




IMPACT

Trauma-Informed Physical and Verbal Self-Defense

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“Part of the abuse was living
in my body and it had to be
physically released.”

-- IMPACT Graduate

What is IMPACT?



- Realistic assault scenarios
- Physical and Verbal Techniques
- Full-force
- Re-trains automatic responses to attack
- Strangers & Familiar people

Managing Adrenaline Response

- Adrenaline= physiological response to stress
 - Self-defense tools are useful if we can access them under stress
 - Practice in simulated assault scenarios to practice managing adrenaline
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IMPACT's Relevance to Trauma Survivors

- “Custom Conversation” scenario
- Broad focus on facing fears
- Re-trains fight, flight, freeze response
- Practice assertiveness under stress



Some Reasons Trauma Survivors Take Self-Defense Courses

- Feeling stuck because of abuse history, unable to move on
- Need for a body-based intervention
- Fear of abusers' retaliation
- Fear of running into abuser unexpectedly
- Preparation for interactions with abuser
- To regain a sense of competence or control

How IMPACT Helps Survivors Heal

- Connection to their bodies: people experience their bodies as powerful
 - Practicing assertive communication under stress
 - An experience of being powerful when feeling fear
 - For survivors abused as children: knowing they can protect themselves as adults
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What makes a self-defense course trauma-informed?

- Confidentiality & Physical Safety
 - Opening & Closing Circles, periodic check-ins
 - Gradual progressions from less challenging to more challenging skills
 - Coaching during scenarios
 - Clear boundaries between instructor roles
 - Choice about techniques, opportunities for modifications
 - Grounding techniques
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IMPACT' s Classes for Survivors

- Slower pace
 - Additional processing time
 - Use of somatic grounding techniques
 - Breathing, tapping, slow movement, body awareness, relaxation response/self-soothing
 - Explicit framing of self-defense as healing
 - More opportunity for customized scenarios
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Research on IMPACT as a Trauma Intervention

- Reduction of PTSD symptoms and shame in a therapy population (Rosenbaum & Traska 2008)
 - Mastery of motor responses that were blocked during traumatic events (Rosenbaum & Traska 2014)
 - Integrated body experience (Rosenbaum & Traska 2014)
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Team Teaching: Role of Coach instructor

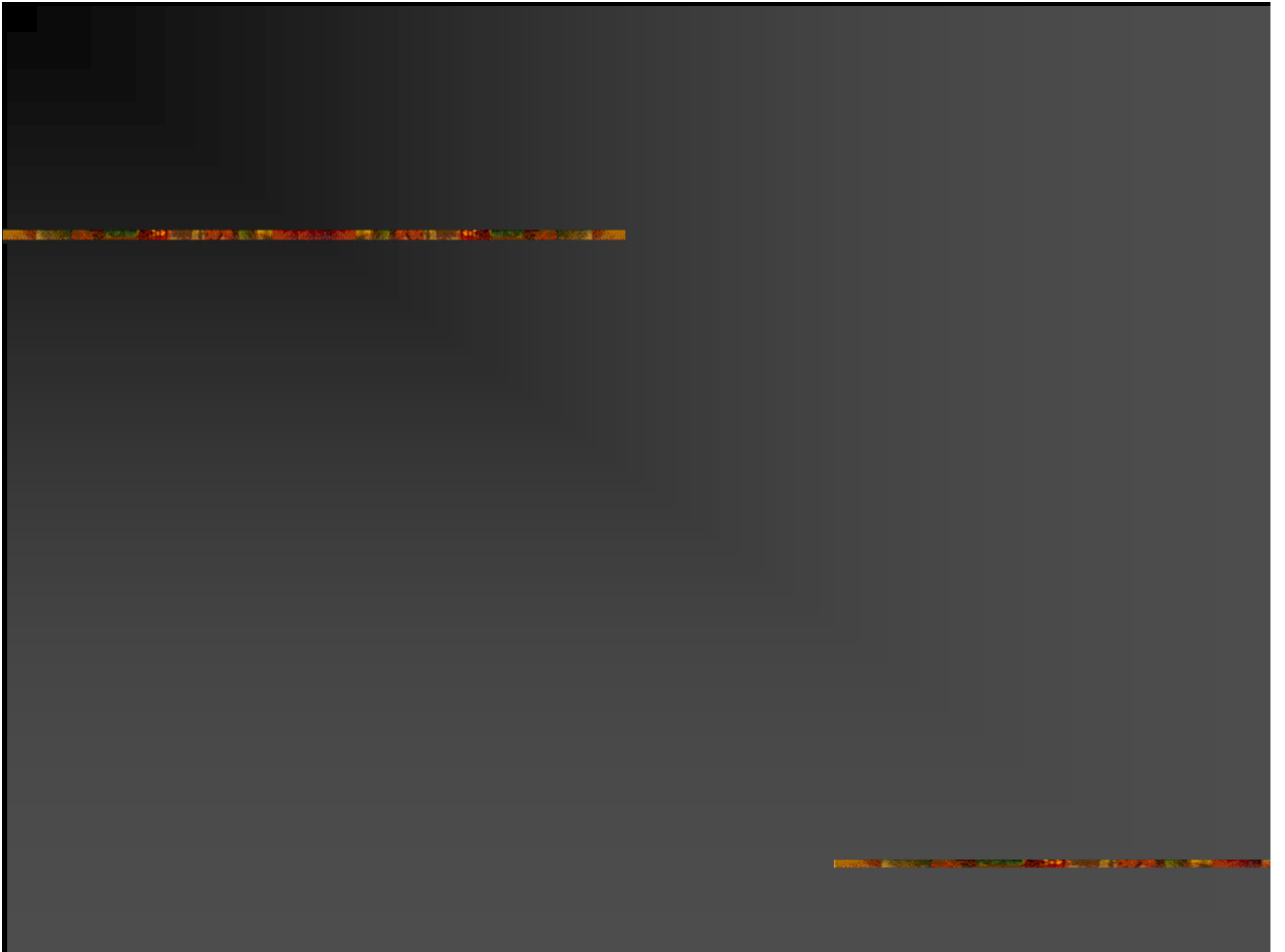
- Teaches and models physical and verbal techniques
 - Provides emotional and practical support to students while practicing scenarios
 - Students are never alone
 - This instructor never plays the perpetrator so students get consistency
 - Ensures physical safety
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Role of Suited Instructor

- Portrays a realistic perpetrator
 - Realistic verbal assaults help students learn to become less immobilized by verbal abuse in real life
 - Physical attack simulations help students find power in their bodies
 - Enables clear boundaries
 - Suited instructor is the only member of the team who portrays a perpetrator
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Role of Suited Instructor

- For some survivors: Importance of a supportive man
 - For some survivors: Ability to use techniques that are effective against someone who is physically larger than they are
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Verbal Strategies

Verbal Self-Defense Strategies

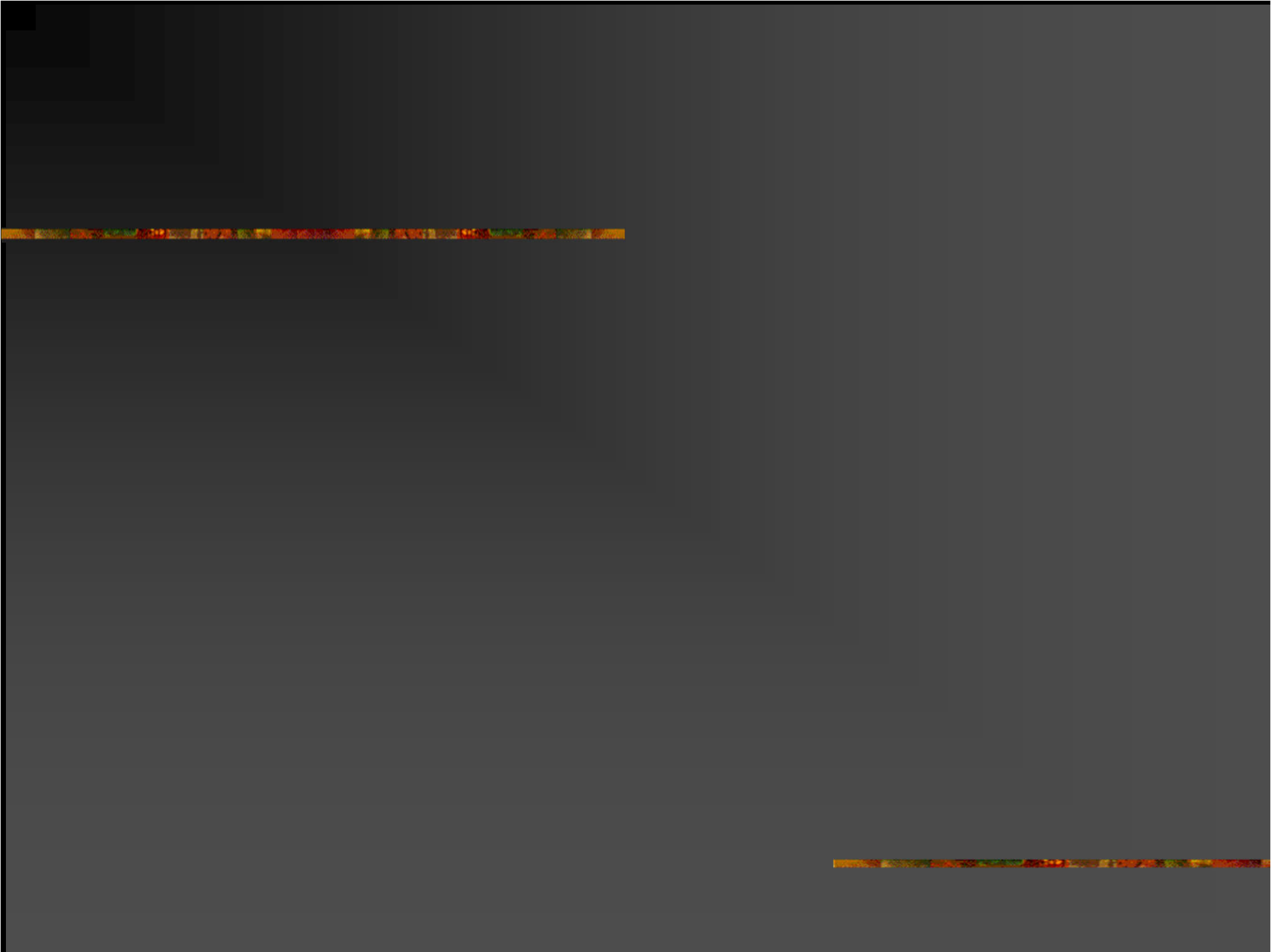
- Emphasis on de-escalation
 - Use of strong and neutral tone
 - Body language matches words
 - Matching our response to the level of threat the attacker/potential attacker poses
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Verbal Skills for Trauma Survivors

- Awareness of unintentional body language
 - Communicating strength in stressful situations
 - Staying calm in the face of threats and verbal baiting
 - Staying in control of oneself in the presence of aggressors
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Why start with strangers?

- More clear-cut self-defense situations
 - Less emotional charge than familiars
 - Mastery of basic skills when we get to familiars
 - Some assaults ARE perpetrated by strangers— real-world skills
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Rape Resistance Research &

IMPACT's Approach to Teaching About Sexual
Violence

Tark & Kleck 2014

- Review of National Crime Victimization Survey
 - Forceful and Non-forceful physical resistance were effective
 - No increased risk of injury after resistance
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Hollander 2014

- College student sample, quasi-experimental design
 - Feminist self-defense class
 - 12% of self-defense group and 30% of comparison group experienced sexual assault in 1 year
 - Self-defense group experienced less severe assaults
 - 0% completed rape compared to 3% of comparison
 - More sexual assault survivors in self-defense group
 - Self-defense group's self-efficacy scores increased over follow-up period, comparison group stayed the same
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Ullman 2007

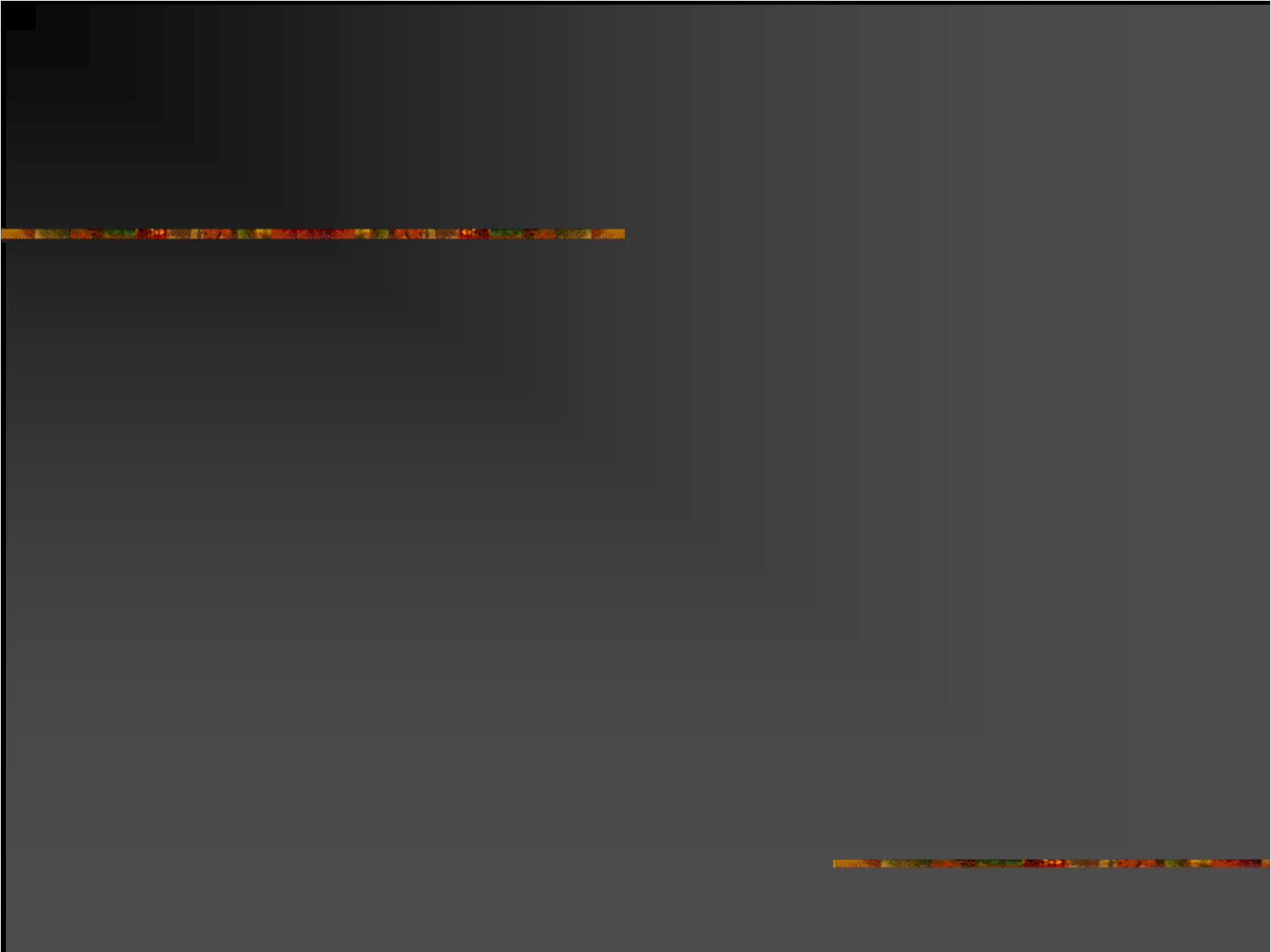
- Most recent meta-analysis
 - Forceful verbal resistance & physical resistance decrease chances of rape completion
 - Non-forceful verbal resistance is not as effective
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Addressing Sexual Violence with Trauma Survivors

- Pacing the curriculum based on survivors' needs
 - Start with strangers and no verbal interaction
 - Focus on physical skills and mechanics
 - Gradual practice
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Trauma-Informed Approach to Sexual Violence Scenarios

- Guard against victim-blaming and self-blame
 - Normalize crying and other fear response
 - Engage students in using their bodies
 - Acknowledge that majority of sexual violence is committed by familiar people
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Assertiveness & Boundary Setting

IMPACT's Survivor Focus Groups

“It’s harder to be assertive when you’ve been...abused. And it’s harder to stand up for yourself, It’s harder to think that you’re worth standing up for.”

“I’m really afraid of sex. I do have it, but only when it’s my boyfriend’s idea.”

Principles of Boundary Setting

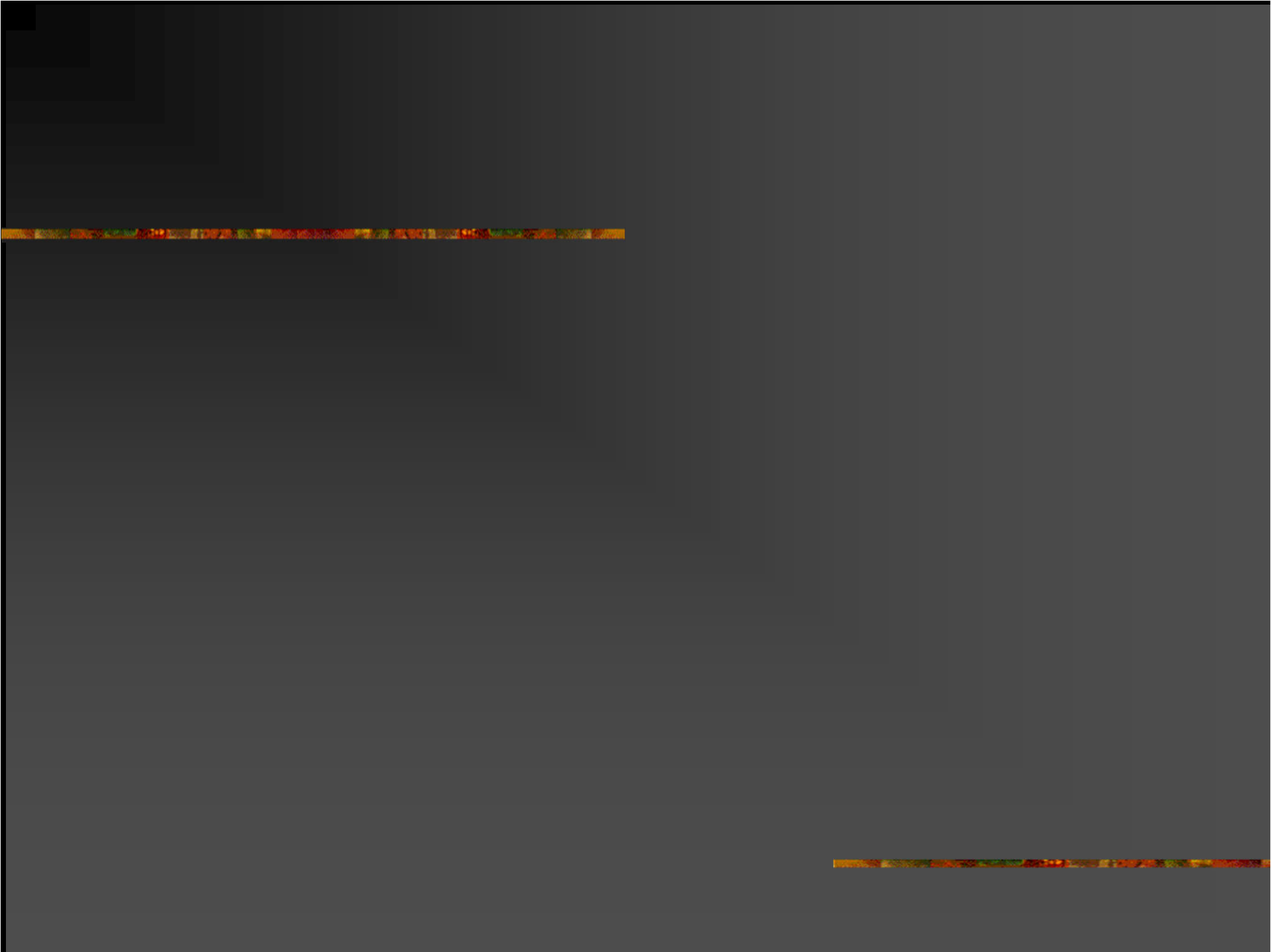
- Breathe
 - What's going on?
 - What do I want or need?
 - Get physical space if needed
 - Make body language congruent with words
 - Ask for what you need
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Why teach boundary setting in a self-defense class?

- Adrenaline management and body language skills are the same
 - Fear often stops people from setting boundaries
 - Boundary crossing is much more common than overt attempted violence
 - Importance of physical distance & body awareness
 - Boundary setting can prevent abuse
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Boundary Setting as Abuse & Violence Prevention

- Assess if someone is trustworthy
 - Smaller boundary violations may be a warning sign of potential for abusive behavior
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Repetition & Practice

Repetition

- Self-defense responses become automatic
 - Muscle memory
 - In assault situations there is no time to think
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Graduates Who Have used the skills

- Didn't have time to think, body acted automatically
 - "I don't remember what I did, I just remember seeing the attacker on the ground"
 - "I forgot I took the class"
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Importance of Repetition for Survivors

- More opportunity for mastery
 - Some students are less overwhelmed as class progresses
 - Can build in gradual improvement
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For further information

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