

Trauma-Informed Lawyering:

- Means asking “What happened to her/him?” vs. “What is wrong with her/him?”
- Rests upon recognition of characteristics intrinsic in all positive human relationships, including empathy, responsive listening, restraint from judgement, and demonstration of authentic care and concern for a client.

Getting Ready For a Meeting or Interview With a Client:

- Ensure the client has the information they need to get to your office or the space where you are meeting. Are they capable of traveling to the space or do they have concerns regarding money, mobility, child care, safety, etc. Give them precise information about getting to your office - directions, parking options, or best public transit routes. Let them know what to expect when they enter the building and how to contact you if needed.
- Prepare your meeting space with client comfort and safety in mind. Look at how the room is set up and make sure the client has easy access to exits. Prepare extra copies of documents and have supplies like a notepad, pens, sticky notes, and/or fidget toys ready at the table.
- Upon arrival, check in regarding basic needs. Does your client need to use the restroom? Can you offer them a glass of water? Asking about these potential needs and making small talk for the first few minutes can help set your client at ease and give them time to prepare for your meeting.
- During the meeting, be sensitive to how your client’s memory may be impacted by trauma. Remember that survivors of trauma may not tell their stories in a linear way and that even if some memories seem “misfiled,” the actual recall of the memories is accurate. Offer to create a timeline using dates and events, and ask if you can assist the client in mapping out and sorting through any conflicting information.

Preparing for and Responding to Triggers:

- Preparing for potential triggers: Explain in advance what will occur during your meeting and offer breaks throughout. Use open body language and be in tune with your own emotions.
- Be purposeful in how you ask questions: Keep questions open-ended (who, what, when, where, how), but don’t ask the client why something happened. Provide introductory information or context to your questions so the client does not feel they are being blamed or judged for their actions or experiences.
- Responding to a client in crisis: Notice and validate your client’s feelings and use active listening skills to respond to their experience. Reassure your client that trauma responses are perfectly normal; there is nothing “crazy” or “wrong” about how they are feeling. Next, ask what would help, and offer concrete options like a glass of water or leaving the room for a few minutes. Finally, help them get grounded in the present by asking them simple questions that re-direct their attention (e.g. “Are your shoes comfortable?”).