

Tips for Approaching the Sensitive Topic of Brain Injury with your Clients

Your client may have anxiety related to talking about certain sensitive topics, including screening for a potential brain injury. Common worries, fears, and concerns include: Embarrassment, judgment, confidentiality, relevance to care, and the nature of a topic which is rarely discussed.

- Think about how you interact with your client
 - How you ask questions – Wording, order, form
 - Clients must feel that you are empathetic and do not judge them. Give honest, straightforward answers to help the client feel at ease
 - Be aware of nonverbal communication- body positioning, body posture, etc.
 - Be sure to exude calmness and comfort instead of tension or unease
 - Ask permission. For example, “Would it be alright with you if I asked you some questions about ___?”
 - Give the client the option to not answer a question if it makes them uncomfortable
 - Acknowledge what the client is saying by using active listening
 - This technique ensures true understanding of what the client is communicating to you
 - Active listening is listening attentively while they are speaking, and can include: paraphrasing what they said and asking for clarification, summarizing or reflecting on what they said, avoiding interruptions while they are speaking, or simply remaining engaged while they are speaking through nodding, leaning in, or making eye contact
- Other helpful techniques:
 - Normalizing
 - Normalize the problem (as appropriate) without minimizing the problem and/or their anxiety
 - Emphasize that they are NOT alone!

- For example, “Many people find it difficult to talk about...” Or “Many people with ____ notice they have problems with ____ . Have you?”
- Transparency
 - Explain why you are asking these questions—be open about your reasons
 - Be sure to clarify the goals of the screening questions
 - This tool does not diagnose a brain injury. However, it does provide a way for us to talk about head injury in the context of IPV, and can help survivors identify the potential source of some of their challenges
 - Explain that the effects of brain injury can range from subtle to severe, and the importance of accessing services to help manage these effects
- Revisiting the core concept of empowering survivor-centered advocacy
 - It is your job to truly listen to what the survivor of IPV/DV with a possible brain injury is expressing, focus on strengths, and provide feedback in a respectful and positive way
- It can be helpful to practice beforehand to maximize your comfort with administering the screening and determining the language you want to use

Validate feelings and experiences. There can be feelings of shame about difficulties they are experiencing, which may cause them to keep things to themselves or try to compensate. Ask, would they like to share more about what happened?

References

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