

GUIDELINES FOR TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE INTERVIEWING WITH JUSTICE-INVOLVED WOMEN

Trauma-informed interviewing is a practice designed to create a safe, supportive environment for individuals who may have experienced trauma. It acknowledges the potential impact of trauma and seeks to minimize re-traumatization while ensuring a respectful and empowering interview process.

Here are guidelines for trauma-informed interviewing:

1. PREPARATION

- Understand Trauma: Educate yourself about the effects of trauma and how it may influence behavior, communication, and emotional responses.
- Set Clear Goals: Define the purpose of the interview and prioritize what information is truly necessary.
- Create a Comfortable Environment: Ensure the interview space is private, quiet, and free from distractions.
- Plan Flexible Questions: Be prepared to adapt your approach based on the interviewee's comfort level.

2. BUILDING RAPPORT

- Start with Neutral Topics: Begin with light, general questions to establish trust and reduce anxiety.
- Show Empathy: Use compassionate and non-judgmental language to build a connection.
- Acknowledge Their Strengths: Recognize resilience and efforts to overcome challenges.

3. COMMUNICATION

- Use Person-Centered Language: Refer to individuals with respect and avoid stigmatizing terms.
- Be Transparent: Clearly explain the purpose of the interview, how the information will be used, and any confidentiality policies.
- Avoid Pressure: Allow the interviewee to choose how much they wish to disclose.

4. QUESTIONING TECHNIQUES

- Avoid Leading or Intrusive Questions: Frame inquiries in an open-ended, neutral way, allowing the individual to respond at their own pace.
- Focus on the Present and Future: Emphasize current strengths and opportunities rather than dwelling on past traumas.
- Respect Boundaries: If the interviewee becomes uncomfortable or distressed, offer to pause or move on to another topic.

5. BE MINDFUL OF EMOTIONAL RESPONSES

- Recognize Signs of Distress: Be attentive to non-verbal cues like changes in tone, posture, or facial expressions.
- Provide Support Options: Let them know they can take breaks, and offer access to resources if needed.
- Maintain Calmness: Stay composed and empathetic, even if the interviewee becomes upset.

6. AVOID RE-TRAUMATIZATION

- Do Not Push for Details: Avoid asking for graphic or unnecessary details about traumatic experiences.
- Minimize Power Imbalances: Sit at the same level and avoid intimidating body language or tone.
- Control Triggers: Be aware of words, topics, or settings that might evoke traumatic memories.

7. CLOSE THE INTERVIEW THOUGHTFULLY

- End Positively: Highlight their strengths, express gratitude for their time, and discuss next steps in a clear and supportive manner.
- Check for Well-Being: Ensure the individual feels stable and supported before they leave.
- Provide Follow-Up Resources: Offer contacts for support services or additional information as needed.

8. TRAINING AND SELF-CARE

- Train Interviewers: Ensure interviewers are trained in trauma-informed practices, including recognizing trauma responses and practicing de-escalation techniques.
- Practice Self-Care: Interviewers should reflect on their own well-being and seek support if the process impacts them emotionally.

Trauma-informed interviewing is about showing respect, promoting safety, and focusing on the individual's potential rather than their past. By adopting these practices, interviewers can foster trust and empower individuals to engage meaningfully in the process.