

## Best Ways to Ask Clients About Abuse

We reached out to our friends at **YWCA of Eastern Kansas, Center for Safety and Empowerment** for some tips about the best ways to ask clients about abuse. Here's what they said:

We believe that safest practice is to try to talk to the client in private, if you are able to do so. Sometimes, an abuser, trafficker or trafficking recruiter may be accompanying the victim-survivor as they receive community services as a way to monitor conversations, sabotage services, and continue to gain and maintain power and control. Abusers may also use children to get information that can be used against the victim-survivor as another method of power and control.

For example, in our office, we have a playroom where children can spend time while being supervised by another advocate as their guardian is able to meet with their primary advocate to discuss shelter, services, case management, safety planning, etc. Of course, sometimes, separating the guardian from the child is not an option or the client requests that the child accompany them to meet with the advocate. This is absolutely the victim-survivor's choice, but in this way, we are able to offer them additional options and accommodations for privacy, confidentiality, and safety.

We find that it is helpful to normalize asking to help the victim-survivor feel more comfortable disclosing any abuse that they may be experiencing. Oftentimes, it all comes down to how you ask, from the way you phrase the question to the tone in your voice and your body language. Here are some ways that staff could ask:

- "I know we just met, and yet I have to ask you personal questions. Let me explain why. My asking you these questions can help us know how to take care of you."
- "I ask all of my clients this question because it's important for me to know what has gone on and what is going on in their lives."
- "Because violence is so common in many people's lives, I have begun to ask all my clients about it routinely."
- "We know now that domestic violence is a very common problem. 1 in 3 women and 1 in 7 men have experienced intimate partner violence. Has this ever happened to you?"
- "Are there times when you do not feel safe at home?"
- "Are you in a relationship with someone who physically hurts or threatens you?"
- "What happens when you and your partner fight or argue?"