

Gaining trust

Despite valid reasons for not trusting others, people with a history of trauma need someone they trust enough to honestly tell as much of their story as they choose to share when they are ready. Here are some ways to demonstrate your trustworthiness and begin the process of gaining trust:

- Be willing to earn trust. Try not to be hurt or offended if a traumatized person who has been battered or sexually assaulted is angry or doesn't trust you right away. Allow people you serve to take as much time as they need to begin to trust you. Understand that this lack of trust has more to do with their life experience and your role than it does about you personally.
- Recognize all people need to earn trust and advocates, counselors and authority figures are no exception. Trust isn't automatic just because someone wants to help or is in a position of authority.
- Encourage individuals to participate in developing safety, service and/or treatment plans. This can help give them a sense of control.
- Explain what you are doing, and why, up front. No surprises. If people we serve suspect that information is being withheld from them or that they are being manipulated in any way, trust often evaporates.
- Understand that confidentiality is paramount in gaining trust, as well as an ethical imperative.
- Explain the limits of your confidentiality at the beginning of the intake process, before anyone begins talking. This may impact which issues an individual feels safe sharing with you.
- Walk the talk. If we have a different set of standards for ourselves than we have for the people we serve, we convey the message we feel superior to them.
- Believe people who tell you about traumatic incidents. Do this, even if someone seems confused or out of touch with reality, or says something you perceive as inaccurate. Try asking yourself, "What might be happening to make this seem true for this individual?" Consider how certain behaviors and beliefs make sense or could be a reasonable response to multi-abuse trauma. Don't ask, "Why are they acting this way?" Ask, "What happened to them to trigger this response? How can I help them find safer ways of coping that cause less grief?"
- Be willing to acknowledge when you don't have all the answers, and be willing to help the people you serve get the information they need.