

Older adults may face unique challenges as they navigate the criminal justice system.

Advocates can help assist older adults through the criminal justice system and beyond by reducing the barriers that older adults may face and by employing a trauma-informed approach in their practice.

Ways Older Adults are Harmed

- ❖ *Elder Abuse – Emotional/Psychological, Financial, Neglect, Physical, Sexual.*
- ❖ *Scams & ID Theft - a dishonest scheme to deceive individuals out of their money and/or to obtain their personal information.*
- ❖ *Other crimes committed by strangers.*

Reducing Barriers

- ❖ Attempt to schedule appointment and meetings earlier in the day (or whenever the older adult is the most comfortable/alert).
- ❖ Ask open-ended questions and allow time for the older adult to answer.
- ❖ Ensure that assistive devices, translators, medications, diet-appropriate foods, and fluids are available and functioning properly.
- ❖ Ensure that older adults are represented on publications, flyers, brochures, etc.
- ❖ Reduce the amount of ambient noise in the room.
- ❖ Assist with finding reliable, affordable transportation whenever possible.
- ❖ Find sturdy chairs with arms for the client.
- ❖ Ensure that tripping hazards are removed or well-marked.
- ❖ Ensure adequate lighting.
- ❖ Ensure privacy whenever possible. Maintain confidentiality.
- ❖ Locate a responsible other (family, faith communities, neighborhood program, social workers, etc.) to assist and provide support (with client consent).

Trauma Informed Care

“Trauma Informed Care is a strengths-based framework that is grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma, that emphasizes physical, psychological, and emotional safety for both providers and survivors, and that creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.” – Hopper, Bassuk, & Olivet (2010).

Abuse is trauma

Older Adults may have experienced layers of trauma throughout their lifespan, the effects of which are cumulative.

Trauma symptoms can mimic dementia

It's worth noting that multiple symptoms that are associated with trauma experienced at any age strongly mimic dementia. It's also important to understand that *most* older adults *do not* have dementia.

Trauma Symptoms that Mimic Dementia

- Withdrawal
- Agitation
- Memory loss
- Difficulty problem solving
- Disorientation to time or space
- Verbal aggression
- Sleep disturbances

Using the Guiding Principles of Trauma-Informed Care with Older Adults

Principle	What	How
Safety	<p>It's important to recognize that a survivor's safety has been compromised, and often by a person that she or he trusts and loves. Safety includes physical and emotional safety, and considers that the system is set up to inadvertently re-traumatize survivors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ <i>Introduce yourself to clients and explain your role.</i> ❖ <i>Attempt to meet clients where they feel the safest.</i> ❖ <i>Allow clients time to tell their stories.</i> ❖ <i>When appropriate, explore clients' triggers and help to mitigate them.</i> ❖ <i>Arrange for physical access to buildings and court appearances when possible.</i> ❖ <i>Reduce exposure to the perpetrator.</i> ❖ <i>Limit the number of times the clients must repeat themselves.</i> ❖ <i>Validate clients' experiences.</i>
Trustworthiness & Transparency	<p>Understand that the survivor's trust in the system, him- or herself, or of loved ones (or a combination of the lot) has been broken. Being trustworthy as an advocate essentially means being consistent; providing competent information and guidance to clients, providing explanations of why or how things work, maintaining appropriate boundaries (important for both the advocate and the survivor), and providing informed consent to clients.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ <i>Respect boundaries – both yours and the clients'.</i> ❖ <i>Be clear and explain what you are doing, when, and why.</i> ❖ <i>Repeat information as needed.</i> ❖ <i>Follow up and follow through.</i> ❖ <i>If you make a mistake, own up to it and make every attempt to alleviate it.</i> ❖ <i>Respect confidentiality.</i> ❖ <i>Know your role.</i>
Peer Support	<p>Is considered a key vehicle for building trust, establishing safety, and empowerment. Peer support is voluntary, non-judgmental, and reciprocal.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ <i>With colleagues: utilize supervision when available.</i> ❖ <i>Provide peer support group information to clients when available.</i> ❖ <i>Consider starting a support group for older adults.</i>
Collaboration & Mutuality	<p>Refers to working with the client and other professionals to ensure consistency and effectiveness. This principle establishes that the survivor is the expert on his or her life, and that healing can occur when there is meaningful sharing of power and decision-making.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ <i>Ask clients about their goals.</i> ❖ <i>Maintain communication with the client.</i> ❖ <i>Allow clients to express opinions and provide input.</i> ❖ <i>Understand that it isn't your role to "fix" clients and their situations; but to be a facilitator throughout their healing process.</i> ❖ <i>When appropriate, challenge colleagues who express ageist or victim-blaming attitudes.</i>
Empowerment, Choice, & Voice	<p>A survivor's choice was stripped away by the perpetrator(s). It is essential to the well-being of the survivor, and to the effectiveness of any interventions, that any decisions that are made are in full compliance with the survivor's wishes whenever possible. This principle also emphasizes recognizing survivor's strengths and resiliency, which helps build a realistic sense of hope for the survivor's future.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ <i>Encourage clients to make as many decisions as possible.</i> ❖ <i>Recognize that some of the decisions and reactions of the survivor are a function of coping.</i> ❖ <i>Work with the client to come up with healthy, productive coping mechanisms.</i> ❖ <i>Again, do not attempt to "fix" the situation for the client; rather, allow the client to come up with practical goals and facilitate accomplishing them.</i> ❖ <i>Use a strengths-based approach.</i>
Cultural, Historical, & Gender Issues	<p>This principle establishes for a more holistic approach to working with a client; incorporating the client's own traditions and cultural connections whenever possible. Historical trauma is acknowledged.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ <i>Ask clients how they'd like to be addressed.</i> ❖ <i>Allow clients the ability to tell you their story; you may be the only person who is willing to listen.</i> ❖ <i>Understand that older adults have experienced numerous traumas throughout their lives.</i> ❖ <i>Acknowledge that systems are in place that perpetuate -isms.</i> ❖ <i>Ask clients what is important to them when creating safety plans and interventions.</i>