updates during legislative sessions and other state and federal policy updates throughout the year. For more information on the benefits and cost of membership, contact Kathy Rutten at kathy@sdnafvsa.com



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# Tracey's Legal Pad

Tracey Dollison Decker: Attorney Consultant & Advisor from SD Network Against FV & SA

Building Trust and Achieving Justice: How Prosecutors Can Be Trauma-Informed with Sexual Assault Victims

Prosecutors play a critical role in the pursuit of justice for survivors of sexual assault. Yet, the courtroom process can often feel retraumatizing for those who have already endured profound harm. A trauma-informed approach can help prosecutors build stronger cases, foster trust, and ensure survivors feel heard and respected.

### **Why Trauma-Informed Practices Matter**

Sexual assault often has lasting psychological, emotional, and physiological effects. Trauma can impact memory, communication, and behavior. This sometimes happens in ways that seem inconsistent to those unfamiliar with trauma's effects. For example, a survivor might recall details in fragments over time or respond flatly when recounting traumatic events. Without a trauma-informed lens, these responses risk being misunderstood as credibility issues, rather than normal trauma reactions.

### **Core Principles for Trauma-Informed Prosecution**

### 1. Prioritize Safety and Support

- a. Create an environment where survivors feel physically and emotionally safe.
- b. Offer options, explain processes clearly, and avoid rushing sensitive conversations.

### 2. Practice Empathy and Respect

- a. Use validating language that acknowledges the survivor's courage.
- b. Avoid judgmental questions such as "Why didn't you leave?" or "Why didn't you report sooner?" which can reinforce feelings of shame.

#### 3. Understand Trauma's Impact on Memory

- a. Recognize that fragmented recall, delayed reporting, or difficulty with timelines are common trauma responses.
- b. Strongly consider retaining an expert to educate judges and juries to combat myths that sexual assault victims all act a certain way when reacting to, reporting, or recounting the assault.

#### 4. Collaborate with Advocates and Multidisciplinary Teams

- a. Partner with victim advocates, counselors, and law enforcement to provide wraparound support.
- b. Ensure survivors have consistent points of contact throughout the process.

#### 5. Empower, Don't Control

- a. Whenever possible, give survivors choices in how they participate, for example, scheduling interviews at times that work for them.
- b. Center their voice in decision-making without compromising case strategy. Even though prosecutors have the final say in case decisions, survivor opinions should be sought and respected whenever possible.

### The Benefits of a Trauma-Informed Approach

When prosecutors approach cases through a trauma-informed lens, survivors are more likely to stay engaged in the legal process. This not only improves survivor well-being but also strengthens the likelihood of achieving just outcomes. By reducing retraumatization, prosecutors can build credibility with victims, enhance witness testimony, and ultimately support community trust in the justice system.



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# **Exciting News for Advocates Seeking Certification!**

The National Advocate Credentialing Program (NACP) recently approved the South Dakota Network's basic introductory training for advocates as a pre-approved training program to become a certified advocate. The South Dakota Victim Assistance Academy (SDVAA) is a 40-hour foundational level training currently offered annually by The Network for advocates working with victims of crime. Successful graduates (including previous graduates) of the SDVAA basic training program are eligible, at a minimum, for the NACP Provisional Credential level, but potentially at a higher level of Credentialing based on verifiable field experience. The SDVAA is the only pre-approved training in South Dakota for credentialing at this time.

For more information on credentialing, please visit <a href="https://trynova.org/credentialing/nacp/">https://trynova.org/credentialing/nacp/</a>. Please watch the Network website for future updates.

The Network's lobbyist, Dianna Miller, recently announced her retirement. Thank you, Dianna Miller, for serving as the Network's lobbyist for the past 23 years! Your knowledge and expertise will be greatly missed.





Dear Krista and all of the members of the Network,

The network will always have a very special place in my heart, and I am
so thankful for the opportunity to have worked with and for all of you!

Love, Dianna

# **Contact Information**

For further information, contact the South Dakota Network Against Family Violence and Sexual Assault

Phone: (605) 731-0041 Website: <u>sdnafvsa.com</u> 2520 E, River Ridge Pl Suite 200 Sioux Falls, SD 57103

# FREE ADVANCED SEXUAL ASSAULT INVESTIGATIONS, PROSECUTIONS, ADVOCACY TRAINING AVAILABLE



# **ADVANCED SEXUAL ASSAULT**

Training on advanced topics within sexual assaults, including facts, myths, culture, consent, intersection of disabilities and sexual assault, South Dakota laws, investigation, prosecution, and victim advocacy services.

The STOP trainings provided primarily to law enforcement, prosecutors, and advocates are done in a team approach made up of trainers from each of these fields with experience in sexual assault cases and assisting survivors

Trainers coordinate to provide up-to-date curriculum, information, resources, and real-life experiences in addressing sexual assault cases and survivors with trauma-informed response and best care practices.

- Training can be requested by law enforcement, prosecutors, shelters, and resource agencies.
- STOP training is provided at no cost.
- Host to provide the training space.

Contact Scott Hultgren - STOP Grant Training Coordinator scottsdnafvsa.com OR CALL **605.650.2895** for more

information or to schedule a training.

Training can range from four hours to two days, depending on request. Preferred full day (8hr.) training.

#### **ADDITIONAL TRAININGS**

Protection Orders Elder Abuse Human Trafficking Victim Services

Domestic Violence Dynamics Stalking Strangulation



South Dakota Network Against Family Violence and Sexual Assault

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