



# Applying Person-Centered and Trauma-Informed Engagement Practices

Supporting Trauma Responses in Legal Settings

## Supporting Cognitive Responses

### Avoid:

- Contradicting Feelings
- Pushing unrealistic timelines
- Stigmatizing mental health treatment or making it seem like a punishment

### Try Instead:

- Validate feelings and mirror language the client uses
- Set realistic goals, explain them, and be flexible
- Be honest about the limitations to your expertise

### Examples of Application

Validating Feelings and Mirroring Language:

- "Thank you for sharing that information about your boyfriend. It sounds like that relationship is / was hard."

## Supporting Behavioral Responses

### Avoid:

- Argumentative or defensive language
- Threatening termination of services as punishment
- Accusing clients of drug use / risky behavior

### Try Instead:

- Remain calm and try to understand where anger responses are coming from
- Focus on setting boundaries in a healthy way and model behaviors.
- Nonjudgmental stance on substance use & be honest about risks

### Examples of Application:

Nonjudgmental Stance on Risky Behavior

- "If you're comfortable, I'd like to talk to you about substance use. I'm asking because it would be helpful for me to know so that I can best represent you and talk you through how it may impact your case."

## Supporting Emotional Responses

### Avoid:

- Refuting or minimizing feelings
- "All or nothing" statements
- Extreme statements or language that can feel judgmental

### Try Instead:

- Validate feelings and emotions
- Normalize responses to trauma
- Show compassion and thank clients for trusting you

### Examples of Application:

Normalize Responses to Trauma

- "It's really common for people who have gone through what you have to experience feelings that you've shared with me. But, what happened to you is not your fault."

## Supporting Physical Responses

### Avoid:

- Further stigmatizing physical coping mechanisms or physical manifestations of trauma
- Demanding language
- Criticizing a trauma responses

### Try Instead:

- Ask clarifying questions non-judgmentally and clarify why you are asking
- Model healthy, positive coping mechanisms like deep breathing
- Go at the client's pace

### Examples of Application:

Model healthy, positive coping mechanisms:

- "I'm noticing when we talk about "X" you begin to speak very rapidly. If it's okay with you, I'd like to try a deep breathing exercise to help ground us before we move to the next part of this discussion."