



## Tips for Conducting a Victim-Centered Intake

### **Tip 1:** Establish rapport

Establish rapport with the survivor by first sharing information about your services and any applicable confidentiality protections available to her. Through your verbal and non-verbal cues, let her know that you're there to listen and provide support, not to stand in judgment. Acknowledge that her experience is unique, but that she is not alone. Tell her that you understand that this is a difficult time, that you believe her and that she neither caused nor is to blame for the assault.

### **Tip 2:** Elicit the survivor's experience

Acknowledge the difficulty the survivor might have sharing a very traumatic, personal story within such a brief time of meeting you. Let her know that she can share or not share her experience with you. If you must ask specific questions or details about the sexual violence, use open-ended, nonjudgmental questions.

### **Tip 3:** Explain the purpose of follow-up questions

Explain that the purpose of any follow-up questions is to ensure the best representation or advocacy and NOT to imply that she did anything wrong. If you cannot think of a reason for your question, that may be a clue that it is out of scope and not appropriate to ask.

### **Tip 4:** Be attentive to the survivor's emotions

Survivors show a range of emotions. All feelings are normal. While it's always important to validate and normalize emotions, you should also be on the lookout for suicidal, homicidal or other dangerous thoughts. For example, if the survivor says she is depressed and is considering ending her life, you can validate her feelings of depression AND help her stay alive. If you are overwhelmed or don't know how to handle a survivor's intense emotions or potentially dangerous thoughts, locate experts at your local community mental health center or hospital who can help, or to whom you can refer the survivor.

### **Tip 5:** Recognize memory impairment

Trauma impacts memory. It is typical and normal for a survivor to have trouble remembering the order of events or not to remember all the details of what happened. Due to the brain's response to trauma, a survivor's memory may be spotty and details may emerge over time. (Memory may also be impaired due to a drug-facilitated sexual assault.) Explain that because assailants often try to use a survivor's memory impairment to cast doubt upon her credibility, it's critical that you and she explore and discuss any inconsistencies in her account. Reassure her that you believe her and understand how difficult it can be to clearly recall an assault.

### **Tip 6:** Be patient

It can be difficult to be a sexual assault survivor. Sometimes, survivors need a break from people asking about the rape. That's normal. If the survivor is in and out of communication with you, be patient. Although your contact with the survivor is well intentioned, it can also be a trigger for her.

### **Tip 7:** Practice victim-centered advocacy

Practice victim-centered advocacy by providing legal information and options, helping survivors to assess their options and supporting whichever steps they take. Remember: Your role is to help survivors understand their options, not to make decisions for them.

### **Tip 8:** Use appropriate terms

Sexual assault survivors may use slang or terms that are unfamiliar to you. It's fine—indeed necessary—to ask what a term means if you don't know. Use the same terms as the victim uses if appropriate. Be aware of your body language and avoid visibly reacting to terms you find offensive. In addition, ask the survivor how she would like you to refer to the perpetrator (i.e., by his name, by a code name, a curse word or the term "assailant" or "perpetrator").