



# Supporting Trauma Responses in a Legal Setting

Trauma Response	Avoid This	Try Instead
<b>Physical Responses</b>	<p><b>Resist showing frustration at changes that may be related to trauma responses. That can lead to re-traumatization and make the trauma response increase.</b></p> <p><i>"I thought you said this happened first? That's not what you said before, which is it?"</i></p>	<p><b>Instead, ask clarifying questions in a non-judgmental way and explain why you are asking.</b></p> <p><i>"Last time we spoke, we wrote that X happened prior to Y. When we go through trauma sometimes it is hard to put events in order. When you think about when X happened, can you remember what the weather was like outside? Were there any holidays around then that you remember?"</i></p>
	<p><b>Avoid demanding language.</b></p> <p><i>"You're talking really fast so I need you to slow down."</i></p>	<p><b>Instead, model a slower pace of communication involving cadence, breathing, and non-verbal communication.</b></p> <p><i>"I'm noticing that when we talk about this, you start speaking very quickly. I want to make sure I'm understanding everything correctly, so it would be helpful to me if we could try to slow down a little. I know when I feel this way, sometimes it helps me to have something I can do with my hands, like doodling. Would you like to try that?"</i></p>
	<p><b>Avoid criticizing clients for a trauma response.</b></p> <p><i>"You're tapping a lot and moving quickly. Pay attention and slow down. This part is really important."</i></p>	<p><b>Instead, go at your client's pace whenever possible.</b></p> <p><i>"We are going to go through some important parts of this, so first why don't we take a break."</i></p>



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Emotional Responses	<p><b>Resist minimizing or refuting a client's feelings. Validate and normalize their feelings.</b></p> <p><i>"Don't be sad / nervous, everything is going to be fine."</i></p>	<p><b>Instead, validate feelings and emotions.</b></p> <p><i>"It's understandable to feel nervous, sometimes even I get a little nervous before these meetings. There are some things I do and have helped others in these moments that I would be happy to share if you are comfortable with that."</i></p>
	<p><b>Avoid "all or nothing" statements.</b></p> <p><i>"You have nothing to be ashamed of, you were a victim."</i></p>	<p><b>Instead, normalize responses to trauma.</b></p> <p><i>"It's really common for individuals who have been through what you have, to have feelings that are similar to what you have shared. But, what happened to you is not your fault."</i></p>
	<p><b>Avoid extreme statements or language that can feel judgmental.</b></p> <p><i>"That is so shocking. Wow, I can't believe that happened to you."</i></p>	<p><b>Instead, show compassion and thank them for trusting you.</b></p> <p><i>"I am so sorry that happened to you. Thank you for sharing that with me, I can imagine how difficult that must have been."</i></p>



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Cognitive Responses	<p><b>Avoid contradicting their feelings.</b></p> <p><i>"He wasn't really your boyfriend; he was just taking advantage of you."</i></p>	<p><b>Instead, validate feelings and mirror the language the client uses to describe their situation and relationships.</b></p> <p><i>"Thank you for sharing that information about your boyfriend with me. It sounds like that relationship has been hard."</i></p>
	<p><b>Avoid pushing unrealistic timelines.</b></p> <p><i>"You have nothing to be ashamed of, you were a victim."</i></p>	<p><b>Instead, set realistic goals and explain them, along with the reasons for any hard deadlines, but be flexible if trauma responses arise.</b></p> <p><i>"There are a few things I'd like to work through today to get you the services you've stated you'd like to pursue. If you need breaks, or would like to slow things down at any point, please let me know."</i></p>
	<p><b>Avoid stigmatizing mental health treatment or making it seem like punishment.</b></p> <p><i>"What you are talking about does not fall under the legal case. Maybe you need therapy."</i></p>	<p><b>Instead, be honest about the limitations of your expertise.</b></p> <p><i>"I want to make sure you are getting all the support you need. I work with an agency that may be able to provide more help with some of your concerns. Would you be open to talking with someone?"</i></p>



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Behavioral Responses	<p><b>Avoid argumentative and defensive language when clients exhibit an anger response.</b></p> <p><i>"You need to calm down. I don't know why you're yelling at me, I'm just trying to help."</i></p>	<p><b>Instead, remain calm and try not to fight back or escalate an angry situation. Don't take the anger personally, if possible, try to figure out where it's coming from. It's okay to disengage and come back when tensions have simmered.</b></p> <p><i>"I'm noticing that this is not easy for us to talk about right now, I think it might help if we take a break. Can I call you back tomorrow?"</i></p>
	<p><b>Avoid threatening termination of services – this can be viewed as a breach of trust or abandonment.</b></p> <p><i>"We had a call scheduled and you never answered. You need to be more responsible, or we won't be able to continue working together."</i></p>	<p><b>Instead, focus on setting boundaries in an empathetic way, which can be a great opportunity to model healthy behaviors for clients.</b></p> <p><i>"It'd be helpful if you could share with me if your availability changes and you're not able to make a meeting – I know sometimes things come up that are unavoidable. You can always email me or call this number to let me know you need to cancel. That helps me to manage my time for you and for other clients. Is there anything I could do to help make this easier?"</i></p>
	<p><b>Avoid accusing clients of drug use or risky behavior.</b></p> <p><i>"Have you been using drugs? This is going to look bad for your case."</i></p>	<p><b>Instead, take a nonjudgmental stance while being honest about risks.</b></p> <p><i>"If you're comfortable, I'd like to talk with you about drug/alcohol use. I'm asking because would be helpful for me to know so that I can best support you and talk you through any risks that may come up in your case."</i></p>