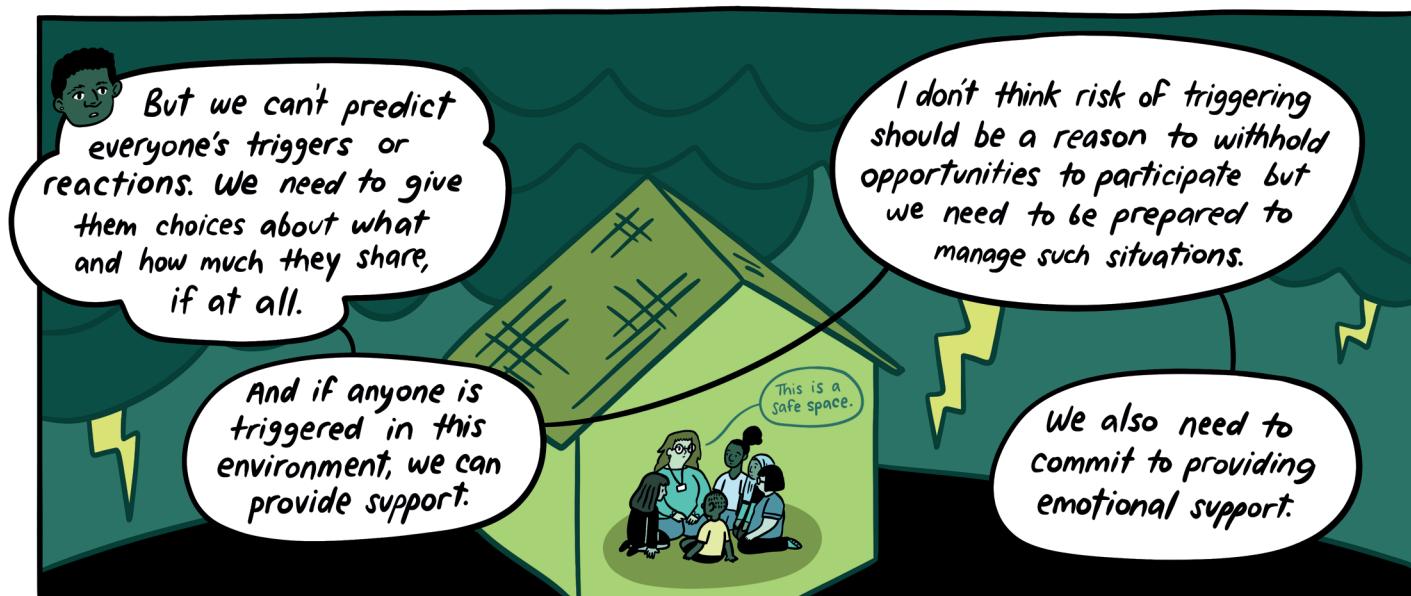




A trigger is something that causes someone to feel upset or distressed because they are made to remember something bad that has happened to them in the past. For young people in this context, being triggered can be very distressing. A discussion about sexual violence or encountering certain situations, events, or sensations may (re)trigger flashbacks or trauma associated with sexual abuse and they may feel they are re-living these traumatic experiences. Different people may be triggered by different things because everyone is an individual with unique experiences.

Risk of being triggered in participatory activities can be one reason professionals may think a young person is not 'ready' to take part.



The risk of triggering can't be eliminated, but there are ways to manage it.

You said about managing this kind of situation—so how do we eliminate the risk of triggering?

We can't...

...but there's things we can do to mitigate it...

For example...

Make sure facilitators have the appropriate training and skills.



Ensure the young person is fully informed about the activity and potential for distress.

Is that all clear, Lucas?

yeah, I understand.

Explain to them that they decide if, when and how to share any personal experiences

and this is not necessary for them to participate.

Take the time to plan and design the activities carefully and thoughtfully.

STEP 1 → STEP 2 → STEP 3 → ...

Make sure young people know they can stop or take a break at any time.



How are you feeling just now?

I could use a break, actually.

Check in with young people after every activity.

Ensure young people are supported throughout the whole process—including afterwards.



For some young people, although being triggered can be distressing, it may also play an important role in their healing and recovery.

It's important to remember that if you are triggered during an activity it can be difficult at the time —

but it can also be helpful for processing what's happened to you.

It helped me learn what my triggers are and how to cope with them —

rather than be protected from them all the time.

Knowing that I'm feeding into change and helping others makes me feel positive, too.

Concluding Thoughts

For young people

- Sometimes it can be hard to talk about issues related to sexual abuse, or be in a group with other young people who may choose to share personal experiences. It's important to think about this, and be aware that it might be distressing or triggering, before you make a decision about participating in different activities.
- You could talk to the professionals involved to understand what the content of discussions might be so you have a better sense of what to expect.
- If you know what might be a trigger for you, and if you're happy to discuss that with the professionals involved, then you could talk about how exposure to this could be minimised and what you would like to happen if you are triggered so that there is a plan in place.

For professionals

- Participatory work requires you to consider, prepare for, and manage (sometimes unpredictable) situations in which a young person may become triggered or distressed.
- There will always be the potential for triggering in this work. Open lines of communication and shared decision-making with young people may help to allay fears and identify if and how young people can be safely involved.
- A young person being triggered doesn't necessarily have to be viewed as a risk. Whilst having the right support structures in place is critical, professionals should also consider that if a young person is triggered, this may play a role in their healing and recovery journey.

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Comics are by Maria Stoian.

To find out more about the work of the Centre please visit the Centre's website beds.ac.uk/sylrc.