

Forensic Experiential Trauma Interviews

A **Trauma** Informed Experience



A Real **Change in the Conversation**

Trauma Informed Response, Interviews,
Investigations & Prosecutions

fa•cil•i•tate |fə'sili,tāt|

verb [trans.]

to make (an action or process) easy or easier

Webster's New World College Dictionary



So...What's the Difference?

Interview

- ☐ You are in control
- ☐ You tell & ask
- ☐ You do most of the talking
- ☐ You have the facts
- ☐ No one may understand the experience
- ☐ Requires more preparation

Facilitate

- ☐ Participant in control
- ☐ Participant works it out
- ☐ Participant does most of the talking
- ☐ You both have the knowledge
- ☐ You both understand the experience
- ☐ Requires less preparation

“Forensic Experiential Trauma Interview” (FETI)



A Paradigm Shift...

Forensic Experiential Trauma Interview

- **Acknowledge their trauma/pain/difficult situation**
 - ▣ **What are you able to tell-me about your experience?**
 - **Tell me more about ... or that...**
 - ▣ **Help me understand your thoughts when...?**
 - ▣ **What are you able to remember about...the 5 senses**
 - ▣ **What were your reactions to this experience**
 - **Physically**
 - **Emotionally**
 - ▣ **What was the most difficult part of this experience for you?**
 - ▣ **What, if anything, can't you forget about your experience?**
 - ▣ **Clarify other information and details...after you facilitate all you can about the “experience” (FETI Funnel)**
 - ▣ **Closure – prep for future information sharing**



A Venn diagram consisting of three overlapping circles. The top circle is dark red and labeled 'Contextual Evidence'. The bottom-left circle is orange and labeled 'Psycho-physiological Evidence'. The bottom-right circle is a lighter orange and labeled 'Experiential Evidence'. The circles overlap in various combinations, creating darker shades of their respective colors. A horizontal dark red bar is positioned behind the top circle. Below the circles is a dark red rectangular box containing white text.

**Contextual
Evidence**

**Psycho-
physiological
Evidence**

**Experiential
Evidence**

**Victims should not
be treated as
witnesses to their
own crime**

**WE CANNOT TRULY
UNDERSTAND BEHAVIOR
WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING
THE EXPERIENCES OF THE
PERSON OR CONTEXT IN WHICH
THE BEHAVIOR OCCURS**

Use a Trauma Informed Interview Approach

- ❑ Trauma informed is not simply
 - ❑ Open-ended questions
 - ❑ Being nice and/or simply building rapport
- ❑ Trauma informed is
 - ❑ Understanding the neuroscience of trauma and memory
 - ❑ Applying these principles in the intervention and interview processes
 - ❑ Focus is on genuine empathy, sensory information, impact, implicit/explicit memories, central details vice peripheral details
- ❑ Forensic Experiential Trauma Interview (FETI)

What is evidence of...???

Fear

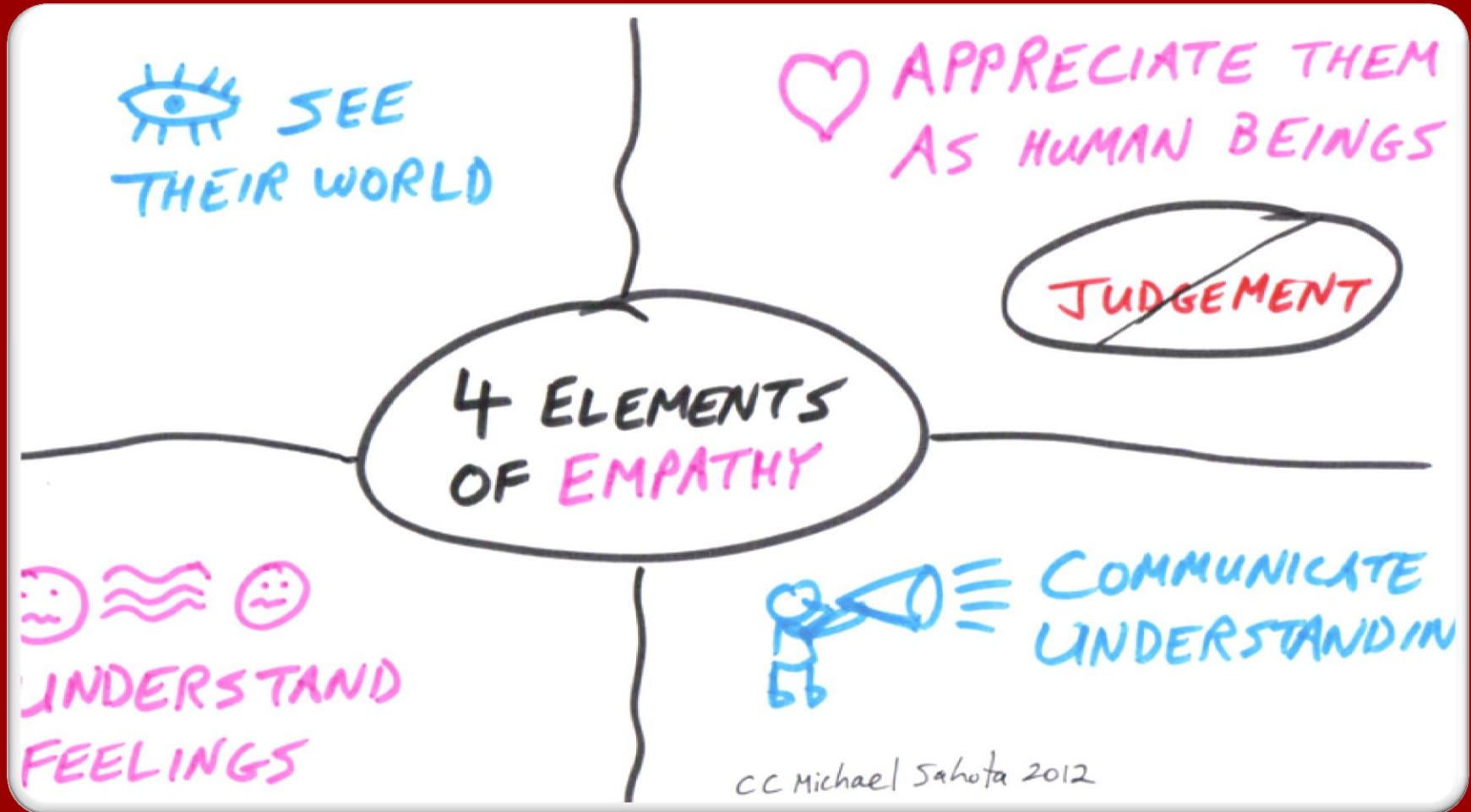
Force

Non-consent

Effective Interviewing

[illegible]

Demonstrate **genuine** empathy



Responding to TRAUMA



Two Essentials of Healing – And Successfully Seeking Justice

“The core experiences of psychological trauma are **disempowerment** and **disconnection**. Recovery, therefore, is based upon the **empowerment** of the survivor and the **creation of new connections....**”

- Judith Herman

“I Don’t Have Time for Empathy” = More Time, Less Understanding, Worse Case


“I don’t have time for empathy,”
“I’ve got to get the bad guy,” etc.




Investigation and
prosecution fail



Lack of empathy for victim,
Failure to empower victim



Less and lower quality
evidence is collected,
Poorer case is built



Victim feels unsafe,
is less cooperative,
less able to remember,
less willing to report



Empowerment, Empathy, Compassion = More Objective Evidence, Better Case

“I’m going to help this person feel understood,
safe, in control, competent, and cared for.”



Investigation succeeds
Better prosecution
Better adjudication



More and better quality
evidence is collected
Stronger case is built
Stronger case heard



Empathy for person,
Empowerment of person

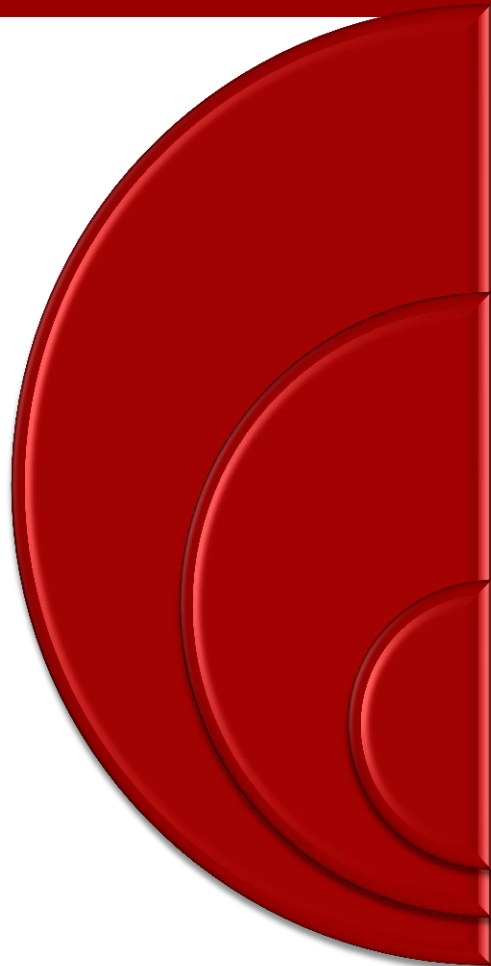


Person feels more safe
Is more cooperative
More able to remember
More willing to report



What are you **able** to remember
about your **experience**?

Memory...



Sense	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• External• Internal
Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Perceive• Store
Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Survive• Mating

THE BRAIN DURING SEXUAL ASSAULT



Perpetrator

- Not stressed
- **Prefrontal cortex in control**
- Thinking and behavior:
 - Planned
 - Practiced
 - Habitual

Victim

- Terrified, overwhelmed
- **Amygdala in control**
- Attention and thoughts driven by perpetrator actions
- Behavior controlled by emotional reflexes and habits from childhood (incl. abuse)

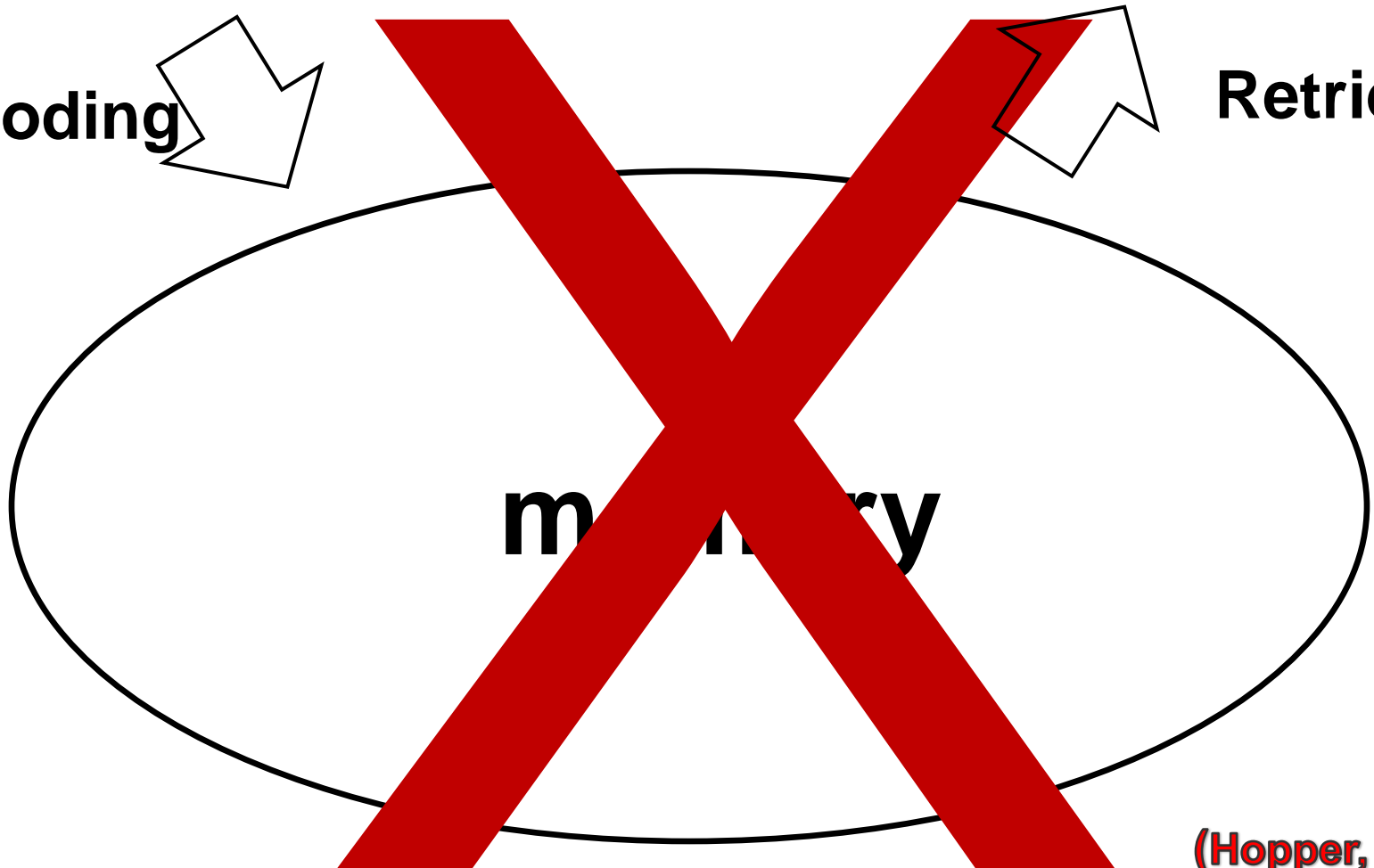
No one thing = memory

Original
Event/Experience

Particular
Remembrance

Encoding

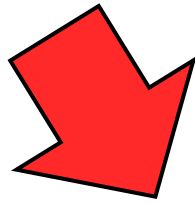
Retrieval



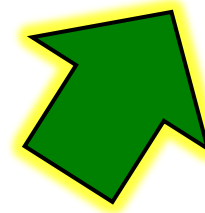
(Hopper, 2012)

No one thing = memory

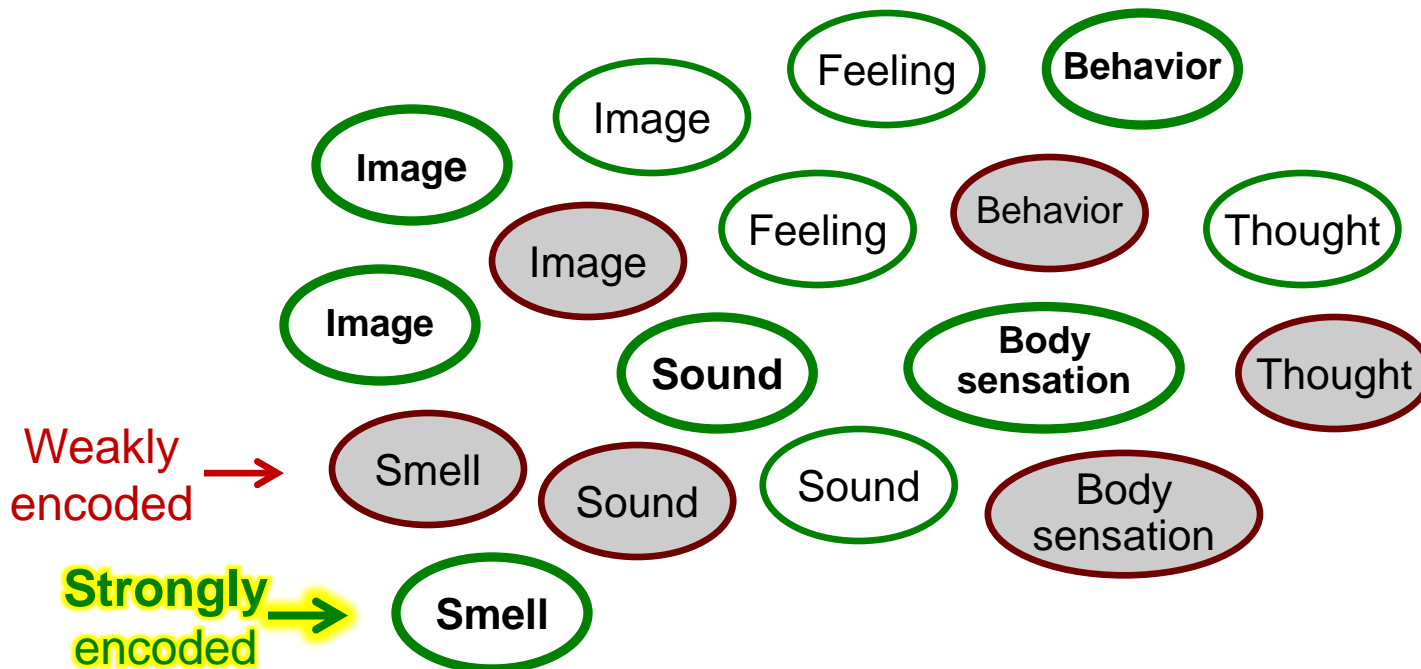
Bottom-Up Trigger
and/or Top-Down
Effort
Activates



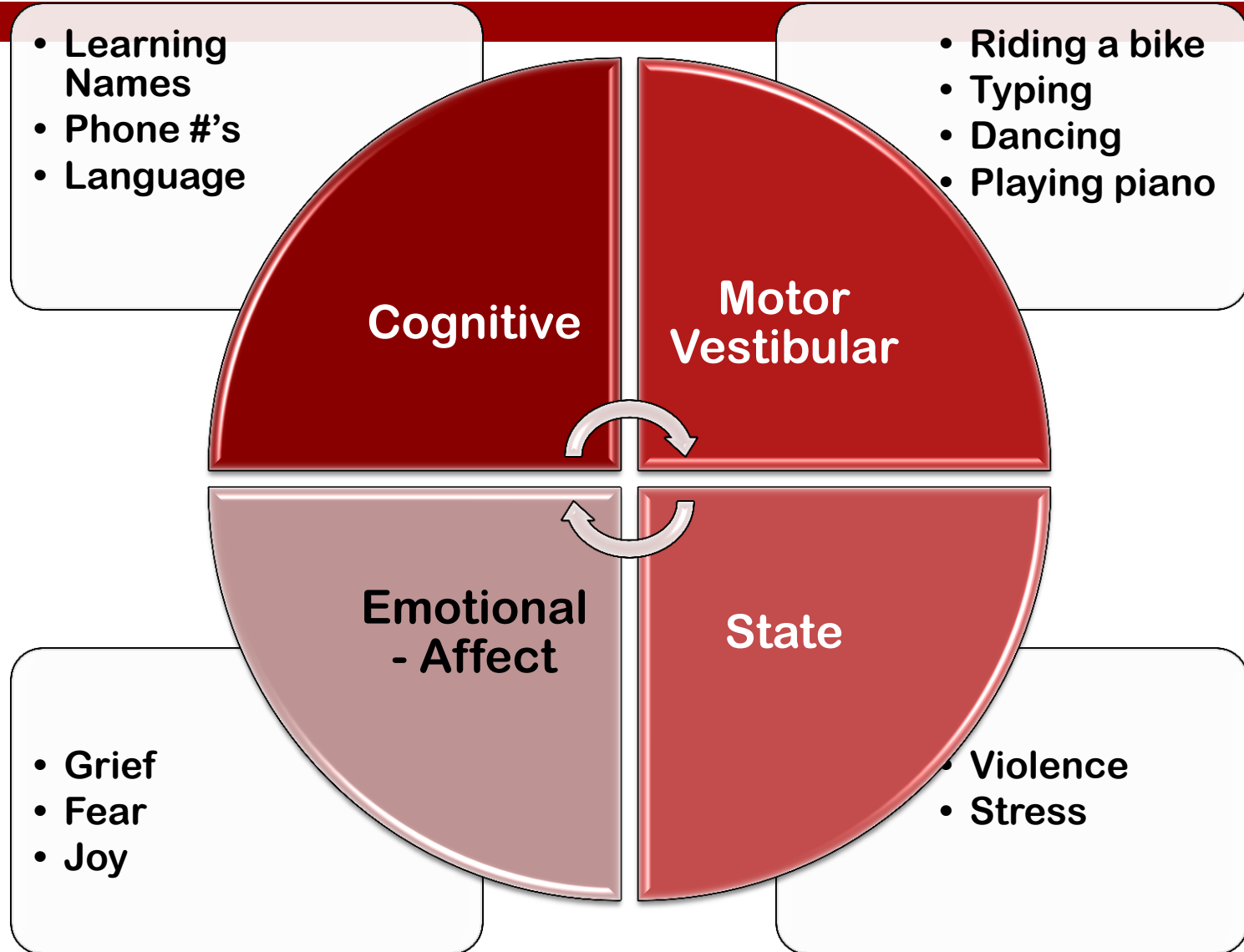
Particular
Remembrance



Retrieval



Use-dependent memories



- The assault experience is remembered in fragments but infused with intense emotion and recollections of sensations such as tastes, smells, and sounds.
- Some victims may become haunted by feelings and senses they know are related to the trauma, but have difficulty identifying the source of the feeling or sensation

When the

~~Zero~~

kicks in

Brain Imaging of **Dissociative** Responses: A Unique Case Study

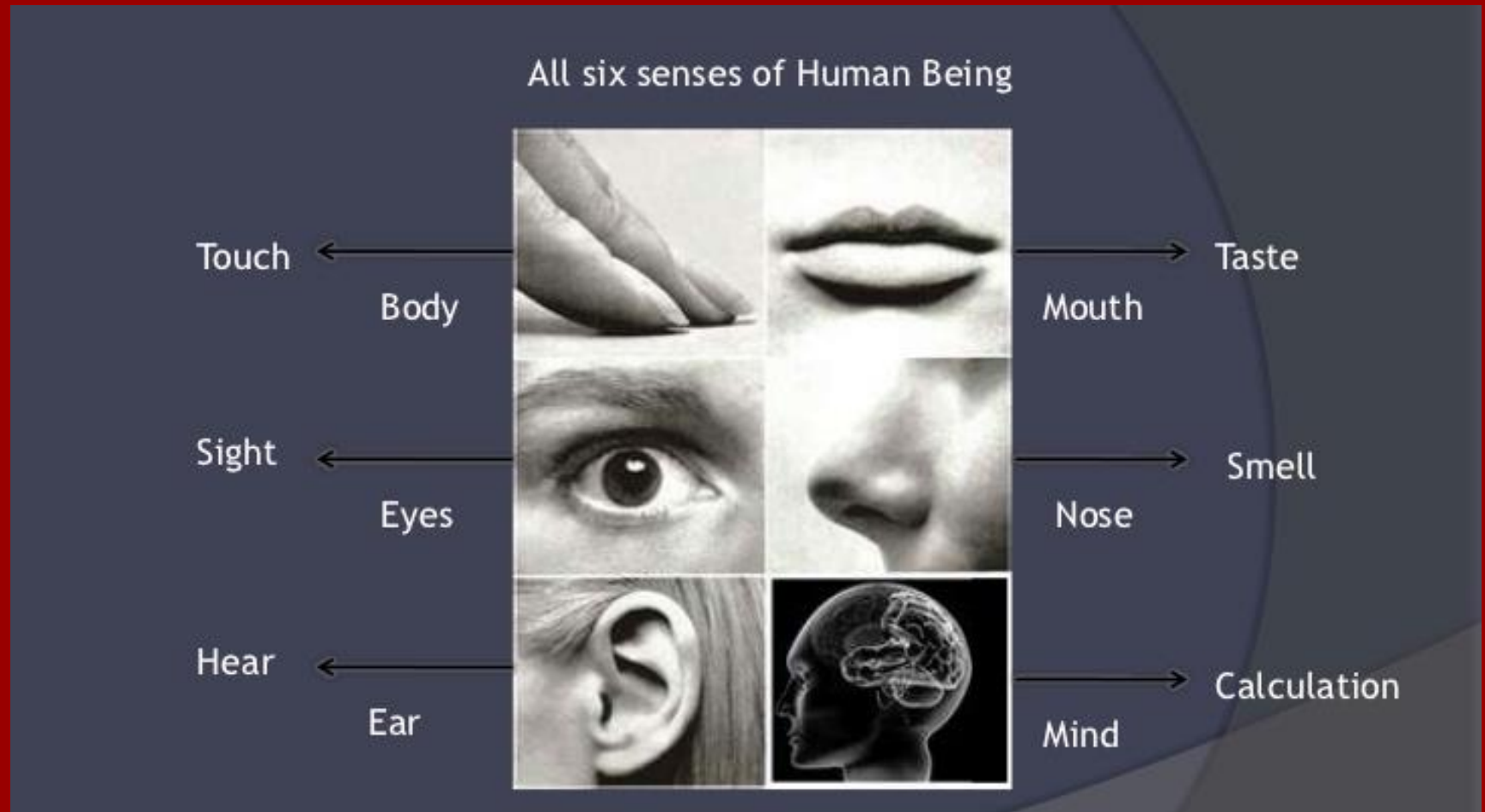
- Husband and wife in terrible accident with many cars; witnessed a death, feared would die
- Husband: Hyper-aroused/physical escape response
- Wife: Dissociative response. “In shock,” “numb,” “I could hardly move because I was completely frozen.”
- Very different brain activity when reliving trauma in scanner – each consistent with subjective experience during the trauma and response at the time

Lanius, Hopper, Menon 2003, *Am J Psychiatry*,



Tell me more...

What are you **able** to remember about...



COLLECTING PSYCHOPHYSIOLOGICAL EVIDENCE IN **TRAUMA** CASES

Smells

Sights

Flashbacks

Tonic Immobility

Nausea

Memory Gaps

Definition of
PSYCHO-
PHYSIOLOGICAL

: of or relating to
physiological
psychology

: combining or
involving mental
and bodily
processes

Trembling

Sounds

**Body
Sensations**

Terror

Incapacitation

Feelings

So...why don't victims seem to remember well?



CENTRAL

Central Details:

- Strongly encoded
- Changes little over time

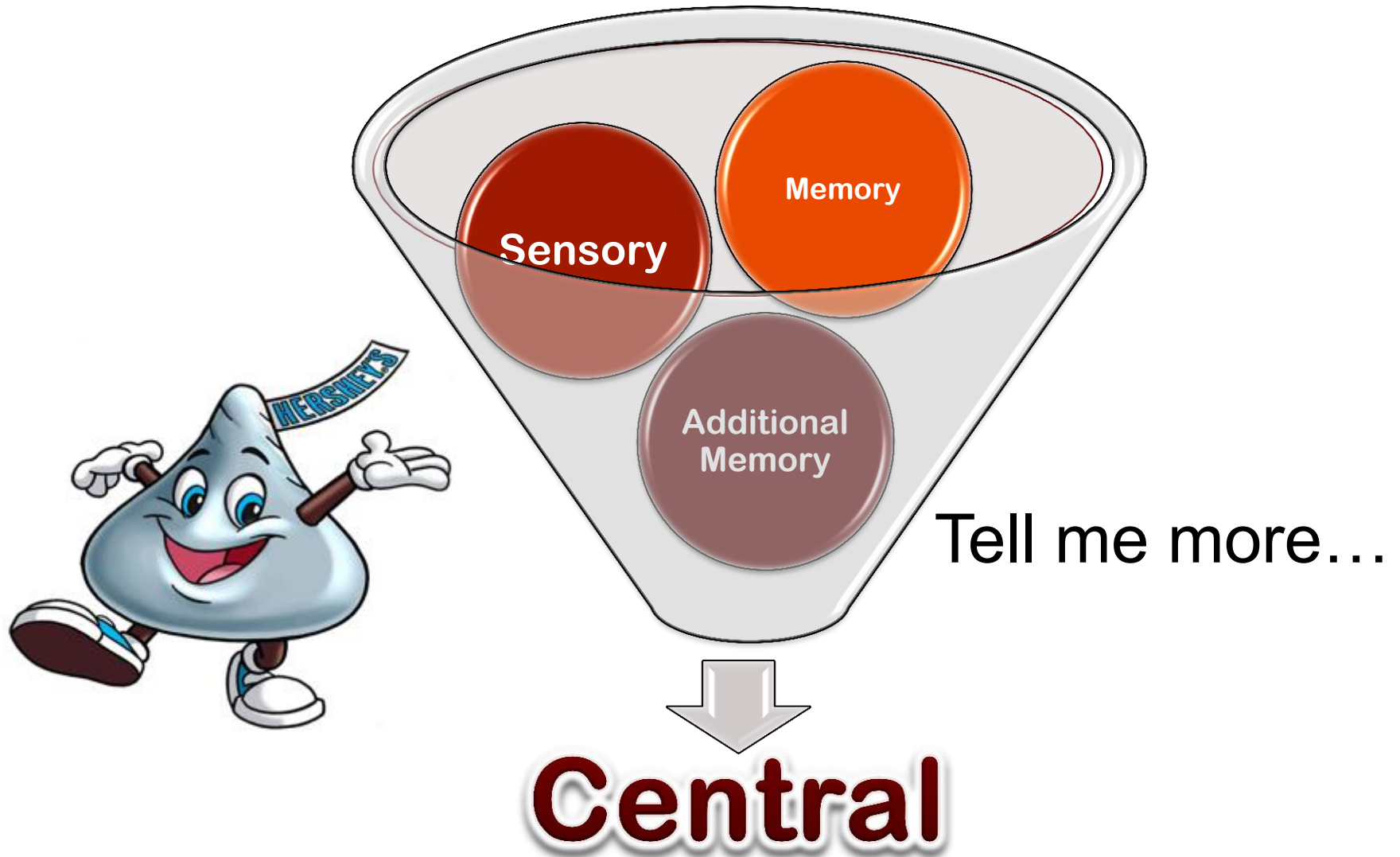
STATION

Peripheral Details:

- Weakly encoded
- Changes much over time



The FETI Funnel



What was your reaction?

IMPACT!

What is the most difficult part of this experience for you?

What can't you forget?

Closure – prepare for the future

- **Address concerns and questions**
- **Advise additional remembrance of experience is normal**
- **Encourage documentation of additional details**
- **Request time and date for follow-up appointment**
- **Explore additional potential barriers for future engagement**

A Paradigm Shift...

Forensic Experiential Trauma Interview

- **Acknowledge their trauma/pain/difficult situation**
 - ▣ What are you able to tell me about your experience?
 - Tell me more about ... or that...
 - ▣ Help me understand your thoughts when...
 - ▣ What are you able to remember about...the 5 senses
 - ▣ What were your reactions to this experience
 - Physically
 - Emotionally
 - ▣ What was the most difficult part of this experience for you?
 - ▣ What, if anything, can't you forget about your experience?
 - ▣ Clarify other information and details after you facilitate all you can about the "experience" (FETI Funnel)
 - ▣ Closure – prep for future information sharing

WHY?

Expect Little, Don't Push

- Peripheral details
- Contextual information
- Time-sequence information
- Organized or coherent narrative

**Are you empowering and
connecting with the victim?**

**ARE YOU GETTING CENTRAL DETAILS?
IDENTIFYING PUZZLE PIECES? IMPLICIT
MEMORIES?**

**Are you getting evidence
of brain-based trauma responses?**



Senior Special Agent (Retired) Russell W. Strand
Former Supervisory Special Agent Lori D. Heitman
Independent Consultants | Educators



**STRAND & HEITMAN INNOVATIVE
FORENSIC TECHNIQUES LLC**

Your Paradigm **SHIFT** Solution

Email - russell.strand@gmail.com or ldh7427@gmail.com

Web - www.russellstrand.com