

Tip Sheet for Trauma-Informed Victim-Centric Writing

“What you write is as important as what you say” (National Center for Domestic Violence)

OVC defines a victim-centric approach as having a systematic focus on the needs and concerns of a victim to ensure the compassionate delivery of services in a nonjudgmental manner.

SAMHSA’s adaptable six principles for a trauma-informed approach serve as vital underpinnings for trauma-informed, victim-centric, and person-centered writing.

1. Safety
2. Trustworthiness and transparency
3. Peer Support
4. Collaboration and mutuality
5. Empowerment, voice, and choice
6. **Cultural, historical, and gender considerations**

Tips for Trauma-informed writing

1. Be aware of COMMAND LANGUAGE and how information is communicated; sometimes, a simple adjustment changes the entire message
“FAILURE to respond by ...” feels intimidating, but “You have the right to request or disagree with the determination...” Moreover, it can convey a sense of empowerment to a person impacted by crime.
2. Be person-centered. “Being a person impacted by violent crime” vs. “a victim or survivor of violent crime. This phrasing keeps the person at the center of communication. What happened to them is an event, **not** a reflection of who they are. A feeling of shame often accompanies victimization, so acknowledging a person, not just as a victim, can promote safety.
3. Be short, clear, and concise- consider the structural elements of written correspondence. For example, bold important dates, avoid legal/technical terms when possible, and use plain language. Headings and lists can be helpful too!
4. Communicate safety, respect, and that the person is believed even if a claim does not fall within guidelines for compensation. The intro and outro phrasing of written communication can be very effective in validating the experience of a person impacted by crime. For example, “The claim,” not “your claim,” does not fall within guidelines for compensation...
5. Consider how correspondence looks on a page. Streamlined and organized letters or instruction sheets can be helpful. Persons impacted by crime may be anxious or overwhelmed when filling out applications. They may experience distressing emotions re-visiting events that are often traumatic and life-changing.
6. Sign all correspondence from a specific contact. Include all contact info, website address, and phone extension to improve accessibility.

Thank you for all you do.

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