

SESSION 7

TRUST

Session Goals

In this session, group members will:

- Discuss how MST may violate trust and contribute to feelings of betrayal
- Learn about the varying degrees of trust
- Learn how to identify and work through difficulties with trust

Session Content

Setting the Agenda

- A. Explain how MST may impact trust.** There are many ways to “trust” in this world – we can trust ourselves, trust the world, or trust other people. After experiencing MST, survivors may begin to second-guess themselves and their ability to manage things. They may doubt their ability to feel safe in the world or believe that the world won’t respond to or meet their needs. Most importantly, they may lose their ability to trust others and have difficulty being vulnerable with other people.
- B. Review session objectives.** The goals of this session are to discuss any changes in trust after MST and strategies for re-establishing trust in oneself, others, and the world.

Opening Exercise (optional) - “What if...”

- A. Set up.** You will need blank sheets of paper and pencils/pens.
- B. Review instructions.** Present the following scenario to the group: “Imagine this. You were specially selected to receive \$1,000,000. There is only one catch. You have to survive on a deserted island for one month. You will receive some basic survival training and a kit of supplies to help with securing food, water, and a shelter. To increase your chances of surviving, you may bring up to three other people. Who would you bring and why? You could go by yourself, but think of the consequences of doing so. Choose carefully. Your life depends on it!”
- C. Give group members a few minutes to write down their answers.** Ask for volunteers to share whom they would invite along with their reasons for bringing those specific people. Responses will illustrate the degree to which group members trust others or simply rely on themselves.

SESSION 7

TRUST

Betrayal and MST

- A. Explain how different instances of MST may be considered betrayal trauma.** A betrayal trauma is when a person's trust is violated in a relationship where the victim depends on the offender(s) for survival or basic needs. There are two instances in which MST may qualify as a betrayal trauma.
- B. Describe individual betrayal.** An experience of MST may be considered a betrayal trauma when the offender(s) is also a member of the Armed Forces. Servicemembers are taught to rely on one another for survival in combat and to treat each other like a "family." This may leave survivors of MST feeling deeply hurt by those whom they believed would keep them safe.
- C. Describe institutional betrayal.** Survivors of MST may feel betrayed by the military institution for not preventing MST and/or responding in a supportive way regardless of who the offender(s) is. For example, institutional responses to MST that seem like a cover-up or that blame the victim may evoke feelings of institutional betrayal.
- D. Elicit reactions to individual and institution betrayal.** Note that feelings of betrayal may make it challenging to rebuild trust in oneself and others.

Trust Isn't All-or-None

- A. Discuss group members' views of trust.** You may ask, "How has the experience of MST impacted your ability to trust yourself and others?" or other general questions about trust (e.g., "What does it mean to trust?," "What does it take for you to trust someone (or yourself)?"). It is possible that some group members were struggling with trust before experiencing MST due to other premilitary trauma.
- B. Discuss how changes in perceptions impact trust following MST.** There are two aspects to trusting relationships – how trustworthy the person is and how much we trust them. Experiencing MST may impact survivors' ability to trust others but may not impact how trustworthy the person is. So then what has changed? Often, survivors' perceptions of trust may have changed but not necessarily how trustworthy people in their lives are. When something bad happens to us, it's natural to question safety issues and try to determine how we can prevent it from happening again. That's a very adaptive quality. But sometimes we become overly protective.
- C. Brainstorm pros and cons of not trusting at all vs. trusting too much.**
- D. Summarize main points.** (1) Trust is on a continuum. Trust isn't all-or-none. It is on a continuum. We can trust someone 100%, just a little, or not at all. (2) Most trust lies

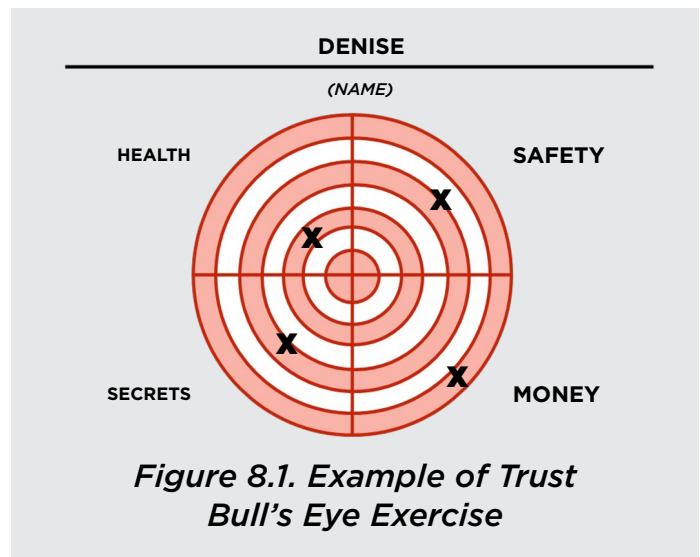
SESSION 7

TRUST

somewhere in the middle. Trusting too much or too little is not the best idea. It is unusual to trust someone 100% with anything and everything. It's also unusual (and not helpful) to trust that the world will be 100% safe. Finding moderation is the key.

Trust Is a Moving Target

- A. Discuss differences in how we trust others.** It is not customary to trust one person with everything. We may trust our friend who is an accountant to give sound financial advice but wouldn't ask him or her to fix our car. Nor would we tell our car mechanic our deepest secrets.
- B. Introduce activity.** This exercise represents how much group members trust others and with what. To begin, group members will write down the names of two people they trust to some degree. For individuals who deny having anyone that they trust, you may point out that they likely trust others with more than they realize. For example, they trusted you enough to come to the group. Next, group members will mark an "x" in each quadrant to demonstrate how much they trust the person in the preselected areas of health, safety, secrets, and money. The more they trust the person in a certain area, the closer the "x" should be to the bull's eye. An example is provided in the patient workbook on page 41 (also see **Figure 8.1**). **Complete worksheet. Process reactions to the activity.**



Learning to Trust

- A. Acknowledge that building trust after MST is hard.** It may feel impossible to trust new people or give someone the benefit of the doubt. Trust is built like a brick wall - one brick at a time. In the beginning, the wall lacks structure and is not strong. But as time goes on and we keep adding bricks, we will have a solid brick wall that is firm. Sometimes people give us a reason to believe they are not trustworthy. This doesn't mean we have to stop building the wall completely, unless the integrity of the wall is jeopardized.
- B. Elicit group members' thoughts about what it will take for them to be more trusting in their relationships. Points to emphasize during the discussion:**

SESSION 7

TRUST

- **Start small.** Ask people to do simple tasks before harder ones; slowly share information about yourself.
- **Be fair.** Don't ask people to do impossible tasks.
- **Keep track.** Be mindful of how well people follow through on their commitments.
- **Don't give up so quickly.** Give people a real chance to earn your trust. Even baseball allows three strikes.

Closing Exercise - "What's Your Motto?"

- Set up.** None.
- Review instructions.** Part of learning to self-trust is keeping the promises we make to ourselves. Another part is not being too harsh when we break those promises. Showing ourselves kindness when we make a mistake or don't meet our goals can be motivating. It is not about "letting us off the hook" but recognizing that we are trying our best.
- Have group members share an encouraging phrase or life motto that can help them combat self-doubt** (e.g., "I am trusting myself not to be perfect," "Life is about the journey not the destination.")

Homework (Optional)

- Complete one additional "Trust Bull's Eye" worksheet (found in Additional Resources section of patient workbook and Appendix B in manual).
- Write down an encouraging phrase or life motto on a post-it note, and hang it in a visible place (e.g., bathroom mirror, refrigerator, bedroom door).