

Impact of Trauma on Interaction and Engagement: Information Sheet for Domestic Violence Advocates*

Trauma can affect a survivor's...

- Interactions
- Stress tolerance and ability to regulate emotions
- Responses to negative feedback
- Ability to screen out distractions

It could look like...

- A survivor seeming "cool" and detached
- A survivor who is highly sensitive and whose feelings are easily hurt
- A survivor is suspicious and not trusting
- A survivor does not "read" or trust warmth and caring from staff and other survivors

When someone is experiencing a trauma response, she may...

- Not be able to talk to you about what is happening
- Not notice what is happening
- Not know what will help or think that nothing will
- Need some time alone or be comforted by having you near
- Feel too upset or overwhelmed to interact with you
- Not want to say what she needs because she does not feel safe enough, she may want to protect you, or she may believe that she should not say

Connection and Reflection Skills:

We know that any survivor may have difficulty engaging with an advocate who offers to help her. It is important to develop communication skills that acknowledge a person's trauma-related barriers to communication, while also following the survivor's lead in the conversation. We can do this by using two sets of skills—our connection skills and our reflection skills. Our connection skills include our ability to engage, be available, be present, convey empathy, avoid judgment, and be open and honest about what we are offering. We sometimes think of these as "lifelines," meaning that they may not be picked up immediately but are available when the other person is ready. Our reflection skills include our self-awareness and responsibility for understanding our own needs and reactions, both of which help to sustain our connection skills.

* This handout is adapted from *Access to Advocacy: Serving Women with Psychiatric Disabilities in Domestic Violence Settings: A Curriculum for Domestic Violence Advocates*, National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health, Chicago, IL (2007).