



## **HOW TO WORK WITH TRAUMA SURVIVORS**

### **1. What is the best approach when working with a client who is a trauma survivor?**

The best approach when working with trauma survivor clients is to allow the client to set the pace. This means not forcing the client to discuss or reveal certain traumatic experiences. Make note of non-verbal signals indicating that the client is not comfortable speaking about those experiences. If possible, allow your client to disclose information once they are ready. If it is necessary to gather certain information without delay, explain to the client why this information is important and confirm that they are ready to discuss the information.

### **2. What should I do if my client becomes emotional or uncomfortable during our meetings?**

Trauma survivors are sometimes overwhelmed by their emotions when they share them with someone else. Remember that if your client opens up about difficult experiences, it is possible that this is the first time they have shared this information with someone else. Be patient and listen. Give your client the opportunity to express themselves and reassure your client that crying or his/her other expressions are proper. Avoid telling the client to stop crying or moving along the meeting. Sometimes it is helpful to give your client water, tissue, or an opportunity to take a break.

### **3. How does trauma impact a client's ability to communicate effectively about his/her case?**

Trauma survivors may have difficulty retelling traumatic events or will hesitate when sharing information about these experiences. Memory loss and distortion are other effects of trauma that impact the client's ability to communicate. Consider that your client may completely block certain experiences as a way to shield themselves from relieving the trauma. Also recognize that your client's unwillingness to communicate about certain events is not voluntary and that there may be other underlying reasons.

### **4. How can I best serve a client who has survived traumatic events?**

Trust and compassion are essential when working with trauma survivors. Developing a trusting relationship with a trauma survivor client is essential to a successful working relationship. Clients may not share personal information unless and until they trust the person helping on their case. Take time to thoroughly explain to your client the rules of confidentiality and your inability to disclose privileged information. This can improve your client's ability to disclose information. Also consider having regular check-ins with your client not just to discuss the case, but also to know about your client's day to day life. Finally, make sure to ask your client if he/she needs help with something beside their immigration case. It is possible that your client may need help accessing social services, such as counseling and therapy.

### **Additional Resources:**

- KIND: *Representing Unaccompanied Children: Training Manual for KIND Pro Bono Attorneys*, <https://bit.ly/2UBJgIC>
- CAIR Coalition: *Practice Manual for Pro Bono Attorneys, Representing Unaccompanied Immigrant Children*, <https://bit.ly/2IIHX1x>
- UNICEF: *Foundations – Working with Children, Action for the Rights of Children (ARC)*, <https://bit.ly/38SZkHQ>