

Trauma-Sensitive Practices

Safety

- Take time to familiarize the person with the physical environment
- Ask about comfort level with lighting, environmental surroundings
- Share control
- Show respect
- Use a warm and compassionate manner to build rapport
- Speak in a calm, caring tone
- Actively listen without judgment

Choice

- Ask if you can touch them
- Ask if you can close the door
- Allow the person to decide where to sit / stand in the room
- Provide as many choices without compromising safety
- Make sure you can follow through with choices provided
- Explain rationale for your intervention and obtain consent

Trustworthiness

- Explain all interventions in terms the person can understand
- Tell the person what to expect and how long it will take
- Ask the person what they want or how you can help them
- Actively listen
- Do what you say you are going to do; apologize if you are not able to or if you made a mistake.

Collaboration

- Share information
- Encourage the person to make decisions about treatment
- Allow the person to problem-solve
- Provide opportunities to take on a leadership role

Empowerment

- Ask “What happened to you,” not “What is wrong with you?”
- Take time with the person so they feel genuinely heard
- If the person appears to have difficulty with an intervention, ask if there is a way you can help the person relax
- Pay attention to body cues; many survivors have been conditioned to be passive and defer to authority and so may not disclose distress
- Model and build self-confidence (acknowledge even the smallest positives)



What Might You See? Nonverbal Indicators of Discomfort & 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 may also be observed)
- Sudden flooding of strong emotions (e.g., anger, sadness, fear, etc.)
- Pallor or flushing
- Sweating
- Muscle stiffness, muscle tension and inability to relax
- Cringing, flinching or pulling away
- Trembling or shaking
- Pacing, muttering
- 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
Waiting for long periods of time	Having to repeat one’s story multiple times to multiple people
Aggressive behavior	Impatience
Not being listening to or being heard	Small spaces
Crowds / Chaotic Environments	Being touched
Removal of or denial of privileges	Colors
Anniversary dates	Signage
Darkness	Lack of choice or options; not being believed

