

Tools for Transformation: Becoming Accessible, Culturally Responsive and Trauma Informed Organizations

Guide for Emotional Support

Navigating conversations about mental health concerns can sometimes feel uncomfortable. Our own views and past experiences with mental health challenges in our work, lives, and communities can shape how we form relationships with people we intend to assist. There are ways we can approach these conversations that are transparent about our intentions and respectful of individual preferences regarding what is helpful in times of emotional distress. With our understanding of the impact of violence, coercive control and trauma, we can expect to regularly encounter people in our services who experience difficulty feeling grounded, connected, and physically and emotionally safe. By using approaches that are inclusive, accessible, culturally responsive and trauma-informed we can be respectful of individual's experience, honor the "whole person" and what they bring, and support survivors to implement self-defined strategies to feel connected, present and safe.

In conversations about mental health concerns, first, be sure your approach is in compliance with the Americans With Disability Act, the Fair Housing Act and the Civil Rights Act and to be sure your processes are not screening people out. Consider what you need to know and why, as well as what you need to document and why. In our work, the goals of these conversations are to offer comfort along with information that normalizes the effects of violence, and to determine what would be helpful and offer that support.

Information To Share With Everyone

Offer information that normalizes the affects of abuse, sending the message that what survivors may be experiencing is common given their experiences. Also include information that lets people know what they might expect.

- We know that abuse can affect our emotional well-being and mental health. Many survivors experience...
- The services we offer everyone are...
- In the beginning it is often hard for people to settle in. There may be sounds or spaces that feel uncomfortable. Let us know if we can help.
- Some people find that they need a few days (or weeks) to catch up on sleep or to "just be."
- Sometimes after a few days of feeling more safer and more rested, people may find themselves feeling more distressed.

- If you are experiencing any mental health challenges or concerns and want help, there are a number of options we can offer, including access to mental health treatment, mind-body practices and peer support.”
- If you have concerns about how someone may try to use your mental health challenges, diagnosis or substance use against you that is something we can assist you with if you like.
- We don’t need to know what meds you are taking but if you would like any assistance regarding medications please let us know. This can include help with storage, reminders for taking medications, assistance with refills or medication changes, learning more about medications, concerns with insurance or with someone being abusive to you and controlling your medications.

Talking About What Helps

Talking with survivors about what helps gives us an opportunity to create relationships based on listening, learning and offering what feels familiar and has been successful to people in distress. This process takes time and we may learn new ways to support someone over several conversations

What are the things that help you the most to stay grounded, calm and clear-headed, particularly when you are under stress or in an unfamiliar environment?

What are the kinds of things or situations that you find most challenging?

What can we do while you are here to have as little additional stress as possible?

What are the kinds of things you might find very challenging?

When you are overwhelmed or distressed, what does that look and feel like for you?

What does it look like on the outside to other people?

What tends to add to your stress or distress?

What has helped in the past when you have felt this way?

Are there things we can do to support you?

Are there things you do not want us to do in supporting you?

Emotional Support Plan: Identifying Feelings, Actions and Supports

Tools, resources and supports I use and things I do that help me feel good, calm, relaxed, focused, grounded, clear-headed or safe

Things I would like help with while I'm here are:

Navigating My Challenges

Inside when I might be feeling:

What it might look like on the outside to other people is:

Things I can do that might help in the moment are:

The physical or emotional signs that show that I am feeling worse are:

Things others can do to help in the moment are:

Things I do not want others to do: