

Trauma Informed Practices

Safety

- Use a respectful and compassionate manner to support belonging
- Speak in a calm, caring tone
- Take time to familiarize the person with the surroundings and available resources & supports
- Actively listen without judgment
- Ensure inclusive and equitable treatment for everyone

Trustworthiness

- Ask the person how you can help them
- Listen to understand the perspective and experience of the person
- Tell the person what to expect and how long it will take
- Explain all instructions in terms the person can understand
- Do what you say you are going to do; apologize if you are not able to or if you made a mistake

Choice

- Allow the person to decide where to sit / stand in the room
- Give choice for where difficult conversations will be held
- Provide as many choices without compromising safety
- Seek consent and explain rationale for actions and instructions
- Make sure you can follow through with choices provided

Collaboration

- Be inclusive and equitable in sharing information
- Listen to understand and not necessarily respond or “fix”
- Allow the person to problem-solve independently, offering support when needed
- Provide opportunities to take on leadership roles
- Acknowledge individual and shared responsibilities

Empowerment

- Ask “What happened to you” rather than “What is wrong with you?”
- Pay attention to body cues; many survivors have been conditioned to be passive and defer to authority and so may not disclose distress
- Take time with the person so they feel genuinely heard
- Ask the person what they need to meet their goals
- Model and build self-confidence, celebrating all accomplishments, large or small



What Might You See?

Nonverbal Indicators of Discomfort and Distress

These behaviors are probably best understood as “fight, flight, or freeze” responses to the perception of a threat:

- Rapid heart rate and breathing
- Holding breath or sudden change in breathing pattern
- Sudden flooding of strong emotions (such as anger, sadness, fear, etc.)
- Facial tension, such as pursed lips, clenched jaw, narrowed eyes, furrowed brow
- Sweating
- Muscle stiffness, muscle tension, and inability to relax
- Cringing, flinching, or pulling away
- Trembling, shaking, or extreme restlessness
- Pacing, muttering, or other signs of agitation
- Startle response
- Staring vacantly into the distance
- “Spacing out” or being uninvolved in the present
- Being unable to focus, concentrate, or respond to instructions
- Being unable to speak

Common Trauma Triggers

Loud or abrupt noises	Smells
Tone of voice	Glaring lights / darkness
Waiting for long periods of time	Having to repeat one’s story multiple times to multiple people
Aggressive behavior	Impatience
Being ignored, dismissed, or mocked	Small spaces
Crowds / chaotic environments	Being touched
Removal of or denial of privileges	Colors and signage
Anniversary dates	Language

