

# WORKING WITH HT SURVIVORS: TRAUMA-INFORMED ADVOCACY

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## Overview

### Trauma

Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening. Individual trauma may have lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.<sup>1</sup>

### Impact of Trauma on Survivors of Human Trafficking

- Clients may experience mental and physical distress such as posttraumatic stress disorder, major depressive disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, substance abuse disorder, and chronic health conditions among others.
- Because of exposure to acute or chronic threats, clients may perceive safe environments as threatening.

### Trauma-Informed Practice

Trauma-informed practice has gained traction and relevancy in many professional services and disciplines. This is especially important when working with survivors of human trafficking. The guiding principle of trauma-informed practice is to put “the realities of the client’s trauma experiences at the forefront in engaging with the client.”<sup>2</sup>

### Importance of Trauma-Informed Practice

- Understand trauma triggers to minimize re-traumatization. Triggers are sensory experiences that prompt trauma survivors to relive a past traumatic experience.
- Anticipate that traumatic experiences may affect survivors’ actions and behaviors. They present themselves unexpectedly or demonstrate unusual behavior linked to coping mechanisms developed in response to trauma. These responses may jeopardize their credibility. Examples include inconsistencies in their statements and memory recall that is not structurally logical. The primary emotion expressed by survivors may be anger. Alternatively, clients may be unresponsive as a self-protective measure to avoid re-traumatization.

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<sup>1</sup> Trauma - SAMHSA

<https://www.integration.samhsa.gov/clinical-practice/trauma>

<sup>2</sup> Katz, S. & Halder, S. K. (2016). The pedagogy of trauma-informed lawyering. *Clinical Law Review*, 22, 359-393.

[https://www.law.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/upload\\_documents/Katz%20-%20Halder%20Pedagogy%20of%20Trauma-Informed%20Lawyering.pdf](https://www.law.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/upload_documents/Katz%20-%20Halder%20Pedagogy%20of%20Trauma-Informed%20Lawyering.pdf)



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- Recognize that culture is not limited to values, norms, language, place of origin, race, and ethnicity. Cultural elements may also include class, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, immigration status, generation or other identities and variables affecting an individual's reality.
- Use a strengths-based approach that leverages your clients' resilience and protective factors, both internal and those associated with their culture.<sup>3</sup>

## Explore the Complexities of Language and Culture

- Consider that survivors, especially members of a less dominant culture may not value or benefit from procedural fairness dimensions –respect, voice, neutrality, and trust – vis-à-vis intersecting dynamics of human trafficking such as language, culture, history of oppression, experiences of trauma, and immigration status.
- Appreciate the primacy of language in communication and context and ensure that clients can interact in their preferred language.
- Recognize that survivors, based on cultural or individual beliefs, may not identify as victims and reject such labeling.
- Caveat: If working with a client in a small or marginalized group, it may be necessary to provide an interpreter from a different community to ensure safety and to protect confidentiality.<sup>4</sup>

## Resources

### Human-Trafficking Task Force e-Guide

<https://www.ovcttac.gov/taskforceguide/eguide/4-supporting-victims/41-using-a-trauma-informed-approach/>

### Victim Assistance Training Online (see Core Competencies and Skills – Trauma Informed Care)

[https://www.ovcttac.gov/views/TrainingMaterials/dspOnline\\_VATOnline.cfm?tab=1#corecomp](https://www.ovcttac.gov/views/TrainingMaterials/dspOnline_VATOnline.cfm?tab=1#corecomp)

### Considerations and Recommendations on Trauma-Informed Advocacy for Trafficking Survivors

<https://www.api-gbv.org/resources/trafficking-tbrief/>

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<sup>3</sup> Establishing a Trauma-Informed Lawyer-Client Relationship (2014)

[https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public\\_interest/child\\_law/resources/child\\_law\\_practiceonline/child\\_law\\_practice/vol-33/october-2014/establishing-a-trauma-informed-lawyer-client-relationship/](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_interest/child_law/resources/child_law_practiceonline/child_law_practice/vol-33/october-2014/establishing-a-trauma-informed-lawyer-client-relationship/)

<sup>4</sup> Trauma Informed Lawyering

<https://ncler.acl.gov/Files/Trauma-Informed-Lawyering.aspx>



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### Resources (continued)

Utilizing Trauma-Informed Approaches to Trafficking-related Work

[http://www.traumacenter.org/clients/projectreach/H-O%20Trauma-Informed%20Case%20Study\\_final.pdf](http://www.traumacenter.org/clients/projectreach/H-O%20Trauma-Informed%20Case%20Study_final.pdf)

Using a Victim-Centered Approach & Trauma-Informed Approach to Address the Needs of Human Trafficking Victims

<https://www.cbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Victim-Centered-Trauma-Informed-Treatment-of-Victims-of-Human-Trafficking.pdf>

