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Trauma-Informed Care for Housing Work **Part 2 – Application**

Training Video Transcript

Slide 2:

Hello, everyone. This is Part 2 of Trauma-Informed Care for Housing Work. My name is Kristina Sanchez, and I'm the Case Manager Project Coordinator with the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles.

Slide 3:

Today's learning objectives are, by the end of this training, you will be able to identify 6 trauma-informed guiding principles to empower clients, collaborate with them, and establish healthy boundaries and provide guiding principles for housing work.

Slide 4:

As part of the agenda, we will talk about the guiding principles, how we can apply these principles to our everyday work and take a look at how these principles might look like in action.

Slide 5:

So jumping right in to providing some information about the guiding principles.

Slide 6:

So the next couple of slides are going to be the 6 guiding principles of trauma-informed care. We start off with Safety. We always want to make sure that our clients feel safe, not only in the environment we are providing but also emotionally safe. Are we providing a safe space that they can speak freely in? And are we providing the platform for the client openly and comfortably communicate with us?

Next, we have choice and control. We do not want to take power away from our clients, we want to make sure that they have an active role, and we allow them to make choices for themselves. We do not want to make them for them.

Collaboration and mutuality: We want to take the time to listen to our clients and provide the space for them to share with us. We respect their concerns and know that even though we might not see something as a barrier that doesn't mean it is not a barrier to our clients.

Slide 7:

Trustworthiness: We want to be completely honest and transparent with our clients by providing a clear view of what our scope of services are and what their role is going to be through the process.

Empowerment: In the previous training we talked about clients going into survivor mode when they're feeling stressed, and the eviction process can be stressful. We need to empower and encourage our clients to help motivate them to get through the next steps. We can do this by building upon their strengths and help build upon their problem-solving skills.

Humility and responsiveness: We need to recognize and address our own biases and stereotypes and also recognize that the individual may have experienced historical trauma.

Slide 8:

So how do we exactly apply these six principles?

Slide 9:

First, we want to start by creating a safe place for our clients. If we are meeting with them in person, we want to create a safe place to meet, that is free of distractions. An example is if you are meeting in court, I am sure that one can consider this a safe environment, but is it a place where you can have an important conversation? It can be busy and loud, which can increase your client's stress levels. Also, this might not be ideal if you have to ask personal questions. A client may not feel comfortable with answering it in fear someone can overhear the conversation. This extends to phone conversations. When you speaking with the client, are they in a place where they can give you their full attention? Or are their children in the background or maybe they are at the grocery store? It is the same concept. Are the distractions keeping the client from being present, and are they going to feel comfortable with answering hard questions while in line to pay for groceries?

Additionally, that first meeting is an opportunity for you to start to build trust. Be transparent about your role and services. Do not let the client assume you are going to provide something that is out of your scope of services. If you are only providing counsel and advice, make sure that is clear. And this is also a good time to let the client know you would expect them to take an active role in the legal process. You will be asking them to provide documents, there are going to be tight deadlines, they need to be available by phone and text, and to check their emails.

Choice and control: You want to make sure that the client has a space to tell their story because they are their own experts of their life. Practice active listening, identify issues and barriers together, and provide support. Remember that a client might report a barrier that you might see as trivial, but it's very real to our clients and ensure that you're validating their feelings. Our clients are stressed, and their survival mode is kicking in. Whether it's fight, flight or freeze, we want to make sure that we are providing support to help them get through the next steps. If you see that they are upset, we can acknowledge that by letting them know: "I can see that this a frustrating experience for you." Or you can say, "I can see how your landlord making that comment would have upset you." This is a good way to validate our client feelings so that we can move on to the next step of the process.

Slide 10:

Besides providing choice and control with our clients, we also want to make sure that we're creating a collaborative environment. Let them know that you will be exploring options together. We want to make sure that our clients understand that they have an active role in the case and invite them to ask questions and express concerns. Be prepared to help the client narrow down options, react to their responses, and answer any questions. Your goal is to provide information so they can make an educated choice.

Additionally, clients may choose an option that we would not have wanted them to choose. Whether it's a pay and stay or possible settlement to move out, we have to understand it's a choice that they made for themselves.

Empowerment: We want to empower and support our clients through every step. When the client is in survival mode, they may not want to move on to the next steps or make any decisions. This is where we can empower and support our clients to keep going. We can give them reminders that we are here to help. If it's a long list of items that they need to complete, consider breaking it up so that they are not overwhelmed. My magic number to provide to clients is three. I try not to give a client more than three things to

do at a time. I might say, “We have several things we need to take care of before our next hearing. Let’s focus on x, y and z right now. Once this is completed, we can move on to the next steps.” Also, provide check-ins—let the client know that you’re there with them in providing that additional support. So you might say, “I’ll check in with you on Thursday at 2 p.m. to see how everything is going.”

We are invested in our client’s case, and we want them to succeed. But it’s also important for us to maintain our boundaries to prevent burnout. And that is something that we’re going to discuss in the next couple slides.

Slide 11:

We should acknowledge and address our own biases and stereotypes by being mindful of the similarities and differences between people from different cultures. Cultural humility means that we should not see ourselves as experts in others' cultures but rather we are learners. Cultural responsiveness includes being aware of all cultural factors and responding to them appropriately. Additionally, we should recognize that certain populations have experienced historical trauma and systematic racism.

Slide 12:

Now boundaries gets its own slide because I think it's very important that we not only protect our clients but we also protect ourselves. We don't have all the answers, and that's okay. There will be situations outside of our scope of service, and it's fine to refer a client to another organization or resource if we can't meet their needs.

It's also okay to set time limits on meetings. All your clients deserve your time and attention and we simply cannot focus on one. When you call a client, you can let them know how unfortunately you have something right after this and you can only speak to them for 45 minutes. Or you can set up

appointments to speak with your clients to avoid the multiple calls or emails.

The client has a right to be heard and feel safe and so do you. If a client starts to use threatening language, yelling, or not creating a productive environment, it's okay to end the conversation and revisit it at another time. As soon as there is inappropriate behavior and you start to feel uncomfortable, address it as soon as it happens. You can say something along the lines of “I know this situation is making you very upset but if you continue to raise your voice, we will have to end this conversation because it is no longer productive.” This statement addresses what is inappropriate and it provides a client with choices, at no point in time are we taking their power away.

Be very clear on what your office hours are and when someone is taking over for you. There are exceptions such as when a client works during the day and you can only speak to them in the evening. But make sure the client is aware the exception is being made. If they expect you to always be available at 7 pm and you are not, this can lead to the client becoming angry and frustrated with you. Also, if they suddenly find out you are on vacation and have to speak to someone else, this can catch the client off-guard and cause them to lose trust in you.

Slide 13:

So now, let's take a deeper look on how these principles look like in action. We'll go over a few scenarios and then discuss how to apply the trauma-informed guiding principles to each situation.

Slide 14:

You will be meeting with a client for the first time. The information you have is that the client received an unlawful detainer for causing several disturbances in the courtyard.

Slide 15:

There are a couple of questions you might want to ask yourself to help prepare for the meeting, so I encourage you to pause at this time and answer the following questions before we answer them together.

Slide 16:

First off, how do you start building trust and creating a safe space?

Choosing a safe and quiet meeting space, such as an office, can help minimize distractions. You can also start building trust by explaining your role, scope of services, and setting expectations. You can use non-judgmental language and be mindful of the questions you ask, such as “can you provide me with more information about the incident that the landlord is referencing to?” Instead of “what kind of disturbances does your landlord say you caused?”

Also, provide disclaimers if some questions may be triggering, and phrase your responses with empathy. An example is "I know these set of questions may be difficult but it's very important for me to ask them to get a better understanding of what the situation is." And it's perfectly fine to write out your questions before the meeting with the client to ensure that there is clarity.

Slide 17:

A few more questions. Again, feel free to pause to answer them before we move on. But what are some of the tasks that will be assigned to the client? And what can you do to make the meeting safe for you?

Slide 18:

The first question: “What are some of the tasks that will be assigned to the client?” Write out all the tasks you will be asking the client to complete, take a step back, look at the list, and break it up if you feel like it is going to be needed.

And what can you do to make sure the meeting is safe for you? You can make sure the meeting is safe for you by identifying and addressing inappropriate behavior as soon as it happens. It starts with that first meeting, so we want to make sure that we set a tone for all our future meetings and notify the client when we are observing inappropriate behaviors and when the conversation starts to be unproductive. And, again, we want to make sure that we are choosing a safe place to meet with the client, and it's not only for us but also for them. So, again, that might be the office. If we're meeting them at their home, we want to make sure that we are going to be safe in that type of environment.

Slide 19:

In scenario two, here's some background information. You're going to be working with a senior client who has ongoing issues with their landlord. The client has fallen behind on rent, but they can now pay the arrears and continue paying rent moving forward. The unit is rent-controlled, and the landlord could double the rent if they evict the client.

We know the client has been living in the unit for 12 years and has a disability. They do use public transportation and they've also reported a leak and mold in the unit. Although the client has a smartphone, they're not very well-versed on how to use it.

Some of the observed issues that we've already seen are that the client has not provided the photos of the unit, they can become heavily focused on the

price of groceries, the client has refused to give a handyman access to the unit, and the client often misses appointments.

We are going to go ahead and listen to the interaction between the client and an advocate.

Slide 20:

Advocate: Good morning Ms. Olsen, how is your day going?

Client: I mean, it's going. I went to the grocery store and nearly spent all my food stamps on one trip. It's only the 15th. I have a few weeks before I get more money on my card.

Advocate: Yeah, the food price has really gone up, and I can imagine spending so much on one trip must be very frustrating.

Client: I mean, what am I supposed to do for the next two weeks? I can't eat ramen every day, and I have to take the bus all the way to the grocery store and then wheel around my cart. They could at least give me more money for groceries since SSI doesn't give me enough to even take a taxi.

Advocate: I'm sorry your day is not going well. I'm calling to check in with you though, because you missed our last check-in, and I still have not received the photos of the damage in your unit. Additionally, your landlord is requesting access to the unit to repair some of the damages you reported.

Client: Listen. I'm trying to send those photos to you. I tried to email them, but I don't know what I am doing wrong. And I don't want that man in the unit. He comes into my unit to spy. He doesn't think I know he wants me out so that he can raise the rent to the next person. I've been here long enough to see his tricks. Who knows, he might have his way with the way food is going up; soon enough, I will have to start using my rent to make ends meet.

Advocate: I understand the price of food and making ends meet can be stressful on top of your eviction case. I think there are a few Meals

on Wheels programs in your area; I can research that for you this week and help you enroll in them if you'd like.

Client: Sure, that would help out. But I am not letting the landlord in my home.

Advocate: I understand that you don't want your landlord in the unit, and I also understood that you do not want to move. I am working towards a pay and stay agreement, but I also want to ensure your housing is habitable for you to live in. If we are successful with a pay and stay agreement, your landlord will need access in order to arrange for repairs. Also, there is ...

Client: (interrupts) Listen. No, no, no, no. Listen, he does not have to come into the unit to see it, he can send a repair man, okay?

Advocate: Ok, if you will allow a repair person to enter, we have some options. But let's focus on getting photos of your unit because we have an upcoming hearing. We want to document the damages in the unit. Is there anyone who can help you take those photos?

Client: I mean, my neighbor can probably do it for me, but I'm not sure when they will have time.

Advocate: Okay, well, it's nice to hear you have someone nearby to help you. It sounds like we now have two choices: You can ask your neighbor if they can help you with the photos, or I can come to you and take the photos. Do you have a preference?

Client: Yeah, let me ask my neighbor first.

Advocate: Okay, that sounds good. Would it be reasonable to ask you to check in with your neighbor today, and then I can follow up with you tomorrow afternoon?

Client: Sure, that sounds reasonable.

Advocate: Perfect. So today you will ask your neighbor to help you with the photos, and I will follow up with you tomorrow at 4 pm. If

they cannot help you with the photos, we can arrange for a time for me to go to your unit to take the photos.

Advocate: Okay, so I'll call you tomorrow at 4 pm to see what your neighbor said. And I'll also provide you with a few resources for Meal on Wheels programs. If you like the programs, I can help you complete their referral process. And I believe this is a process we can accomplish over the phone.

Client: Yeah, I would definitely need help to apply to the program. Thanks.

Advocate: Ok, great, I'll give you a call tomorrow but if your neighbor can take the photos for you, please have them email to me. I'll still give you a call tomorrow though, to give you the Meal on Wheels referrals and discuss the next steps of your case.

Slide 21:

Let's break down this conversation and look at some of the guiding principles that were demonstrated.

Slide 22:

Safety: The advocate did not push for the client to come into the office, instead the advocate offered to speak to them on the phone and also offered to come to them.

Choice and control: The advocate demonstrated active listening and addressed the client's concern of food insecurities. When it was addressed, they offered solutions. They also acknowledged the client was very untrusting of the landlord, so they offered them more choices on how to deal with that particular situation. At no point was the client's power taken away.

Collaboration: The advocate provided and helped identify an individual that can help the client take photos. Again, they worked together to come to that conclusion and the client was provided with choices so at no point in time was the power taken away. And, also, the client also chose to seek assistance from their neighbor, so that was something the advocate also utilized: building on the client's strengths. They had some community support.

Trustworthiness: The advocate provided reminders that they were working together, and the advocate was working in the client's best interest.

Empowerment: At the end of the conversation, the advocate offered a follow-up call to check in and make sure everything was on track and also provide the client with additional services to address their food insecurities.

Slide 23:

Looking at scenario 3, we are going to be listening to a conversation with an advocate and client. What we know is a client is upset because they were told the opposing counsel had offered a move-out deal that you thought was good. However, the client wants to stay. The only way they would consider moving out is if the landlord offered an unreasonable amount of money for relocation funds. The client is upset, yelling, interrupting you, and using language that makes you uncomfortable.

Slide 24:

Advocate: Good morning, Mrs. Smith. I spoke to your landlord's attorney today and they offered to waive the \$12,500 in rent that you haven't paid, seal your record, and give you 60 days to move out. This is a reasonable offer. I know you were hoping to stay in the unit however, I was unable to negotiate a pay and stay settlement deal for

your eviction because even though you can pay your rent moving forward, you cannot pay the back rent.

Client: Oh, wow. I don't want to move out. Why did you enter this deal? I never agreed to it.

Advocate: To clarify, I have not entered any deal with your landlord and gave no indication that you would be interested in it. However, I am obligated to pass on any offer that the other side makes. Why don't we take a step back and look at all the options that we have right now?

Client: Okay, like what?

Advocate: We still have the option to go to trial; however, if we win, you will still need to pay your rent that you have not paid yet but can stay in the unit.

Client: Well, I can't afford to pay him. I know other people that have been paid to move out, why can't you do that for me?

Advocate: Yes, people have been offered relocation funds to move. However, in your case, since the landlord is offering to waive your balance and give you an additional 60 days without rent, he is unfortunately not open to paying any relocation funds.

Client: No, you're just bad at what you do. You are working for me and should be fighting for me. How am I going to pay for movers and a deposit? You just need to not be stupid and do your job.

Advocate: It's understandable that you are upset with this possible outcome, and I am working with your best interests in mind. We can discuss your options in more detail however, I do need to ask you to refrain from raising your voice and name calling...

Client: (interrupts) Yes, I'm upset because you gave up and my landlord's an idiot if he thinks he can bully me out.

Advocate: So, if you give me a few moments, we can overview

Client: (interrupts) No, you don't know how hard it is and everything I have going on, I can't believe you'd want me to do this.

Advocate: I need to ask you again to please allow me to speak. If you continue raising your voice, I will need to reschedule this call.

Client: Ugh, oh, so now you don't want to speak to me.

Advocate: Yes, I do want to speak with you and discuss all the options that you have.

Client: (interrupts) Ok, then tell the landlord I want \$10,000 to move out.

Advocate: I can relay that request, but I do want to prepare you for him declining it.

Client: I'm not going to agree to anything until I get moving money.

Advocate: Ok, I understand that the unexpected information that I provided you may have been upsetting. I want to reassure you that I won't move forward with any agreement without your consent. To help you make an informed decision, I can email you the details of the offer from the landlord as well as the available options. Please take your time to review each option, and feel free to reach out if you have any questions. I'll plan to follow up with a call on Wednesday. If you still want me to pursue the additional \$10,000, I am ready to do so.

Slide 25:

So, we're going to go ahead and break down this conversation a little bit more. Looking at the boundaries, transparency and trustworthiness, and choice and control.

Slide 26:

Before we get into the guiding principles used in this scenario, I did want to point out that the advocate had to use clear boundaries with the client. The

advocate immediately identified the unacceptable behavior and prevented it from continuing. The advocate provided the client with choices and never took away control. So the unacceptable behavior was identified, and the client was offered choices as to whether they can continue the conversation or they can speak at another time. to give the client a little bit more time to process information that was provided to them.

The advocate also maintained transparency and continued to build trust with the client. Even though there was inappropriate behavior, the client was reminded that nothing would be done without their approval. And all available choices, whether good or bad, were presented to the client, along with realistic expectations of the outcome for each option. Throughout the conversation, the advocate consistently offered choices to the client, never making decisions for them. They also displayed empathy, validated the client's feelings, and understood their frustration, allowing the client to make their own decisions.

Slide 27:

The conclusion of the guiding principles is that we want to make sure that we're looking beyond the client's behavior. We want to take the time to validate our client's feelings and the perspective on the situation. Because, again, they are going to be their own experts on their life.

We want to make sure that we provide them with choices. At no point in time are we going to be taking that control away from the client.

We also want to set boundaries because we want to make sure that our clients feel safe, but that we also feel safe.

And we also want to be transparent. We want to start building that trust with our clients, and we can do that by being very transparent on our scope

of services, how we will be assisting them, and what our expectations of them will be.