# Mariska Hargitay explains why it’s important ‘SVU’ will address Benson’s trauma in new season

"The way somebody is strong is to be comfortable in their vulnerability," the "Law & Order: SVU" star told TODAY. [Mariska Hargitay On Importance of ‘SVU’ Addressing Benson’s Trauma (today.com)](https://www.today.com/popculture/tv/mariska-hargitay-importance-svu-addressing-olivia-bensons-trauma-rcna48495)

TAP TO UNMUTE

Sept. 20, 2022, 6:20 PM -03 / Source: TODAY

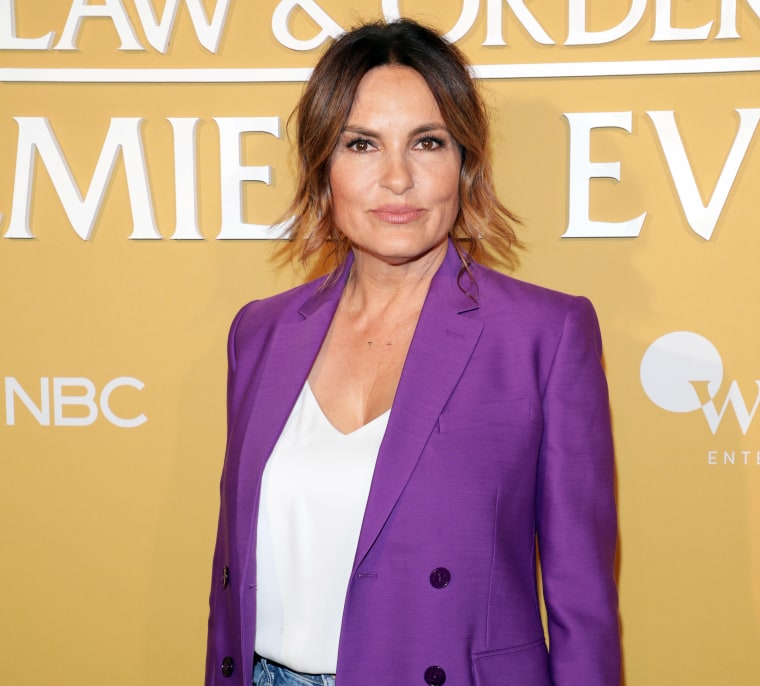
By MC Suhocki

After nearly 25 years of helping victims, [Mariska Hargitay's Olivia Benson](https://www.today.com/popculture/500th-svu-episode-brings-flashbacks-returning-characters-t235156) will address her own trauma and PTSD in the upcoming 24th season of "Law & Order: SVU."

Hargitay explained to TODAY at the "Law & Order" premiere event red carpet on Sept. 19 why digging into her character's traumatic experiences was especially important to her in the upcoming season.

"I think that because Olivia and so many of the characters on our show have been through so much trauma, I really wanted to delve into that a little more," she said. "And we have this idea that, 'The strong woman, she just deals with it,' but the way somebody is strong is to be comfortable in their vulnerability. And so I wanted to sort of take this, kind of the word is, take this idea that people are like, 'Oh, they're just strong, and they just come out strong.'"

"Real strength has to do with feeling the feelings, dealing with them and moving through them," she added.

Mariska Hargitay attends NBC's "Law & Order" season premiere event in New York City on September 19, 2022.Rob Kim / Getty Images

Arguably Benson's most traumatic experience began in Season 14 when she crossed paths on a case with a sadist and serial killer and rapist named William Lewis (Pablo Schreiber). Lewis eventually kidnapped Benson, tortured her and made her witness unspeakable acts. Benson's [former longtime partner, Elliot Stabler (Chris Meloni)](https://www.today.com/popculture/tv/olivia-benson-elliot-stabler-relationship-timeline-law-and-order-svu-rcna37289), departed "SVU" after Season 12, but Benson brought up Stabler during her abduction in the Season 15 premiere after she had managed to free herself from restraints and handcuff Lewis to a bed.

[by Taboola](https://popup.taboola.com/en/?template=colorbox&utm_source=nbc-today&utm_medium=referral&utm_content=thumbnails-rr:Right%20Rail%20Thumbnails%20-%20Bento:)

*Sponsored Stories*

[SIEMENS ENERGYHydrogen’s Swedish supermodel](https://ad.doubleclick.net/ddm/trackclk/N1355190.2621703TABOOLAEUROPELTD/B26996758.345474990;dc_trk_aid=537202864;dc_trk_cid=177467888;dc_lat=;dc_rdid=;tag_for_child_directed_treatment=;tfua=;ltd=?tblci=GiBNROmatO3XserhQdp0EXehJNEeJrFvkD7rQ05lWNFhmSC68FUoh8n-jtvrgILvAQ#tblciGiBNROmatO3XserhQdp0EXehJNEeJrFvkD7rQ05lWNFhmSC68FUoh8n-jtvrgILvAQ)

[THELOTTER.COMLoterias dos EUA disponíveis no Brasil: bilhões de reais a serem ganhos](https://www.thelotter.com/pt/loterias-americanas-conquistar-brasil/?tl_affid=12797&utm_source=taboola&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=5671799&utm_content=2980545983&chan=1554+-+Brazil+-+PT+-+Desktop&data1=nbc-today#tblciGiBNROmatO3XserhQdp0EXehJNEeJrFvkD7rQ05lWNFhmSDk_T0okoOamva1gq9h)

*Real strength has to do with feeling the feelings, dealing with them and moving through them.*

MARISKA HARGITAY

"My old partner, he'd know what to do," Benson says.

"He wouldn't question himself after what you've done," she continues. "He would kick your teeth in, break your legs, break your arms, break your back, break your face. Maybe I should call him."

At the Sept. 19 red carpet, Hargitay told TODAY: "So, I wanted to deal with some of the PTSD that Olivia Benson had from people that she's dealt with and all the William Lewis storyline and all that, but really go back into it — deal with it — so she could put it behind her."

She hopes Benson facing her trauma will "model" for people "that we don't have to be so scared of things that have happened — that healing is possible if we face them and if we have the courage."

"So dealing with that," Hargitay continued. "And this idea, in fact, that the only way out is through."

As for fans who want [Benson and Stabler to pursue a romantic relationship](https://www.today.com/popculture/should-benson-stabler-date-debate-between-2-svu-experts-t217280), now that Meloni is back in the "Law & Order" universe on ["Organized Crime"](https://www.today.com/popculture/tv/chris-meloni-posts-video-split-set-law-order-organized-crime-rcna27627) and has [shared scenes in crossover episodes](https://www.today.com/popculture/benson-stabler-got-personal-law-order-christmas-crossover-t242774) with Hargitay, "SVU" showrunner David Graziano [recently told TODAY](https://www.today.com/popculture/tv/law-order-svu-showrunners-talk-olivia-benson-elliot-stabler-rcna43579) the writing staff has "a responsibility to Benson as a character" to unpack events between Benson and Stabler before a relationship could be on the table.

"I think true love prevails in the end," Graziano said. "I’m a firm believer in true love prevailing dramatically if not in real life. But before you can have a healthy relationship like that, if you have some monsters under your bed, you have to slay those first. Otherwise, they’re going to follow you into that relationship."



## [Mariska Hargitay, Chris Meloni talk Benson and Stabler’s feelings](https://www.today.com/video/mariska-hargitay-chris-meloni-talk-benson-and-stabler-s-feelings-133427269578)

FEB. 17, 202204:58

Hargitay also explained the kind of planning that would go into preparing for the emotional discussion between Benson and Stabler about what Lewis did to her during Stabler's absence after the script is written.

"So we do a lot of work and we would plan it, and I would work with the writers about what we want to say," she said. "It's a very beautiful collaboration, obviously, because this is not — it's a unique situation because we've already lived this. We have 23 years of what has happened. So I think that we'll plan it very carefully.

"And then Chris and I always work on our scenes together to make them the best and most truthful that we can."

TODAY also asked Meloni if he would prepare for a scene like that by watching the Benson and Lewis scenes beforehand.

"No, because from my standpoint, I would not have known what happened," Meloni said.

"I'd do a better service to myself with my own imagination," he added.

Hargitay and Meloni have been filming scenes together over the past few weeks for the [upcoming historic "Law & Order" premiere](https://www.today.com/popculture/tv/law-order-brings-3-casts-together-first-time-historic-crossover-rcna44435) on Sept. 22, in which all three shows will cross over into each other.

As "SVU" marks its 23rd anniversary on Sept. 20, Hargitay said she and Meloni just have "so many" memories from their years working together.

"When we were shooting last Saturday and the time before, we are so in this thing of going down memory lane and remembering our favorite memories," she said. "And I'll tell you something, it's just a blessing because it rains down memories."

Reminiscing while filming?Jose Perez/Bauer-Griffin / GC Images

"I mean 23 years, we were together, 12 years, but also the friendship is a long time," she added. "So we have a lifetime of beautiful memories, and we talk about it a lot."

Another person who's been in Hargitay's life for nearly as long as Meloni is Ice-T, who plays Capt. Benson's right-hand man Sgt. Odafin “Fin” Tutuola.

"My job as a sergeant is just to watch Olivia as they say watch her back — from that line I had back in the day," Ice-T told TODAY, possibly referencing a line his character had in Season 12's "Pursuit," when Fin walked in while Benson was video chatting Stabler and said to Stabler: "I actually watch her back and not her backside." But Fin has shown his loyalty to Benson [many times](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-MN5a5XV9-Y) over the years.

"Just to cover her and make sure what order she sends out gets accomplished," he continued. "So you see Fin more in a control role working with a lot of the new detectives, making sure things are done the way she wants."

Ice-T joined "SVU" in Season Two in 2001 and has been a rock for Mariska Hargitay's Olivia Benson ever since.NBC / Getty Images

"You'll see me and her sit in her office, and she'll give me the outline of what needs to be done. But Fin's pretty solid — I don't get into anybody's personal business. I don't get into any of that kind of stuff. I just handle the job. I'm strictly business."

### *Recommended*



### [POP CULTURE](https://www.today.com/popculture)[Brad Pitt makes surprise sculptor debut in a series ‘about self-reflection’](https://www.today.com/popculture/popculture/brad-pitt-makes-surprise-sculptor-debut-finland-rcna48624)



### [POP CULTURE](https://www.today.com/popculture)[Will Smith sings ‘Happy Birthday’ to wife Jada Pinkett Smith in birthday video](https://www.today.com/popculture/popculture/jada-pinkett-smith-celebrates-51-birthday-rcna48623)

Ice-T is fully aware, like everyone else, of the many fans who want Benson and Stabler to "hook up."

"I thought it was kind of creepy when his wife was still alive," he said about Kathy Stabler, Elliot's wife who was killed during his return to "SVU" in April 2021. "You know, I'm saying Mariska being so conscious that (Benson) would go sleep with a married man, even though the fans did not care."

"But now, hey, it's an open window of opportunity," Ice-T said about Benson and Stabler. "But I don't know what's going to happen. The writers write this stuff, so we'll see. I wouldn't mind seeing them get butt-naked in bed."

One (real) "Law & Order" relationship that sadly appears to be coming to an end is [Sgt. Ayanna Bell (Danielle Moné Truitt)](https://www.today.com/popculture/tv/danielle-mone-truitt-law-order-working-chris-meloni-rcna23823) and wife Denise (Keren Dukes) on "Organized Crime."

Season Two ended with Bell returning home to an empty apartment and a note from Denise saying she left with their son.

Early "SVU" fans will remember Stabler ran into issues with his wife and family multiple times. The couple also separated at various points during Stabler's 12 seasons on "SVU." Truitt teased a few moments in the upcoming season of "OC" where Bell and Stabler will talk about what Bell is going through with Denise.

"The way their conversations go, they're just so sweet!" Truitt said.

She also highlighted one of the upcoming scenes she "loves" because it goes from Bell "being really serious and heartbroken" and Stabler recalling his marriage to Kathy.

Things didn't end well for Bell personally at the end of Season Two, but she'll have Stabler "to lean on" as she and her wife go through a divorce in Season Three.NBC / Getty Images

"At the end, he says something to me, and we both crack up laughing," Truitt explained. "It just shows the layers in their relationship. ... They're both like, 'Yeah, we're kind of whack.' We're awesome, but we're also kind of whack with relationships."

"It's going to be great to see Bell go through this journey and who she becomes going through this divorce," she continued. "And having Stabler to be able to lean on, I think, is really important."

One "OC" character who will have "a very special and different" relationship in Season Three is Jet Slootmaekers (Ainsley Seiger).

Last season, Jet began exploring a romance with hacker [Adam “Malachi” Mintock (Wesam Keesh)](https://www.today.com/popculture/tv/law-order-actor-wesam-keesh-malachi-jet-romance-rcna22039). Fans deemed the two "Jalachi," but Seiger warns that "Jalachi may be dead."

"As far as turnover goes in the 'Law & Order' universe, everyone is always coming and going — the revolving door never really closes," Seiger said. "But Jet will have a very special and different relationship ... and finally really open up despite her greatest ambivalences, which I'm really excited to get into."

Seiger confirmed this "special" relationship is with a character the audience has not yet met before.

More Stabler and Jet scenes in Season Three? Sign us up.NBC / Getty Images

She also discussed some "really fun moments" she filmed with Meloni, as fans love Jet and Stabler's almost father-daughter type of relationship on the show.

"I think the writers are really good at not overindulging in moments like those, and I think that's what makes them so special," Seiger said. "But it's very clear through every interaction that we have, at least this season, that Stabler and Jet do have a very, a very close, protective relationship with one another, but they are also able to set that aside and be colleagues."

Meloni reflected on his favorite parts about working with Seiger, noting "she is amazingly prepared."

"She just has a very interesting kind of core to her, and she's game really for anything," he said.

"She's very open to her art," Meloni added. "So it's a lot of fun."

*“Law & Order: SVU” returns Sept. 22 at 9 p.m. ET as part of a crossover premiere event with “Law & Order” at a special time, 10 p.m., and “Law & Order: Organized Crime” also at a special time, 8 p.m.*

This is TODAY

Your day starts here. The latest in news, pop culture, wellness and more from TODAY.