



A Toolkit for Navigating Difficult Conversations with Child Clients: Guidance & Examples

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Section I

Introduction

I. Introduction

A. About CILA

The [Children's Immigration Law Academy \(CILA\)](#) is an [expert](#) legal resource center created by the American Bar Association (ABA). CILA's mission is to empower advocates who guide immigrant youth through complex legal procedures, to do so with courage, competency, compassion, and creativity. CILA builds capacity for those working to advance the rights of immigrant youth seeking protection through trainings, technical assistance, resource development, and collaboration.

CILA serves nonprofit, pro bono, and private sector legal advocates who work with children in immigration-related proceedings. CILA began operations in Houston, Texas in late 2015 in response to the thousands of children from Central America who entered the United States at our Southern border. Many children were fleeing prolific violence and abuse in their home countries and seeking humanitarian protections offered under U.S. law. Through our work, we hope to ensure more immigrant youth are represented and to provide the resources and expertise needed to support those who endeavor to represent them. In furtherance of this goal, in 2022, CILA expanded its technical assistance program nationwide, and now offers more training and working groups to a national audience.

Complementary and critical to our capacity-building efforts for legal advocates, CILA's social services program aims to increase capacity for social workers and social services providers serving immigrant youth at legal services organizations nationwide, thereby ensuring stability in the lives of youth so that they may meaningfully participate in their immigration cases.

Should you or someone you know wish to make a donation to further our work, please visit:

https://www.americanbar.org/groups/departments_offices/fund_justice_education/donate/com-imm-cila/.

B. About this Toolkit

Advocates working with immigrant youth in the immigration context often must navigate difficult conversations on topics surrounding the youth's legal case and personal life, and sometimes involving ethical dilemmas. With this toolkit, we hope that you will feel more prepared to address a range of challenging issues that may arise when working with clients, and to do so in a trauma-informed way.

We acknowledge that no situation is the same and that there is no script we can develop that will apply universally. We do hope that this resource will offer you some ideas on strategies for engagement, considerations to keep in mind as you think through tough conversations, and some helpful examples of language to use when communicating with clients.

Members of CILA’s legal and social work teams worked together to create this toolkit with an interdisciplinary approach, and to provide information to all advocates serving unaccompanied children, including attorneys, legal staff, and social services providers. Throughout this toolkit, you will find practical tips. Some of these tips were offered by participants during CILA’s workshop series, “Como Tener Conversaciones Difíciles en Español,” held in January 2023. We thank the participants for their insights.

This toolkit is designed with both new and experienced practitioners in mind since, as we work with new clients, each may bring new experiences or a new situation we have not yet encountered. Of course, practitioners new to working with immigrant youth will likely benefit most from this resource. The CILA team included guiding concepts and principles applicable to advocates navigating difficult conversations with clients. Additionally, the CILA team highlighted several specific issues that frequently arise and included several role plays throughout the toolkit. In the attached Appendix, there are two handouts: one handout includes reminders and tips to support advocates and clients having difficult conversations, and the second provides the role plays in Spanish. While we hope you read the resource in full, the table of contents is there to help you navigate to sections that you need most and that are relevant to your practice. We hope that this resource helps you both prepare in advance, so you have the tools you need to navigate difficult conversations and also serves as a guide to aid you in the moment—when a client is looking to you for support.

We hope that this toolkit and the included tips serve you well in your practice.

Section II

Pre-Engagement with Client

II. Pre-Engagement with Client

A. Considering Your Client and the Context of Difficult Conversations

Before you have a difficult conversation with your client, prepare yourself for the conversation by considering both your client as an individual and the context of the difficult conversation. Remember that each client is different. Children and youth have diverse backgrounds and diverse experiences, including sometimes traumatic experiences. There are many potential impacts of trauma, which vary per individual, including: loss of self-worth, sense of self, loss of safety, loss of trust, shame, loss of intimacy, loss of physical connection to the body, re-enactment, and/or disassociation. Recognizing and understanding the influence these impacts can have on a client's development is key to understanding their behavior and thought process. Think about how your own background and experiences have shaped you and how they play a role in how you approach certain situations and topics.

B. Preparing the Environment

Having a good meeting or engaging with the client begins before the client arrives at the appointment. It begins with the preparation that goes into the meeting and understanding the client's story and their history as well. If you do not have all that information yet, then begin by making sure the space where you will be meeting has been assessed with thoughtfulness and is ready for wherever the client's story or situation might lead you.

We will not always be able to choose the environment where we meet our clients, but we can pay close attention to how it affects our client and be ready to provide acknowledgement and supportive dialogue. If you do not have as much control over the space where you will be meeting, maybe you can be intentional about the environment in other ways, such as rearranging chairs, turning on/off lights, opening/closing windows, bringing tissues, offering water, and showing where the bathroom and/or water fountain is located, for example.

One of the goals of trauma-informed advocacy is to create environments that promote a sense of calm, safety, dignity, empowerment, and well-being for all. So, when we think about pre-engagement, we think about the space where you will meet the client. Look around and see the space through the eyes of your client.

Providing trauma-informed advocacy involves paying close attention to the space, layout, and type of furniture present: what art, painting, or décor you have; what the lighting is in your space; and including biophilic (*connectedness to nature*) design. This last aspect of creating a trauma-informed environment—surrounding the use of biophilic design—has been proven to be particularly effective. Below are a few tips to keep in mind as you consider your meeting space:



- Create an environment that does not overwhelm but instead inspires trust and support. Prior to meeting with the youth or family, look around your office and ensure you have adequate meeting space considering how many individuals are coming to the meeting. Do you have seating available or is everyone able to sit comfortably?
- If you know your client has mobility limitations, a visual impairment or other physical limitations, or if they use an assistive device such as a cane, walker, or wheelchair, ensure that there is a clear and open path to the seating arrangement.
- Consider whether the space is well lit and welcoming, and ensure you have small niceties, like tissue or waste bins. Perhaps, consider offering refreshments, like water, and packaged snacks to the client.
- Consider having plants in your space, if possible. Plants can be calming and bring a sense of grounding. They can also be a small but effective way to reduce intimidation since we can all identify with nature. In that way, plants are an excellent equalizer.
- In choosing your meeting location, consider your client's comfort level and sense of safety, which includes confidentiality.
- Understand your client's ability to transport themselves to meetings and their willingness to venture to places outside of their comfort zone. Help the client prepare for the meeting if they are unfamiliar with the location or listen for cues about whether the client feels safe or comfortable. This can help you both avoid miscommunication and failed encounters.

C. Interacting within Different Environments

As discussed [above](#), consideration of the environment also entails recognizing and understanding the dynamics of the interaction that you will have with the youth and/or their family members. It is helpful to contemplate the following in advance of your meeting, so that you understand all the nuances of the interaction you are about to have with your client:

Persons present at meeting:

- Are you meeting with an individual alone or with that person and others?
- Are they comfortable meeting with you alone if that is your preference?
- Does the child have any history that you should be aware of regarding gender-based violence or trauma? Have you asked if they would be more comfortable meeting with someone of a different gender? Or are they more comfortable meeting with someone present with them?
- Are the person or people who are accompanying the client individuals that they feel safe with or just someone who gave them a ride to the appointment?
- See [below](#) for additional considerations when working with family members.



Office meeting:

- Is the meeting in a neighborhood or area the client is familiar with, and, if not, did you provide information that was clear and detailed for them to arrive safely? Did you provide contact information so that you can be informed if things change and they cannot make it to the meeting?
- What about the environment the client will be traveling through? By relaying information regarding the environment your client will be encountering (for example, busy freeways, bus stations, high rise buildings, escalators, elevators, security guards), especially if there is a history of trauma, you are already helping the client to feel safer and more secure about entering an unknown and scary situation.

Court setting meeting:

- Prior to arriving at a court setting, especially if the client has not encountered that type of setting before, it is important that special time be given to help the client “see” the space before they go there officially. It may help to show the client a picture of a courtroom and to explain who will be present in the courtroom during hearings.
- Provide explicit information about how the court works and what the client can expect, including the possibility of being body searched and scanned upon entering the courthouse, and what effects, if any, that will elicit.
- If you are working with an asylum seeker, CILA's resource, [“Trauma-Informed Representation in Asylum Cases: Asylum Interview & Asylum Merits Hearing Checklists.”](#) provides several helpful tips for preparing your client for both an asylum interview and an immigration court hearing.

Detention space meeting:

- When meeting in a space where the client is detained, it is important to acknowledge that you are in that space. Acknowledge that the client may not feel comfortable. Take steps to ensure the client's privacy and explain to them those steps in order to have a productive meeting in which the client feels comfortable.
- Using calming and intentional dialogue (as described [below](#)) in this environment will help the client not feel so alienated and alone away from all that the client knows and is familiar with. Being present, thoughtful, and kind in acknowledging the situation can go a long way towards helping the client feel comfortable.

Client's home space meeting:

- Although this last environment is rare, it is important to consider a client's home environment as a meeting space. The meeting might take place in person or virtually via a video call to the client at home.
- We might like to believe that a client in their own space/home is the most trauma-informed environment for a meeting, but that is not always the case. Be aware of the client's housing situation and how they feel about their home. You might ask who they live with, how many people live there, and whether the client gets along with family members/housemates, for example.
- Ask the client privately beforehand if anyone else will be in the home, and if they have any privacy or confidentiality concerns. By going over these questions in advance you can more readily problem-solve any challenges if they arise once you get there/begin your video call.
- We never want to make assumptions about how someone feels around others, even if they say they are all right. Make sure to note the body language and the comfort level of your client and build time and space to have a one-to-one conversation with them about how they feel and your observations.

Special Considerations in Working with Family Members

- **Working with Family Members:** Some cases will require that the advocate works not just with the youth but also with their family members who are assisting or working with the practitioner on the youth's case. Keep in mind the duty of confidentiality and privacy owed to clients, even when working with the youth's family members.
- **Unsafe Home:** Not every client will be living in a stable and/or safe situation. Some clients may need assistance with creating a safety plan, and it may be beneficial for the client to be aware of this safety plan if it is created with an adult supporting the youth. The National Domestic Violence Hotline provides an [interactive tool](#) to create a safety plan; 1800 Respect also provides a helpful safety planning [checklist](#).
- **Family's Safety and/or Immigration Status:** Oftentimes, youth may not only worry about their legal case, but they may also worry about their parents' or other family members' immigration status and express that to the advocate. The youth may even ask the advocate to assist their parents or other family members with their immigration case(s).
 - Here are some tips on navigating a situation when a youth is worried about what will happen to their family:
 - Remind the youth that they are your client, not their parents/relatives.



- Sometimes, the youth's pending form of legal relief may or may not allow for the youth to petition for the parents/relatives. Explain petitioning in the context of the youth's legal status and be clear on whether the youth could be able to petition for family members or not. A few examples are below:
 - Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS): SIJS petitioners cannot petition for their parents later in the process.
 - Asylum: Asylees can petition for a parent if they are granted asylum; however, the reality is that we cannot rule out the possibility that the government would look at the youth's A file and the underlying facts to the asylum case if the case is based on child abuse involving that parent.
- Let the youth know that you are not there to judge them or their parents/relatives but that your role is to represent them. Reiterate your role and purpose focused on the youth's case.
- Do what you can to answer your client's questions regarding any potential impacts on family member's cases. Also, keep in mind it is often challenging to know all potential ramifications, explain which areas are "unknowns" or more ambiguous and what you do know about the youth's relief and case.

D. Being Prepared Because Difficult Conversations Come Up

To effectively serve youth, we need to acknowledge and appreciate their cultural and social background and upbringing. Take the time to learn more about cultural competency and humility in general. Read CILA's resource, ["Cultural Competency and Humility When Representing Unaccompanied Children,"](#) to learn more about these issues. More information on this topic is also covered in [Section III](#).

Keep in mind that a client's age and maturity may affect their overall cooperation in working with an advocate as well as their ability to understand their journey to the United States and their current situation in the United States. Consider the context of what the client experienced in their home country, during their journey to the United States, and after arriving to the United States.

What were the client's prior experiences? What was their life like in their home country? What pushed them to leave their country? What was the journey like? Were they ever afraid, and of what? After they arrived in the United States, were they detained in an Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) shelter? Think about how these experiences may affect their willingness to be open with strangers such as advocates. Also consider how



their experiences may affect their life here in the United States, including their overall wellbeing.

Remember that the client is the expert on what has happened in their own lives. Do not make assumptions or guesses to “fill in the gaps” when working on a client’s case. For advocates working with immigrant youth, learn more about trauma-informed lawyering by reading CILA’s resource, [“Tips for Working with Migrant Youth and Trauma-Informed Lawyering.”](#)

Section III



*Cultural
Humility*

III. Cultural Humility

A. About Cultural Humility

It is important to understand the concepts of cultural competency and humility when working with youth. This is an ongoing process of self-reflection and self-awareness of your own cultural identity, biases, and power inequalities between you and your client. Most importantly, it is also about developing the desire to level out those power imbalances. This involves a conscious effort to learn the cultural identity of those you serve and acknowledge the differences while accepting and respecting individual clients as they are. Cultural humility is observational, not aspirational. It entails being involved in the process and practicing with consciousness. Learn more about cultural humility by reading CILA's resource, ["Cultural Competency and Humility When Representing Unaccompanied Children."](#)

Adopt a client-centered approach where you provide a safe space and time for the client to teach you what is important for them, including their beliefs and values. Start from where the client is and let them dictate the pace. And remember, an environment that intimidates or overwhelms the client is not conducive to trust and support.

For example, there will be children, especially Indigenous children from remote areas, that have never seen a doctor. Instead, they have relied on "curanderos" (healers) for their medical needs, or they have relied heavily on their spirituality and religiosity to tend to their medical and emotional needs. Do not view this as a limitation. View this as a strength and as an opportunity to expand or enhance their support system.

B. Role Play: Diego is Anxious, Could Benefit from New Strategies

In this role play Diego, a 15-year-old youth from Guatemala, is meeting with his advocate. He has been feeling anxious. The advocate is attempting to engage Diego in working through his anxiety with grounding techniques. The advocate encourages Diego to consider new strategies in addition to those that he already relies on.

Advocate: How have you felt lately about the anxiety you mentioned to me last week?

Diego: About the same.

Advocate: From one to ten, ten being the highest level of anxiety, last week you told me that you felt like you were at six. This week what level would you give yourself?

Diego: I feel the same, six.

Advocate: Were you able to implement the breathing and meditation techniques we practiced last week?



Diego: Not really.

Advocate: I am sorry to hear that. Is there any reason you could not practice them?

Diego: I'm not used to meditating and I feel like I look strange. Instead, I started praying the rosary.

Advocate: I understand, and you're right, it may feel strange at first. It's like anything we do for the first time. But with time and practice, you'll feel less weird, and I think it will help you regulate anxiety. Do you think praying helps you reduce your anxiety?

Diego: I'm not sure, because I still feel the same! I don't know what to think.

Advocate: I know that praying for yourself is especially important, and I think it's something you shouldn't stop doing, even if it doesn't seem like it's helping you with anxiety. Maybe it's helping you in other ways, what do you think?

Diego: I think praying gives me peace and hope.

Advocate: That's wonderful, that is a beginning! Peace and hope are key ingredients to combat anxiety. Perhaps what is happening is that one or more ingredients need to be added for it to take effect. What do you think?

Diego: Like what?

Advocate: Have you noticed that when you are relaxed, your breathing is deep and relaxed? You are not thinking about it. But when you're anxious, your breathing becomes shorter and faster. And when your heart beats faster, your face flushes, and your muscles become tense.

Diego: Yes, something like that.

Advocate: Deep breathing can be amazingly effective in lessening the effects of stress and anxiety. How about adding deep breathing in conjunction with praying, to begin with? Then next week we will see how you feel, we can reevaluate and add some other techniques if necessary. What do you think? Are you willing to try it?

Diego: Ok, yes, I'm going to try.

Advocate: You can start with once a day during the time of prayer, but the ideal is to do it whenever you feel anxious. It doesn't have to be something that takes a long time, just enough to make you feel better. I would like to practice deep breathing with you before we end our visit, so that you feel more at ease when you try it in private. Does that sound ok to you?



Diego: Yes.

This role play is also available in [Spanish](#) in the Appendices.

Section IV



Client Communication

IV. Client Communication

A. Expression in a Non-Threatening Way

You may feel that who you are is synonymous with kindness, or you may be less confident about the energy you exude. Even if we feel like we are safe people, we never know what another person's history is, nor what they find threatening or not. To avoid misunderstandings and convey our intention to the client, we want to communicate in a non-threatening and authentic way.

In your initial conversations with youth, try and establish rapport with them. This means helping them know that you are a safe person. Stay aware of your body language and tone and consider mirroring the body positioning of the client. If they sit, you should sit too. If they are hunched forward, you should also lean forward in your chair. This also helps equalize the dynamics of power between you as advocate and the youth. As you converse with the client, give them the opportunity to express their thoughts without interruption. Even if you have a lot to say, when you choose to say it is just as important as how you choose to say it.

CILA's resource, ["Tips for Working with Migrant Youth and Trauma-Informed Lawyering,"](#) provides several ideas to help you build rapport with your client. Additionally, you may want to use the worksheet, ["Being an Immigrant,"](#) provided by Mylemarks' therapy resources, to help you learn more about your client and their experiences.

Intentional dialogue and motivational interviewing are effective ways to mindfully communicate about challenging topics and can also help an advocate build trust with and empower a client. For more information on these conversation techniques, see below in [Sections IV.C.](#) and [D.](#)

B. Role Play: Felipe is Nervous at First Meeting with Advocate

In this role play, the advocate is meeting with Felipe, an 11-year-old youth from Honduras. He had never left his village before journeying to Texas. The advocate is meeting with Felipe for the first time and has observed his body language. Felipe is nervous. The advocate and youth practice saying that they need a break and that they do not understand a question.

Advocate: Hi Felipe, how are you feeling today?

Felipe: *(Felipe looks down and around, but not at the advocate.)* I'm doing good.

Advocate: Do you need anything before we start? I notice that you are looking around and seem uncomfortable. Is there anything I can do for you?

Felipe: I don't need anything. I am a little nervous...

Advocate: I can understand being nervous. It's a big step. There is a lot going on. Is there anything I can do to make this easier?



Felipe: No, I'm doing good. I want to get started.

Advocate: Great. I am glad to hear that, but first, let's make a deal. You will let me know if at any time you feel uncomfortable, and I promise we can take a break. Deal?

Felipe: Ok.

Advocate: Let's try it out. "Can we please stop? I need a break." Now it's your turn to say it...

Felipe: Can we please stop? I need a break.

Advocate: Yes Felipe, you got it! Let's take a break! Great job! How did that feel?

Felipe: (*Felipe smiles.*) Not bad, it was good.

Advocate: How about if you have a question about something that you don't understand? What would you say?

Felipe: I would say, "Can we please stop, I don't understand?"

Advocate: Exactly, you are very quick to learn!

This role play is also available in [Spanish](#) in the Appendices.

C. Intentional Dialogue

Intentional dialogue is a structured way to mindfully communicate about difficult issues. It can be an effective way to build relationships and trust with others. The purpose of intentional dialogue is to create emotional safety, which deepens connection. Intentional dialogue can significantly increase the ability of the listener to listen and the ability of the person sharing to be open. It allows those engaging in dialogue to have non-threatening and non-harming conversations.

Intentional dialogue entails responding by:

- a. **Validating and affirming.** Acknowledge the other person's experience, regardless of your thoughts or even feelings. Sit with their experience.
- b. **Staying strengths-based.** Always stay focused on the positive side of the conversation, on the client's strengths, positive attributes and abilities, and on what is going well. Keep expectations manageable. Do not overwhelm your client.
- c. **Offering silent acknowledgement.** If you see cues that your client is becoming emotional, do not try to fix this immediately. Give the client space to regulate or calm themselves first. Silence is sometimes the most effective tool you can use. Become comfortable with it.

The role plays included in this toolkit utilize one or more of these intentional dialogue methods. See if you can tune into each of them as you review the scripts.

D. Motivational Interviewing

Motivational interviewing is a collaborative, goal-oriented style of communication with special attention to the language of change. It is designed to strengthen personal motivation to reach a specific goal by exploring the person's own reasons for change within an atmosphere of acceptance and compassion. For more in-depth information about motivational interviewing, check out Miller and Rollnick's *Motivational Interviewing: Helping People Change* (3rd Edition), 2013.

As advocates, we encounter situations where a client is engaging in decision-making or behavior that negatively affects their families, their future, their health, and sometimes their immigration case. For example, we can be working with an adolescent whose addiction is threatening their life and immigration relief, and they cannot stop the behavior. As advocates we understand that it is in the client's best interest to stop the negative behavior, and it may be our goal and/or responsibility to help them work towards that goal, in this case toward recovery.

Motivational interviewing is best practiced by having conversations utilizing the client's innate sense of survival, knowledge about themselves, and their own internal motivation, and guiding the client to see alternative and less damaging options. This is referred to as harm-reduction.

Motivational interviewing is not about telling someone what to do. Instead, it is about showing them in the gentlest manner that there is another less destructive path and guiding them to acknowledgement of their own instincts for resolution. Motivational interviewing empowers the client to recognize that they had the solution within them all along, and it is not a miracle intervention. It can be very effective in reducing resistance and de-escalating conflict.

One technique of motivational interviewing is demonstrated by the acronym **OARS**:

O – Open-ended questions. This entails trying to stay away from “yes” and “no” responses to engage the client. For example, consider this open-ended question: “What happened the day you left your father’s house?” Another might be, “What do you want to do next?”

A – Affirming. This is different from praising and entails empowering the client by using language that recognizes how they are feeling. You can acknowledge the client's struggles and hard work. For example, you might say, “I appreciate your



coming in to meet with me today.” You might also say, “I am so sorry that happened to you.”

R – Reflective listening. This entails serving as a sounding board for your client’s perception of what is happening, and can involve repeating or rephrasing, paraphrasing, and/or the reflection of feeling. It can involve the use of standard phrases like “So you feel” or “It sounds like you...” For example, “It sounds like you don’t like the way they treated you.”

S – Summarizing listening. This entails relying on the client’s words to let them know you have been listening carefully, are understanding, and that what they say matters. For example, you might indicate, “You left your house because of the way you were treated.” The client then has an opportunity to hear a summary of their concerns and to correct any errors in understanding.

For more information on O-A-R-S- in motivational interviewing, access these handouts found on online [here](#) and [here](#). Additionally, this [“Pros & Cons”](#) worksheet, provided by Mylemarks’ therapy resources, can help your client navigate decision making, and using a visual or worksheet such as this can help an advocate review the issue with a client.

The techniques described above can help the client feel that you are there with them and that you understand their distress. You are not providing solutions, and you are not evaluating what is being said. Instead, you are demonstrating to the client that what they are saying is important, and you are showing them that you are listening and not distracted.

Although motivational interviewing can be a helpful technique, there are no guarantees that it will lead your client to a choice you think is best. Ultimately, the client must make the choice themselves. The advocate should always, always respect a client’s self-determination.

E. Preventing Re-Traumatization

Remember that a primary goal in trauma-informed advocacy is to prevent re-traumatization of the client. Many clients you serve have experienced something traumatic, whether in their country of origin, during their journey to the United States, or after arriving here. Some have had numerous traumatic experiences. You can best serve your client by focusing on making them feel safe, heard, welcome, and comfortable. Some tips to keep in mind are as follows:

- Establish your role with the client as a person that they can trust. In doing so, you will make your client more comfortable, secure, and trusting as they speak with you. Explain your role, how it relates to the client and to their case, how it relates to the conversation you are having, and the duties you owe the client.



- Make sure your client knows that they can speak freely and to speak up, especially if they are uncomfortable or if they need to take a break and step away from the conversation.
- Remember the different ways you can communicate with your client that you care about them, their case, and their sense of safety and security. Understanding the signals of care will help you facilitate effective, safe communication with your client. Check out the [handout](#) in this resource's Appendices to learn more about communicating signals of care and how to support your client before, during, and after difficult conversations.
- Consider your client's comfort level—emotionally and physically—as you have difficult conversations or broach difficult topics.
 - Ask your client, “Are you comfortable? Is there somewhere else you’d want to sit as we talk? Do you feel comfortable having this conversation here? Do you want to have another person here with you while we talk? Do you feel okay having this conversation with me today?”
 - Pay attention to your client as you speak to one another. How is their body language? Is your client showing signs that they are overwhelmed? How is their breathing, the pace of their speech? Where is their eye contact—directed at you or something else? Do they seem engaged or withdrawn? Did the client's demeanor change? Are they fidgeting or shaking? Were they talkative and then suddenly became quiet? Do they seem “there” or somewhere else? Do they seem fully present or distracted, or fully disengaged? Do they seem sad? Is something that you’re discussing triggering your client? Are they giving you cues that they’re feeling traumatized?
- Help quiet the intrusive thoughts, and bring the client to the present, to where they stand here and now. For additional information on how to do so, see below in [Section V.C.](#)
- You never know when or if something might trigger a client. Try as best as you can to prepare yourself for client reactions and to have a plan. Sometimes, this is something you can anticipate. For a helpful role play that emphasizes the importance of planning ahead, see the role play below in [Section V.D.](#)
- If your client is having a reaction to the conversation, explore how they are reacting.
- If this is not your role or you feel uncomfortable in this role, try to reach out to a colleague, and be sure to get the client's consent to do so.
- Generally, respond with thoughtfulness and care and provide support. Keep in mind your role and specific obligations.
- If you are working with a client who is reluctant to approach a difficult topic or to get additional support, break it down into small steps.



- For example, encourage a client to have a phone call with a mental health expert even if they are hesitant to engage in counseling or to do a psychological evaluation.
 - Another option is to ask them to think of someone that supports them that they can trust, and encourage the youth to speak with that person to help them through this difficult and challenging issue. Also, if that person is someone that has passed away, ask the youth what that person would do or say to the client that would help them feel better. If the client can speak to you as they would speak to that person, it may help the youth break through their fear or hesitation.
- It may help to ask the client if they have coping skills for difficult situations or if they need help exploring or learning about coping skills. Their responses may help guide you in how you can better support them in times of need (or decompensation) when in a meeting, interview, or hearing. Consider asking them one or some of the following questions and/or relaying these messages:
- “How do you handle stressful situations?”
 - “How do you unwind after a difficult conversation?”
 - “How do you process difficult conversations?”
 - “Think about the way you feel during or after a difficult conversation and think about ways that you generally make yourself feel better in moments of stress. Is there a technique or something you can do to calm yourself or make yourself feel better after a difficult conversation?”
 - “Is there something I can do to support you if this happens again? I want to be there for you, and I would like to know what helps you specifically, when you are experiencing... (sadness, anxiety, etc.).”
 - “Thank you for sharing with me.”



Section V

Supporting Clients During Difficult Conversations

V. Supporting Clients During Difficult Conversations

A. Providing Space for Emotions

Our work entails difficult conversations. It also entails working with clients who are sometimes in crisis. Indeed, many times clients will seek out or call upon advocates when they are experiencing a crisis, even if the crisis does not directly relate to their immigration case. Perhaps their housing situation has become unstable, they cannot secure transportation to get to school, and/or they are worried about a sick family member back home. Some will come to you during what is the most difficult point in their lives—a time when they feel challenged in every way.

Clients may share this information with you because you have been a supportive adult in their lives, and they need help solving the crisis or simply processing it. These difficult conversations can bring about heightened emotions. It is important to make space for them, and it may be helpful to do some planning so that you know how to best support your client. In some cases, they may tear up but be able to continue with your meeting. In other cases, your client may experience an overwhelming emotional response and need assistance in de-escalating and refocusing.

Many of these situations must simply be navigated in the moment; however, below you will find some helpful guidance to help you make space for your client's emotions. Included are tips for assisting your client in de-escalation and grounding, some reflection on the toll on you, as advocates, and resources for when you or your client need to reach out for help.

B. Role Play: Felipe is Conflicted About Being in the United States

In this role play, the advocate is meeting with Felipe, an 11-year-old youth from Honduras. Felipe feels conflicted about being in the United States. He was released from a shelter and has been living with his sister, who has two children, and her husband in a rural area in Tennessee. He is feeling lonely and is considering going back home as he is missing the grandparents who raised him. The advocate utilizes reflecting feelings and summarizing in this role play.

Advocate: Great to see you, Felipe. I know you said you wanted to speak with me. And I wanted to make sure you didn't have any questions before we go to court. Is anything on your mind?

Felipe: I am not sure about all this.

Advocate: *(Don't ask "what?," try to tease out the answer in their own words.)* Tell me more about that, Felipe.

Felipe: I don't know. This is hard for me being away from my grandparents. *(Felipe is holding back tears and is trying to stay composed, so let this process continue organically.)* It's just that I am not sure I want to stay here in the U.S. anymore!



Advocate: You are not sure that you want to stay here in the U.S. anymore. *(This is a statement, without any inflection, to reflect what you heard.)*

Felipe: No, there is nothing to do, and my sister is always busy, so she hasn't been able to get me to school, and I don't have anywhere to work around here. And my grandparents need me.

Advocate: Felipe, you have been worried about many things lately. That must be difficult. You have so much on your mind.

Felipe: Yes, and I am so tired. It's too much. I just want to stop it all and just go back home.

Advocate: You are tired, and you just want to go back to your country.

Felipe: I don't know, maybe.

Advocate: I am hearing that you don't know what you want to do right now, is that right?
(Felipe becomes emotional again.)

Advocate: I am sorry you are feeling overwhelmed. These are difficult emotions, and I see that they are affecting you. Felipe, you are not alone, maybe you and I together can sort out your thoughts and feelings to help them make sense? That way you don't feel like it is all resting on your shoulders, strong as they are! Would you like me to help you with anything? Is there anything I can do to help you right now?

Felipe: I don't know.

Advocate: Let's start with one thing...If you had a magic wand right now and you could have one wish, you would wave your magic wand and...?

Felipe: My grandparents would live with me here, and I would not be alone.

Advocate: When was the last time you talked to them Felipe?

Felipe: I can't be calling them all the time, but I did call them last month. I worry about them.

Advocate: It is hard leaving those we love behind. I can tell you feel responsible. Maybe we can find a telephone calling card so you can call them once a week on Saturdays, that way they won't seem so far away.

Felipe: I guess so. I would like that.

Advocate: Ok, let's put that down on a list of wishes! The next thing you mentioned is the time you spend with your sister. She is pretty busy these days, I guess.

Felipe: Yes, she does not have time to run errands with me, especially for school. So, I stopped going. That way she does not have to take me.

Advocate: Have you talked to your sister about how you feel?

Felipe: No, I don't want to worry her, she has a lot going on.

Advocate: Absolutely, we all have a lot of things going on! How about asking yourself in a different way, how has your sister shown you that she cares?

Felipe: In many ways...she sponsored me.

Advocate: Yes! She wanted to help you, and waited for you when you were in the shelter, *(Felipe nods)* and she made an appointment with the attorney.

Felipe: And she went to the school and filled out all those papers and went to all the meetings.

Advocate: Right! So, it seems to me that there is a lot of proof that she cares and supports you very much.

Felipe: *(Felipe looks down and does not say anything.)* Yes, she has been very good to me. Maybe I should tell her.

Advocate: Seeing all the positive support and actions, maybe helps give you a different view. And maybe she can help you see through this, too. She seems pretty good at taking care of you; that you are not alone and that she does care. You are very important to her.

Felipe: I care about her, too.

Advocate: Yes, I can tell! If you like I can be there when you meet with her. Unless you want to talk to her before our next meeting.

Felipe: I will talk to her first. Maybe I will call you if I need help. *(Felipe laughs.)*

Advocate: Yes, of course! Ok, then would you mind if I call you next week to check in, and maybe talk to both of you? Would that work?

Felipe: Yes, I will have talked to her by then. That sounds good.

Advocate: I am so glad Felipe, thank you for speaking to me about what you were feeling. It's important to talk about our emotions even if they are difficult, and not keep them bottled up because that can be so painful, and you don't have to do it all alone.

Felipe: Thank you! Yes, I understand.

Advocate: Do you want to talk about court now?

Felipe: Yes, I am ready.

Advocate: I want you to know that you are very brave Felipe. It's ok to be doubtful, sometimes our thoughts and fears are trying to distract us from the road before us, and we must organize them and tell them to wait until you are ready and feel safe enough to pay attention to them.

Felipe: Yes, there is a lot on my mind.

Advocate: Exactly! There is no rush! We have time. How are you feeling now?

Felipe: Better!

This role play is also available in [Spanish](#) in the Appendices.

C. De-Escalation and Grounding

Youth react to their pain and discomfort in different ways, both physically and emotionally. These reactions can include all types of emotions and feelings, including sadness, irritability, and even anger. As difficult as some of these feelings and emotions might be to navigate, they are a normal reaction to an abnormal situation. It is important to show compassion regardless of how a person's trauma or past experiences, and their mental health, manifests.

When an encounter with a youth becomes highly emotional, you want to make sure that you listen with objectivity and refrain from engaging in aggressive reactions. It is important to recognize that their reaction may not have anything to do with you. Your presence and your voice may not be the only ones a client with trauma is seeing and hearing.

Some considerations for de-escalating a client that is having strong emotional responses is to tell them, "I am so sorry, this happened to you." Although you have done nothing wrong, some clients have never heard an apology, not from their aggressor if that is the case, or from their parent, or from anyone in their life. This apology is symbolic and for some clients it is important for them to hear and can help de-escalate their responses.



By now, many of us have heard the term “grounding.” It is a technique that helps keep us in the present moment and refocus on the here-and-now. Grounding is useful and highly effective in de-escalating and helping bring the client back from the feeling of being overwhelmed by anxiety, distress, fear, or shock. It is also helpful for advocates who are feeling the stress of the encounter. An advocate can help a client by engaging them in simple activities that help bring the client back into the present moment.

Grounding techniques are especially useful when someone feels lost in their head with irrational, negative and persistent thoughts that provoke a feeling of fear, anxiety, paralysis, insecurity with oneself and/or with their surroundings. For people who have experienced trauma, those thoughts can also lead to feelings of re-living the traumatic event as if they were re-experiencing that past event in the present.

The goal of using these techniques is to focus on stopping for a moment and making the person aware of where they are standing and what surrounds them, hence the name grounding. Grounding techniques can be useful for anyone. For example, a client may be able to use grounding techniques on their own, and a provider may do grounding techniques with a client, if necessary. Additionally, providers may wish to teach grounding techniques to the youth, or they can utilize grounding techniques as part of their own self-care.

Three types of grounding techniques are mental, physical, and self-soothing. Mental techniques involve using your eyes to notice your environment and speaking about what you see. “The walls are light green; there are five chairs in this room; there are four plants; there are three lamps here; there are two desks, etc.” Also, notice any shapes, smells, and/or even the temperature in the room.

Physical grounding entails focusing on your senses. For example, ask the client to focus their attention on their breathing and guide them to practice controlled breathing like the 4-5-4 method: breathe in for four seconds and then breathe out for five seconds, and then alternate until the client regains emotional balance. Another idea is to get the client a glass of water and ask them to take a sip and tell them to concentrate on how the container feels in their hands, or how the water feels. Ask about the temperature of the water, is it warm or cold, and ask whether they are thirsty.

Finally, self-soothing is about words of affirmation. You can guide the client to speak words of encouragement and support for themselves. Let the client know that they are safe and have them repeat, “I am safe.” You can also use words of encouragement, like “You are so brave.” “You are doing so well.” This grounding technique is about speaking mantras or words of wisdom to oneself to connect to the moment and how far the client has come. Other self-soothing practices could be to think of what fun activities the client has planned for the following week, like meeting a friend or going to play soccer.

Make sure to be aware of the emotional state of the client, and if they are starting to escalate emotionally. Begin the grounding techniques sooner rather than later. Encourage them to practice these skills daily, even when they do not need them. This practice will not only help prevent or reduce an emotional escalation, but it can also help them feel comfortable with the technique and more willing to use them when needed.

For more tips and guidance on working with trauma, grounding techniques and de-escalation, please refer to the CILA resource, [*Unaccompanied Children Mental Health Behavioral Toolkit*](#), Section 11: Coping Skills and Grounding Activities, pages 48-52. Additionally, for a demonstration of approaching grounding with a client, see the following role play.

D. Role Play: Ana is Upset Discussing Abuse Covered in her Declaration

In this role play Ana, a 13-year-old youth from El Salvador, is meeting with her advocate. During a prior meeting, Ana became upset in speaking about her father's abuse. Her advocate now needs to review Ana's declaration with her and knows that this could be painful. Her advocate has planned ahead with Ana so that there is space for her heightened emotions, and they can work together to bring her comfort.

Advocate: Good morning, Ana. I'm glad to see you again. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk to you.

Ana: Good morning!

Advocate: Ana, do you remember the last time we spoke, you saw me taking notes and I told you that I was going to use those notes to prepare your declaration for the court?

Ana: Yes, I remember that.

Advocate: Well, I was able to write the declaration, and now I would like to share it with you to make sure I wrote correctly what you shared with me. It is important to me that the declaration reflects and respects your memories. We can read it together if you want, since it may include "legal" words that are difficult to understand. Or if you want, you can read it yourself silently. Either way, I can clarify any doubts or questions you have.

Ana: Ok, I'd like to read it myself in silence.

Advocate: Sure! But before that, I'd like to discuss something important with you. Last week when you were telling me your story, it caused you pain, sadness, and agitation. And do you remember we talked about those deep breathing and coping techniques to help ourselves when we have those feelings. Do you remember the one you and I practiced together? Did that exercise help you?



Ana: Yes, I remember, and it helped me a lot.

Advocate: I'm extremely glad to hear that! The reason I wanted to talk about that is because it's quite possible that you may have the same reaction or something similar when you read your story, I would like for us to be prepared for that. What do you think if we plan in case this happens?

Ana: Ok.

Advocate: As we talked about earlier, it's important that you know how to recognize in yourself that something is affecting you. That means that you know or learn to read your feelings, emotions, and the way your body is reacting. You mentioned to me that your heart started beating faster, and you really wanted to cry last time. Those were signs that your body sent you that something was affecting you. It's important that if that happens again you tell yourself (and me) to pause. Do you agree?

Ana: Yes.

Advocate: The next thing is to remember that sometimes our mind can trick us, and it can feel like you're back at that place and time when someone was hurting you. To help break that moment, we need to bring our mind to the same place and time as our body—to this time and place, to the now and to the present—where no one is hurting you and you are safe. Do you remember how we can do this?

Ana: Yes, to tell myself, I'm here and I'm fine. I can say it aloud to remind myself.

Advocate: And if that's not enough, what else can you do?

Ana: I can use my five senses to do it, by saying five things I can see, four things I can touch, three things I can hear, two things I can smell, and one thing I can taste.

Advocate: Perfect, would you like me to help guide the technique with you at that moment or do you prefer to do it alone?

Ana: Yes, I would like you to help me.

Advocate: Ok, now that we have a plan, do you feel ready to read the statement?

Ana: Yes. *(Ana reads the declaration and becomes visually upset. She starts crying, trembling, and rests her head on the table.)*

Advocate: I can see that reading the declaration is bringing up emotions that are difficult for you. Do you want us to take a pause?



Ana: Yes...I think so.

(Allow whatever time Ana needs to feel better. Do not try to rush her or the situation. You can let her know that you are there to listen and to provide support. You can also remind her to take deep breaths and have a sip of water. Once she has visually calmed down, you can ask how you can help her in the current moment.)

Advocate: How can I help you right now? Can I get you anything?

Ana: *(Ana is crying.)* It's just that, I love my dad! He really didn't want to hurt me!

Advocate: Ana, I'm so sorry this happened to you. It sounds like you're having a tough time. It is difficult to feel two things at once. Sometimes this can be confusing! I want you to know that it's possible to feel contradicting emotions for someone, especially when the relationship has been damaged. For example, it is possible to love your father and at the same time you may hate the way he treated you.

Ana: I feel guilty sometimes.

Advocate: Tell me more about that...

Ana: That all of this happened because of me. That it's my fault...! *(Ana is crying.)*

Advocate: I understand. The most important thing is that you know that you are not to blame for how your father behaved. That is something your father is going to have to deal with on his own as an adult. The important thing right now is that you are healthy and that you feel safe. I am here to support you and to listen to you.

Ana: Ok, thank you. I will think about that.

Advocate: How about taking a break to stretch our bodies and take several deep breaths? *(Use a healthy redirecting of attention to bring the conversation back into focus later.)*

Ana: Yes, ok. *(Go through calming exercises. Ana drinks some water, stretches, and does deep breathing, but once she resumes reading the declaration, she breaks down again.)*

Advocate: Ana, I can see that by continuing to read this, it is bringing up a lot of strong emotions. How about activating the plan we discussed?

Ana: Ok.

Advocate: I want you to tell yourself, “Today is May 8, 2023, and I’m in a safe place, I am with safe people, and I am safe.”

Ana: Today is May 8, 2023, and I am meeting in a safe place, I am with safe people, and I am safe.

Advocate: Great, can you repeat it again, please!

Ana: Today is May 8, 2023, and I am meeting in a safe place, I am with safe people, and I am safe.

Advocate: How do you feel now?

Ana: Much better!

Advocate: It seems this has been more emotionally difficult than we anticipated. How about instead of continuing to read the declaration, we stop for now? What’s more important in this moment is that you feel ok.

Ana: Yes, thank you!

Advocate: You told me that your clinician has been helping you a lot. How would you feel about us reaching out to her for some support? She can help you explore ways to cope during emotionally difficult moments and she can also help me learn ways on how I could best support you during those moments. I would only do this if you were ok with it!

Ana: That would be ok!

Advocate: I’m glad you are feeling better and that you are ok with me contacting your clinician. I will call her later today.

This role play is also available in [Spanish](#) in the Appendices

E. Self-Awareness in Responding to Clients Experiencing Emotional Crisis

There is no single fix to help all people who are experiencing heightened emotions and discomfort. The best that you can do is to do your best. There is no magical “right thing to say,” but you can be caring and concerned and let that shine through. As much as you understand this, these conversations can cause a lot of stress for you as the caring advocate. Having self-awareness and practicing self-care will be essential to you.

Many advocates experience uncomfortable emotions or even secondary trauma after having these difficult conversations. Some advocates who have experienced trauma have a strong emotional reaction because they encounter a disclosure during a difficult conversation that closely resembles an experience they relate with or know about. It is

important to find adequate time to explore your reactions after you meet with a youth, especially if they feel overwhelming.

In the moment, something that can assist advocates who begin to experience an emotional reaction during a difficult conversation with a youth is to remember that, although you are being affected emotionally, this moment is not about you. Rather, it is about the youth. Keeping the youth at the center and focusing on their story and their words without internalizing can be key to helping the youth and the advocate through the difficult conversation. For example, recognize and acknowledge what you are feeling, and then ask yourself, “What does the youth need from me right now?” Remind yourself, “This is not about me right now.” Remember that in removing the focus from the youth, the advocate risks not attentively listening to important information that can help the youth. We never want to lose sight of the reason we are there.

Also, consider that if you need to take a break, you can say so. If you begin to experience any difficult or overwhelming emotions during your conversations with the youth—if the youth is okay with this—consider asking a colleague to stand in for you and give yourself a moment to regain balance. If instead you need to wrap up the meeting, that is okay as well. Just have a plan for you (or a colleague) to meet again with the youth so they understand you will follow up.

F. Reaching Out for Help

There may be emergency situations you are not equipped to deal with alone. If you feel that you are not able to de-escalate the client in crisis without additional support, call someone. Remember to ask for help. You are not alone. If the client you are working with has a mental health provider, that would be a good place to start. If they do not, there are organizations who can help you help them through any crisis safely. Here are a few resources you can contact 24 hours a day, 7 days a week:

- [Call 911](#) if the crisis is a life-threatening emergency. Make sure to notify the operator that it is a psychiatric emergency and ask for an officer trained in [crisis intervention](#) or trained to assist people experiencing a psychiatric emergency.
- [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) – You can call or text 988.
- [Crisis Text Line](#) – Text NAMI to 741-741 to connect with a trained crisis counselor to receive crisis support via text message.
- [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) – Call 800-799-SAFE (7233) to speak with trained experts who provide confidential support to anyone experiencing domestic violence or seeking resources and information.
- [National Sexual Assault Hotline](#) – Call 800-656-HOPE (4673) to connect with a trained staff member from a sexual assault service provider in your area that offers

access to a range of free services. Crisis chat support is also available at [Online Hotline](#).

If you are in a detained setting, the child will have an attendant that you can send for help, to contact a case manager, or to contact the child's mental health clinician. Also, many residential shelters have emergency mental health protocols in place for emergencies.

There are also non-emergency situations that your client may seek your help with. You may not have the time or expertise to assist them, but you can help by providing a list of resources.

The Client's Needs Beyond the Immigration Case

Social Services Support: Oftentimes, a client may express to their advocate that they need other support not directly related to their legal case, and maybe that means support with food assistance, healthcare access, and/or a safe space to live or to meet. Keep this in mind and, time-allowing, consider researching local resources for these resources to have on-hand in case clients request help or need ideas. Some organizations have staff members available to assist with this research and provide connections to local resources. Keep this in mind, and ask colleagues whether this is available at your organization. Also, consider reaching out to CILA for [social services technical assistance](#) to receive support.



Section VI

Types of Difficult Conversations with a Client

VI. Types of Difficult Conversations with a Client

A. Common Challenging Issues When Working with Youth Clients

There are many potentially challenging issues that advocates may face when working with immigrant youth clients. In this section, the CILA team has highlighted a few of these issues, providing background information and some pointers to engage in conversations with a client on each of these issues. Later in this section, we provide a chart that covers several additional scenarios and different types of difficult conversations that an advocate may have with a youth, and this chart also provides advocates with general considerations, ethical rules to reference, and resources relating to these additional scenarios.

i. Teen Dating Violence

Many adolescents confuse jealousy for love, and control over their autonomy disguised as affection. Because adolescents are hyper-focused on peer acceptance, they may be less likely to understand the dynamics of abuse that happens in their peer group. They may not understand that teen dating violence can take the form of physical, emotional, and/or sexual abuse.

For some, there are taboos and stigma around intimate partner violence. These beliefs are often rooted in cultural and community norms, the “what happens in the home, stays in the home” philosophy and sometimes even in blaming the victim behavior. Gender stereotypes can contribute to dating violence. Cultural norms surrounding masculinity and gender roles continue to be prevalent in immigrant communities. Also, some families discourage talking about violence and demean or trivialize disclosure of abuse. In addition, adolescents are also less likely to share what is really going on in their relationships, even if they are survivors of teen dating violence due to how they will be perceived by their family or their peers or because the expectation exists that girls “deserved” the negative behavior. This can be rooted in cultural, religious, community, and sometimes family dynamics. Finally, immigrant youth are more isolated and more fearful of repercussions if they were to report the violence due to not understanding their rights, regardless of citizenship.

Many youth may not disclose harm because they are protective of their abusers if they have been groomed by an older partner, especially if the child is under-age. These children often have been prepared to avoid answering any questions related to their older perpetrator. Youth may fear their perpetrator, not understand, believe they do not have other options, be financially dependent, or not have information or access to assistance and support. Many adolescents would rather not share what happened to them for fear of retaliation or being reprimanded or even blamed for the abuse.

In your work, you may encounter both survivors and offenders. Perpetrators of teen dating violence being held accountable for their actions may involve legal consequences,



but also education and counseling to help them understand the impact of their behavior and learn healthier ways to interact in relationships.

Seeking help or resources is often difficult due to a lack of confidence and trust in the systems in the United States. Also, not understanding the language can hinder an adolescent from seeking help. Importantly, immigrant survivors of teen dating violence often do not know the legal significance of helping identify their abusers to law enforcement. They may not know that doing so may benefit their application for humanitarian protection (for example, a U visa or Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) protection). They also may be unaware or, conversely, fearful that reporting the abuse to law enforcement could lead to the deportation of their abuser.

Be attentive to mandatory reporting laws that may apply to you given your license and/or state. Upon learning of abuse, you may be required to report the situation to child welfare authorities.

Survivors of teen dating violence may need assistance in connecting with additional support and resources to help them leave abusive relationships and heal from the trauma. Access information from domestic violence centers in your area that may have helpful information, including resources for younger survivors.

How to Approach the Issue with a Client

- In your conversations with youth, you can talk about how abuse manifests in different ways, and address that some forms of abuse leave no marks on the body, but significantly impact the mind.
- It may be helpful to review with a youth a visual like the power wheel to help them understand the different ways that abuse can look in day-to-day life. The National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence provides this [teen power and control wheel](#) in Spanish, and The Duluth Model provides this [power and control wheel](#) in Spanish as options to consider. These are helpful visuals to use during a conversation on this issue.
- It may also be helpful to make clear that just because certain behaviors may be common in their family, community, or society, that does not mean they have to accept them or that they are lawful. Pay attention to where the youth is emotionally. Ask them about their beliefs and how they perceive relationships in general. If their understanding is limited or the youth has some concerning beliefs, explore safety planning with the youth. Reviewing a safety plan can be helpful; see [Section II.C.](#) above for some resources regarding safety planning.
- In your conversations with youth, it may be helpful to address the stigma head on. You can acknowledge it, for example, by stating that you understand that in some families, difficult things are kept secret but that can be damaging because ignoring a problem does not mean it will go away. Indeed, ignoring problematic situations may lead to mounting frustrations and increased violence.



- You can also encourage trust by indicating that the youth will remain in control of the information even after they share it with you, unless the situation is one that requires mandatory reporting. This means that if they ask you to keep the information confidential, unless that violates your duties, you will respect their wishes.
- Let the youth know that you are there to support them through the difficulty they had in their relationship, no matter what happened, without judgment. Let the youth know that you are on their side and that everything they tell you, even if the youth does not think it is important, might be useful for the advocate to know. Also, try and find something you have in common with the youth, this will help build rapport as you are conversing.
- In your conversations with youth, it can be important to challenge these stereotypes and promote gender equality. You can do this by asking them how they feel about stereotypes and gender roles, for example, that females should be subservient to males, and that abuse is justified if a female does not behave “appropriately.” If the dating violence they experienced took place in their home country, this information may be relevant to the legal theory in an asylum claim (e.g., related to political opinion or imputed political opinion).
- You can speak with a youth about the resources available and provide them with assurance 1) as to resources available, regardless of immigration status, as well as assurance 2) as to resources available to them that they can access without fear that doing so will impact their immigration case. You can also speak with them about language access, including connecting them with resources in their best language, or with staff that speak their best language. You can also inform them about how they might seek out an interpreter or connect them with one.
- In your conversations with youth, providing access to counseling and other support services for substance use, housing support, and support for seeking a protective order and other legal protections under state law can be critical.
- When engaging with youth, you can help address this fear by creating a safe space. Letting them know that abuse is never justified and never their fault can be critical to gaining their trust that confiding in you is okay. They may have been told by parents, other caregivers, or friends not to date the abusive person and feel that abuse is punishment for not having listened to that advice. You can assure them that they are not to blame.
- In your conversations with youth, you can help to ensure that they receive all relevant information and can make the best, most informed decision as to whether to disclose that they have experienced abuse to you and others, including law enforcement, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), the immigration court, a state court, and a psychologist or therapist conducting a psychological evaluation.
- In your work as an advocate, be prepared to have conversations with both survivors of teen dating violence, who may be your clients, and perpetrators,



who may also be your clients. With perpetrators, provide tips for letting them know that their conduct is not okay, could violate criminal laws, and could affect their immigration case, as well as letting them know about resources available to them to help them work on themselves through counseling, substance use treatment, etc.

ii. Unstable Housing and Homelessness

Generally, home and family are culturally and historically important for immigrant families. It is the place where families can spend time together and where parents and their children create a sense of belonging. For many immigrant families, the home is a place of safety and where they can be themselves and feel accepted.

Unaccompanied youth may be displaced from their homes in the United States for reasons ranging from economic reasons, becoming pregnant, their sexual orientation, substance abuse and behavioral challenges, having difficulty adapting to their new environments or to their sponsors, being trafficked, or abused, or many more and often intersecting reasons. Additionally, they might not have other options or understand where to seek help.

Immigrant families face many challenges related to housing, including a lack of affordable housing, hazardous living conditions, overcrowding, and discrimination. Not only are immigrant families targeted due to their race, immigration status, and national origin, but if they do get housing, they are subjected to exorbitant rental fees and demands from property owners, such as having to pay every two weeks instead of every month, for example. Renters who miss payments can be evicted with little or no notice and may have few recourses to challenge the property owners in court. Due to the shortage of housing nationwide, property owners may also discriminate based on family size or maximum occupancy, which would amount to a preference that excludes immigrants with large families.

Sometimes the housing that is available to immigrant families are located far on the outskirts of towns, or in rural areas, and youth who are employed must travel long distances with limited resources and sometimes lack of transportation because they are forced to live in areas that are inconvenient to them to keep their jobs. They struggle unnecessarily to be able to survive.

How to Approach the Issue with a Client

- In your conversations with youth, it is important to explore how they feel at home. Being curious about the youth's home environment and whether they feel safe, and comfortable, can lead to trust and create rapport.



- If the youth is hesitant to speak about their home life, maybe explore this further as it may be an indication that resources or support are needed. Ask the youth if the family is satisfied with their living conditions, how long they have lived there, and what the youth loves most about their home.
- Encourage drawing pictures about what they love most about where they live, and what they would change if they could. These conversations can help draw out difficulties that the child may be having that may be stressful or are hindering their ability to thrive.
- Listen with sensitivity to both verbal and non-verbal cues that might indicate there are challenges in their living conditions. If the child expresses that they are having challenges in the home, it is important not to try and fix the situation but assess to see what the child feels needs to happen. Ask what they need from you, the advocate. If they need resources, try and speak to attainable solutions, and do not overwhelm the youth with solutions they see as unattainable. Sometimes youth only need to be validated in their challenges and need someone to support and listen to them.
- Brainstorm with the youth to see if they feel strongly enough that they want to leave their home. Find ways to support and validate their decision by helping the youth write down a list of pros and cons as well as a needs list to help them transition no matter what their decision ends up being.
- As advocates, we can assess and ask the youth about the conditions of the youth's home and if necessary, contact the client's housing, address needs, and/or support the family by helping them feel empowered to address their concerns. In your conversations with the youth, ask them if they need help connecting to culturally sensitive housing organizations that support renters and families to file complaints or make demands if the property owner is failing to meet the minimum requirements for safe housing.
- Also, ask the youth if they need help with transportation and research connecting them to resources or ride shares if their housing is in a rural area.
- Always approach the conversation with curiosity and openness to face difficult hurdles. This will in turn help empower the youth and their family. Ask if the family is connected to some of the housing resources locally and do research on the area where they live to inform yourself of some of the challenges the youth may be facing as this can also impede the family in participating in the resolution of their case.

iii. Sex and Labor Trafficking

A youth may not realize that they are or have been trafficked. They may not realize that they are in the United States as a result of trafficking, that they experienced trafficking



while travelling to the United States, or that they are involved in an ongoing trafficking situation. A youth may not understand what trafficking is—whether that be labor trafficking or sex trafficking. In many cases, the youth’s family or sponsor may have enabled, encouraged, or facilitated trafficking of the youth.

In many cases, immigrant youth are told that they must “pay back” someone for their journey to the United States and that they must work when they get to the United States to pay off the debt of the journey. A youth may think that is normal, but that may be trafficking. Many children were promised educational opportunities in coming to the United States but are forced to work instead of going to school after they come to the United States.

Trafficking does not always involve the exchange of money. Trafficking also does not always involve employment. Sometimes, a youth is trafficked to the United States and is required to perform acts to pay off a debt. Those acts can include acts of domestic labor, Sometimes, those acts can include sex. This means that practitioners representing or collaborating with migrant youth need to pay attention to the youth’s home or sponsor situation and ask the right questions to understand the nature of the youth’s journey to the United States.

In many cases, when a youth is aware that they are in a trafficking situation or that something is wrong, the trafficker holds the youth’s immigration status against the youth—threatening the youth if they speak up. This often prevents some youth from speaking up about their situation. This could also mean that a youth may not be able to speak up about their situation or feel empowered to do so until they are no longer living with their sponsor or experience a dramatic change in their living circumstances.

There are many reasons why a youth may not disclose that they have been trafficked. For this reason, practitioners may not identify or evaluate that a youth has been trafficked at the youth’s first legal screening. Rescreening the youth for legal relief over time may give the opportunity for the youth to eventually disclose that they have been trafficked.

How to Approach the Issue with a Client

- Pay attention to cues that the youth is working to pay off a debt. Perhaps they are working instead of going to school or owing a sum of money to their sponsor or sending money to someone in their home country on a routine basis.
- Traffickers are not always smugglers or strangers preying on children. In most cases, the trafficker is someone that the youth trusts or someone connected to the youth—a relative, partner, or friend.
- Try to assess the situation and/or relationship between the youth and the individuals they reside with. What is their relationship with the youth? If they are



not family members, how did they meet the youth? How long have they known the youth?

- A red flag should be raised for you internally if the youth tells you that they met their sponsor online soon before coming to the United States. If the youth tells you this, gently learn more about the situation and try to speak to the youth privately, away from the sponsor.
- Another red flag should be raised if the youth tells you that they are in a romantic relationship with someone that they did not meet in person until soon after they came to the United States. Again, if the youth tells you this, try to speak to the youth privately and assess the situation. How did they meet this person? Are they living with them? Did this person pay for their journey to the United States?
- Does the sponsor control the youth or prevent them from meeting with the youth's advocates? Does the sponsor not allow the youth to meet privately with the advocate? Does the sponsor speak on behalf of the youth?
- Pay attention to the youth's body language as you ask them things about their living situation or their journey to the United States. Are they becoming very quiet, looking downward, fidgeting, or shutting down as you ask them about their journey to the United States?
- If the youth is working, inquire about their scheduled work hours, their pay, work conditions, and how their income is being allocated. Are they working long hours? Is their income being given to their sponsor or to another individual?
- Think about the youth's aspirations in coming to the United States and compare that to the reality of their life in the United States and assess the situation. Do they want to go to school but instead work? Did someone tell them that they have to work instead of going to school? How do their goals in leaving their home country compare to their reality in the United States?
- Ask the youth what, if any, are their chores or duties in the house. Does their sponsor make them cook, clean, care for children, or do anything else within the house or for the sponsor to "pay the sponsor back" for housing or for the journey? Is the youth forced to do these things? Does the sponsor threaten the child if they do not do these things? What would happen to the youth if they were to stop performing these acts?
- Assess the youth's living situation with the sponsor. Do they have their own room or their own bed? Do they have to share their room or bed with anyone else, and if so, who and what is their relationship with the youth? Is the youth uncomfortable with their living situation?



For additional helpful information on screening for trafficking and T visas, check out this recorded presentation from CILA's Symposium, ["T Visa Practice Updates & Best Practices for Children and Youth."](#) Lauren Fisher Flores and Alexa Sendukas, May 2023.

iv. Pregnancy and Sexuality

Pregnancy: Youth arriving at the border are given brief assessments prior to being sent to an ORR shelter. Most youth answer truthfully, but sometimes they are unaware that they are pregnant. Once the youth arrive at a shelter, all children are given full medical exams and asked about their sexual history. If a pregnancy test comes back positive, the youth is referred to the clinician for follow-up. At this time, the youth is asked many questions related to their pregnancy. Sometimes they know the father although some are reluctant to explain who the father is, and this becomes a reporting concern since the father may be older and the child or youth may be a survivor of abuse or exploitation. Some children and youth do not know who the father is. Others may be in a relationship or married and refer to their boyfriends or spouses as having traveled with them or separately or are waiting for them in the United States. In some cases, the child or youth is no longer in that relationship.

Youth and children are then asked how they feel about being pregnant and offered either prenatal assistance or alternatives such as family planning or abortion. Guidelines within different shelters vary and responses from staff are subjective. [ORR policy](#) dictates that the child is entitled to be given access to their reproductive choices. If the child or youth does not have a sponsor, requests for housing for the child or youth's particular condition and needs are submitted to ORR via the case management department. There are several shelters nationwide that have programs that aid pregnant youth who do not have sponsors. If they do have sponsors, the youth is given the choice, depending on whether the child is over the age of 14, to disclose to the sponsor or to maintain confidentiality. Pregnant youth with no sponsor may be transferred to independent, religious homes, or nonprofits which have their own policies and guidelines.

Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation: Discussing gender identity and sexual orientation can be key to working with immigrant youth—whether in the detained or the released context. Not only is asking questions about sexual orientation and gender identity often a part of performing an intake, but these aspects of one's life may be motivators for the youth's journey to the United States or the foundation for a youth's eligibility for legal relief.

Detained youth are given an extensive mental health assessment and risk assessment by onsite clinicians at shelters. During the risk assessment, the youth is asked about their gender identity and sexual orientation. [ORR policy](#) dictates that children with differing gender identities be treated equitably and protected from adverse treatment. The child or youth must be given the choices that make them feel safe, so a male who identifies as



female has the choice of being situated in an environment that more closely resembles their preferred gender if that is their choice, although some children or youth prefer to be housed alone for safety. It is the shelter's duty to accommodate the request. In addition, most shelters have a zero bullying policy that ensures the safety of the child or youth.

Asking youth about their gender preference and/or sexual orientation is not always easy, as some children and youth are not out or open about their sexual orientation, are questioning and exploring, are afraid of their feelings and fear a negative response, or they do not initially trust the clinician they are assigned. Sometimes, the child or youth may disclose to their clinician but requests confidentiality, and no one in the shelter knows the child's sexuality even after they are released from the shelter. Other times, shelter staff find that youth are comfortable with identifying their sexuality and often share this themselves with other children.

When youth are released from the shelter, they are often asked about their gender identity and sexual orientation when they meet with a legal service provider or legal representative who is trying to determine eligibility for legal relief. For those conversations, the tips below may prove helpful.

Note: Organizational policies in asking youth about sexual orientation and gender identity may differ among service providers. For example, some released service providers may factor the youth's age into the decision to conduct intakes that include questions about gender identity and sexual orientation, while other organizations may have blanket policies to ask all youth these questions. We encourage you to consult your organization's policy to learn more.

How to Approach the Issues with a Client

- When speaking to a youth about their sexuality, it is important to know if they have been married, or if they have ever been pregnant. Some youth are going to say "No!" Nevertheless, it is still important to ask. Others are hesitant and may not seem sure, so it is important to go tentatively further into that unknown. If this is the situation, consider gently inviting the youth to share by telling the youth what you are seeing, for example, "I see you are hesitating..." This may help them open up and share the story of what happened to them.
- Consider the cultural and social contexts of understanding one's gender identity and/or sexual orientation in the United States and how this may differ from the cultural and social contexts of your client's country or culture of origin. A client from another country or culture may not conceptualize sexuality outside of heteronormative, cisgender, binary standards. They may not understand that they have agency and autonomy over the way they identify, nor may they conceptualize the different types of relationships aside from heterosexual



relationships. Try to keep this in mind as you explain concepts to clients or as you ask clients questions about their sexual orientation and gender identity. Be open and prepared to answer questions from clients about these topics, but also be prepared for potential confusion, reticence, or reluctance to answer questions or discuss these things.

- In your conversations with youth, you can approach discussing their gender identity and sexual orientation just by asking, or saying, “I know that you were asked this in the ORR shelter....” Also, let the child know why you are asking. The less awkward and more direct the question is delivered, the less shame or fear will be present. However, keep in mind that many youth “block out” the time that they spent detained after they have been released, or they may not remember or recall undergoing the shelter intake process.
- A client may feel fearful to discuss their gender identity or sexuality, perhaps due to family, cultural norms, persecution, and/or laws from their country of origin. Create a safe space for your client when approaching this topic, and exercise patience. Research social and cultural norms of the youth’s country or culture of origin to get an idea of the foundation of the youth’s understanding of gender and sexuality. CILA has a resource, *Conditions for LGBTQIA+ Children & Youth in Seven Countries*, that may help you get started in that research, and it is available on CILA’s [Additional Resources webpage](#).
- Some children may not understand what you are asking, so initially asking the question directly is very effective because if the youth understands, they will answer, and if they do not, they will tell you that they do not understand. Then, you can explain the definitions, protections, laws, resources, and other information the youth needs. You might start, “Do you consider yourself to be heterosexual, bisexual, or gay/lesbian?” You can then follow up with an explanation, as needed.
- You still need to consider your client’s age and/or maturity in understanding their gender identity and sexuality. For example, a nine-year-old may not have any idea what you are asking them when/if you ask, “How do you identify?” However, if you explain it in simpler terms, they may very well be able to communicate with you about this. On the other hand, they may still be far from understanding sexual orientation. It will likely greatly differ depending on the child, their experiences, and what they have learned about these issues thus far.
- A child client from another culture or of a certain age may not understand the concepts or even terms surrounding gender identity. Try to explain concepts in the simplest terms possible. For a simple pronoun explanation: “My pronouns are he/him. Some people use she/her or they/them for their pronouns. ‘He’ and ‘she’ are not the only pronouns people use, and you have choice in how you choose to identify.”



- Think of the little ways you can approach or introduce the concept of gender identity with a client. For example, you can explain your pronouns, add them to your email signature line, or introduce your pronouns when you introduce yourself. Here is an example: “My name is _____, and my pronouns are she/her. I identify as a woman. Do you have a preference or a way that you identify? It is okay if you don’t understand what that means. Allow me to explain. I want you to feel safe and welcome here and know that you have a choice in how you want to identify. Oftentimes, an individual’s biological sex (as male or female) is listed on documents (like a birth certificate), but the individual may identify or express their gender differently than what is listed as the sex on the document. If you want me to call you something different, feel free to let me know.” A visual like the [gender unicorn](#), available on Trans Student Educational Resources’ website, may be helpful to use in this conversation.
- A youth may not understand why you are asking questions about their gender identity and sexuality, and this practice may feel intrusive or uncomfortable to the client. Inform them why you are asking about this topic and let them know you are on their side but give them choices as to answering the questions they are asked. If you like, you can preface the question with an explanation of why you are asking, or you can say the following, “I have to ask some personal questions that might make you uncomfortable. Is that all right?” If the youth says “no,” let them know that if they do not want to answer the questions they do not have to, but that it might be important to their case and could help them further.
- Consider, if the client says they do not want to answer, “No worries. I understand this may feel uncomfortable. If you are not comfortable answering, it is okay. You have choices here. However, it may help your case if we could talk about this further.” Also, always explain a question to the youth if they seem hesitant, as it might not be hesitation out of fear, but perhaps related to lack of understanding. The best approach is to be open and honest. If you are uncomfortable, say so, and remember that many people are.
- The point is to never make the youth feel like there is any shame, negativity, or criticism in the question and that it is asked to be helpful and not punitive. It is important to ask further about whether anyone has ever hurt the youth or treated them badly because of their gender identity or sexual orientation and remind them how brave they are. This is motivation for them to feel safe and be able to share.
- It is even a possibility that a client may feel offended or find your question(s) irrelevant to them and wonder why you are asking them about their gender identity or sexual orientation. You can frame the conversation from the beginning and note that asking everyone these questions comes from a place of creating safety and acceptance. Here is a way you can frame that: “I ask because some people may not use ‘he’ or ‘she’ as their pronouns, or they may use a



different pronoun now than they used when they were growing up. I want everyone to feel welcome and accepted here, and I want to honor everyone's identity."

For additional information on approaching this topic in a trauma-informed way, see CILA's resource, ["Tips on Working with Migrant Youth and Trauma-Informed Lawyering."](#) Additionally, view CILA's webinars, ["Being an Ally: Working with and Advocating for LGBTQ+ Unaccompanied Youth"](#) and ["Best Practices for Serving LGBTQIA+ Unaccompanied Youth."](#) For a role play demonstrating one way to approach a conversation with a youth about gender identity and sexual orientation, see below.

Role Play: Diego Discusses Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation with His Advocate

Diego is a 15-year-old youth from Guatemala. He has been in an ORR shelter for a couple of weeks and plans to reunify with his older brother in Houston, Texas. He is meeting with his advocate who is following up on some questions related to the original intake. His advocate needs to ask Diego about his gender identity and sexual orientation.

Advocate: Diego, I know that I have been asking questions that might appear intrusive or too personal and want to make sure you are feeling ok before I move on to more questions. Do you need to stand up and stretch or drink some water?

Diego: No, thank you. I'm ok.

Advocate: These other questions I have are about sexuality. Although they are questions we ask everyone, I know it can be awkward or uncomfortable for some to talk about. I want to make sure you are ok with discussing this with me. What do you think?

Diego: Not sure what you mean!

Advocate: Of course, Diego can you tell me how you would describe your understanding of sexuality?

Diego: I think it's about who I like, or who I have dated before? But why do we have to talk about that?

Advocate: I know this is probably the last thing you want to talk about, especially with an adult you just met. This will help me learn more about you, your case, and know how to better support you.

Diego: What if I do not want to answer some of those very personal questions?

Advocate: Excellent question! Please know that even though I'm asking these questions, you have a choice and the right to choose if you want to answer/talk about this with me. Also, know that it's your choice who you want to share information about your sexuality or anything else. Ok?

Diego: Yes, I understand.

Advocate: Is it ok if I continue asking more questions about your sexuality?

Diego: Yes, it's ok.

Advocate: Thank you. Diego, can you tell me in your own words what sexuality means to you?

Diego: Well, when two people like each other they go out and date, and maybe get married?

Advocate: Well, that's part of it, and it's about a little bit more than just when people like each other.

Diego: So, like is it sex? When you like someone more than just being friends?

Advocate: That's certainly another part of it. Sexuality is also about gender identity and sexual orientation. It's about how you feel, and how you see yourself, and how you relate to others, and who you date and who you marry, if you want to get married. I would like to explain more to you, if that's ok?

Diego: Yes, it's ok.

Advocate: Gender identity is different from sexual orientation. Some people for example see themselves as a boy, some see themselves as a girl, and some people don't see themselves as a boy or a girl. When we are born, and based on our anatomy, we are assigned a gender, male or female. But some people feel like what they were told was their gender, is not what they feel like they are inside. They feel like their gender identity, or who they feel they are, does not match the gender they were assigned. Does that make sense so far?

Diego: Yes. I think so, I have seen boys who dress like girls.

Advocate: Yes, and that is called gender expression! They may identify as boys and wear dresses simply because they like to dress up, or they may do so because they identify differently than their assigned gender at birth. A lot of times, the way people feel on the inside makes them want to express themselves through how they look on the outside, so they use their clothes and maybe make-up, even their walk and their talk. Gender identity is not about just feminine/girl or masculine/boy, it is also about being able to identify as any, or no gender. How you identify is very personal and individual for each person.



I know that's a lot of information, do you want me to explain more on any of this?

Diego: No. I think I understand.

Advocate: Great! Now, sexual orientation on the other hand is more about who you like and who you are attracted to. Many people are attracted to someone of the opposite gender, and some people are attracted to other genders, or the same gender. The names given to that "attraction" are: heterosexual if a person likes someone of a gender different from their own, gay if they like someone of the same gender they are, and bisexual if there is attraction to more than one gender. And there are people who are attracted to all genders.

Diego: Yes, I do know a little about this.

Advocate: Ok. I also want to add that sexual orientation for some people is fluid, that kind of means that who someone may feel attracted to now, may change, or it may stay the same throughout life. I know that's a lot of information, I want to pause here to check-in with you. How are you feeling so far?

Diego: I'm good, thank you, this has helped me understand a little bit better.

Advocate: Great! So, the question I have for you is about your gender identity and sexual orientation. This may help me better understand you, your case, and identify any resources that may be helpful to you. Regardless of what you tell me, I am here to help you. There's no wrong answer. Ok?

Diego: Yes, I understand.

Advocate: Ok! Diego, can you tell me of a time you had a crush or were attracted to someone?

Diego: Before coming here I liked this girl that was in school with me, but we never dated. But I met this guy during my journey that I got really close with, but we did not date. I'm kind of confused now, I do not know if I like girls or guys, but I know that I feel masculine inside. I feel strange talking about it like that. Tell me again why you need to know this to help me?

Advocate: Great question! Let me first start by saying that it's ok if you do not know who you are attracted to—that is an answer, too. Whoever you are attracted to might not be something you will know right away, and it is up to you and only you to keep finding and exploring your sexuality and asking questions. Some people know right away. For others it takes more time. There is no rush. What do you think about that?

Diego: That makes sense, and it makes me feel better.

Advocate: I am so glad. I want to go back to answer your question. The reason I'm asking is because it may also be relevant to your immigration case, for example, if you've suffered in some way because of how you identify or because of your sexual orientation. Also, young people who belong to these sexual minority groups, meaning they identify as lesbian/gay/bi-sexual/transgender or other, have certain protections under the law here in the U.S. because they sometimes experience challenges, mistreatment, and discrimination from others who respond negatively to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

That is why I asked, I want to be able to provide all the resources and information about any immigration relief, rights, protections, support, and guidance that you might need. Secondly, I could connect you with the right people or groups that will best help you wherever you are going to live if you are interested in that information.

Diego: I understand. Thank you for that!

Advocate: You indicated you are not sure what your sexual orientation is; have you ever explored this with anyone?

Diego: I did talk to my doctor about it a little bit. But I'm not ready to talk more about it yet. I don't know what to think about it.

Advocate: I respect that! Please know that only you can decide when and with whom you would like to share this part of yourself. I understand your reservation. Sometimes people are very quick to judge and label others who they perceive as "different;" however, that's on them and not on you.

Diego: People do judge, and they can be mean.

Advocate: Yes, they can be. The important thing for you to know is that you matter regardless of your sexual orientation or gender identity. Who you are and how you feel, but especially that you feel safe, is most important. Also, you do not have to use any of the terms I mentioned earlier to describe yourself, but if you do - that is your decision to make and not the decision of others. We always want you to feel that you are in a safe space and being treated with respect and dignity.

Has anyone made you feel unsafe/uncomfortable here or anywhere else?

Diego: Not here, everyone here has made me feel welcome and respected!

Advocate: I am so glad to hear that, Diego! So, I heard you say that everything is ok here, but perhaps that wasn't the case somewhere else? Did I understand that correctly?

Diego: No, it wasn't ok in the past. But it was a long time ago.



Advocate: I understand it might be uncomfortable to talk about, but even though it was a long time ago, this might be important to your case Diego. What do you say to us talking briefly about what happened to you?

This role play is also available in [Spanish](#) in the Appendices.

If Diego were to say that he does not feel safe, offer to explore that with him. Ask him about the reason(s) he does not feel safe and what can be done in the shelter to make him feel safe. If he is not in a shelter, ask him if anyone has made him feel unsafe or uncomfortable and consider options to address those reasons with him. If this has been a heavy conversation, maybe end the conversation soon and offer to follow up with him later. Consider concluding the meeting with a debrief/grounding exercise and/or on a lighter topic.

B. Chart: Types of Difficult Conversations with a Client

The chart below shows common issues that often come up when working with immigrant youth, with some pointers to consider or help guide you in these difficult conversations, as well as resources where you can turn to for more information. The chart was created to be a user-friendly tool that you can easily access before and/or during a difficult conversation with a client. To help make it more navigable, the topics covered are included below with a direct link to the location in the chart.

Click on each sub-section here, to take you to the specific issue in the chart:

- i. [Ethical Issues](#)
- ii. [Mental Health](#)
- iii. [Past and Current Abuse and Harm](#)
- iv. [Suicidal Ideation and Harm](#)
- v. [Grief and Loss](#)
- vi. [Inconsistencies and Credibility](#)
- vii. [Timeline and Case Demands](#)
- viii. [No Relief and Removal Orders](#)

There are many ethics rules involved when working with a client in an immigration case. Consult the state bar's ethics rules where you are licensed and practicing. Information in the below chart references the [ABA Model Rules for Professional Conduct](#) (ABA Model Rules), and many state bar ethics rules pull heavily from the ABA Model Rules. We included rules that apply to attorneys in purple text in the below chart to highlight those sections. More information can be found on the ABA's Center for Professional Responsibility's Resources [webpage](#).



Depending on your role and background, the [National Association of Social Workers \(NASW\) Code of Ethics](#) may provide guiding standards and apply to your role as a social worker. This code is available in English and Spanish and can be a helpful resource, even if it does not directly apply to you and is not binding. The code is divided up by responsibilities to clients, colleagues, the social work profession, and broader society. It also includes responsibilities in practice settings and as professionals generally.

Many staff at legal service providers work on an interdisciplinary team. It is important to be aware of the ethical guidance that applies to your role and the roles of others on your team. Beyond the rules related to law and social work licensing, discussed above, there are also state reporting requirements that you should be aware of. These will vary per state.

Sometimes, having a difficult conversation with a client after an issue arises (such as one of the challenges shown in the chart below) is an isolated conversation—only needing to be addressed in one meeting or just one time. However, these conversations often highlight or bring other challenges to the surface, requiring follow-up or lead to avenues for other difficult conversations. It is important to support your client before, during, and after difficult conversations to facilitate and maintain a trusting, cooperative professional relationship between you and your client.

Think about it this way: if you do not make your client feel supported before, during, or after a difficult conversation or during a difficult situation, the client may not be willing to meet, speak with, or trust you afterwards—which may have negative ramifications for the client's case. The client may be reluctant to turn to you in times of crisis, and they may shut down and lose interest and motivation to continue working with you in their legal case. While challenging, these conversations oftentimes open the door to building further trust with a client and an opportunity to demonstrate what you have said to them before—that you are there to help.

TYPES OF DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS WITH A CLIENT

ETHICAL ISSUES

ETHICAL ISSUES: POINTERS TO HELP GUIDE YOU IN CONVERSATION

- Some ethical rules frequently arise including the following ABA Model Rules: [Rule 1.2](#), [Rule 1.4 Communications](#), [Rule 1.6 Confidentiality of Information](#), [Rules 1.7 and 1.8 regarding conflicts of interest related to current clients](#), and [Rule 1.14 Client with Diminished Capacity as examples](#).
- When faced with an ethical dilemma, remember you are not alone. If possible, it is often important to consult with a supervisor or someone else at your organization in



a similar role to confer on the issue. Also, most state bars have an ethics hotline or something similar where you can seek support and advice from your state bar on the ethics issue you are facing. Keep in mind that [Rule 1.6 \(b\)\(4\)](#) states, “A lawyer may reveal information relating to the representation of a client to the extent the lawyer reasonably believes necessary: (4) to secure legal advice about the lawyer’s compliance with these Rules.”

- Lawyers can consult with others in the firm/organization in the course of practice. See [Rule 1.6 Comment 5](#). Therefore, keep in mind it might be important to seek advice from others in your organization when dealing with complicated legal and client issues.
- Remember that the child is your client, not the child’s parent, sponsor, or another supportive adult. The child’s decisions should direct the representation. Also, the attorney is there to follow the child’s wishes and not what the attorney thinks is in the best interest of a child. For example, consult [Rule 1.2\(a\)](#) and [Rule 1.14\(a\)](#) and [Rule 1.14 Comment 1](#).
- Keep in mind any potential conflicts or issues that can arise between attorneys and social workers working together at an organization. Consider the ProBAR resource, [“Blueprint for the Integration of Social Work Within Immigration Legal Services.”](#) that discusses some of these issues.
- It is important to know reporting requirements for your state regarding abuse and neglect, and whether you live in a mandatory reporting state or not, and to whom obligations apply. After gaining understanding of these issues, discuss your role and the requirements early on with your client, so they are fully informed before sharing information with you. Requirements vary by state.
- If there is a situation when you need to involve a third party to obtain or share information, it is essential that you have your client’s permission. Get written consent from your client to release or obtain information and keep the signed document in the client’s file. Depending on the situation, you likely also need to have the other party sign a document regarding maintaining confidentiality regarding your client’s information.

ETHICAL ISSUES: WHERE TO LOOK FOR MORE INFORMATION

- CILA, [Pro Bono Guide: Working with Children and Youth in Immigration Cases](#)
- ABA, [Standards for the Custody, Placement and Care; Legal Representation; and Adjudication of Unaccompanied Alien Children in the United States](#)
- Lowenstein Sandler Memorandum, [“Ethical Obligations in Representing Children Without Capacity in Immigration Proceedings”](#)
- ProBAR, [“Blueprint for the Integration of Social Work Within Immigration Legal Services”](#)



MENTAL HEALTH

MENTAL HEALTH: POINTERS TO HELP GUIDE YOU IN CONVERSATION

- Remember there may be stigma surrounding mental health in many communities and cultures.
- Keep in mind that some clients may already be engaged in mental health therapy. In other situations, you may wish to make that recommendation based on information your client has provided and your observations when speaking with and working with your client.
- Explain the importance of mental health to your client as part of general wellness.
- Try to normalize mental health concerns. For example, you might explain that seeing a counselor in the United States is commonplace and widely accepted. You may also explain that you generally provide this recommendation for all of your clients.
- Before you make a recommendation to a client about their mental health, explain the purpose for the recommendation.
- Remind your client that their mental health is vital to their case.
- Explain the concept of ongoing care. Mental health needs must be prioritized and supported over time. Mental health is not treated in one-time acts.
- Consider incorporating psychology experts into your case strategy and setting up a forensic evaluation to support your client and to support their legal claim. Explain how a forensic evaluation or obtaining mental health records would support their immigration case and why it would be beneficial to meeting their ultimate goals in the case.
- Work with the client and discuss confidentiality and disclosures when working with a psychological expert.
- Give the child agency in deciding whether they want to undergo a psychological evaluation. The decision is entirely up to them, and no one will force them to do anything that they are not comfortable doing.
- Be mindful that only licensed clinicians and doctors should diagnose an individual. Therefore, while it generally will not be your role to diagnose clients, it is helpful to be familiar with different mental health conditions and how they can present, so you have more understanding and so you can more thoughtfully support your client and make referrals as needed. Also, this is especially important to keep in mind because sometimes clients who have experienced past trauma may experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as a result. Additionally, many clients we meet with might be experiencing a stressful situation, and that can cause intense symptoms of stress, sadness, and/or anxiety even if they do not have an underlying condition or diagnosis.
- At times you may meet with a client when they are in a mental health crisis or experiencing severe symptoms. Do your best to remain calm and be supportive. Depending on where you are when this occurs (i.e., a meeting, a hearing, etc.), keep

in mind your client's safety first and your role as an advocate. In most situations, it is likely important to create space for a break. Treat your client with respect and compassion, while maintaining a professional role.

MENTAL HEALTH: WHERE TO LOOK FOR MORE INFORMATION

- CILA, [*Working with Unaccompanied Children: Mental and Behavioral Health Toolkit*](#)

PAST AND CURRENT ABUSE AND HARM

PAST AND CURRENT ABUSE AND HARM: POINTERS TO HELP GUIDE YOU IN CONVERSATION

- Unfortunately, situations of abuse frequently come up in children's immigration cases, so it is important to be prepared for conversations on this topic.
- Try to be a protective factor in the child's life. Offer support, empathy, and compassion.
- Be a good listener and respond calmly. Let the child know that they should not have experienced harm or abuse. No one should have hurt them. Affirm the child and let them know that it was not their fault.
- Whether the client experienced past abuse, or if they are currently not safe and at risk, will influence your conversations and any potential actions.
- It is important to know reporting requirements for your state regarding abuse and neglect, and whether you live in a mandatory reporting state or not, and to whom obligations apply. After gaining understanding of these issues, discuss your role and the requirements early on with your client, so they are fully informed before sharing information with you. Requirements vary per state.
- Consider the cultural and social contexts of abuse and harm in the United States and how this may differ from the cultural and social contexts of your client's country or culture of origin.
- A client may not understand that they experienced abuse or harm. They may not know what those words mean, or they may not label what they experienced as abuse or harm due to their cultural context, familial experiences and portrayal, or for other reasons—even though it is considered as abuse in the United States. Keep in mind that common and/or acceptable discipline practices differ in other countries.
- You may need to discuss these issues because they directly tie to your client's legal case and/or to their well-being. Consider the language or terminology of your client's native language in discussing abuse or examples of abuse.
- Terminology and word choice is important in these conversations. You might want to avoid words such as "harm" or "abuse" and ask questions related to this in other ways that are more age appropriate for a conversation with a child. For example, one or more of the following questions may be appropriate: "What did parent/caretaker do



when you misbehaved? Or when they thought that you misbehaved?” You can also be more specific and say: “Did your parent hit you with their hands? Or another object?” Read more in the Appendices on [“Tips to Put Your Client at Ease.”](#)

- Additionally speak to your client as a “survivor” rather than a “victim” and use language that is empowering, and strengths-based. Read more in [Section IV.C.](#) on “Intentional Dialogue” to learn more about a strengths-based approach.
- The child may fear the effect of disclosure of abuse on their family. Be prepared to respond to the child’s fear(s). Be honest with the child about the potential effects on family, especially with SIJS and asylum cases. Establish your role with the client clearly and remind them of the goals in their case. See the information included in Section II.C. on [“Special Considerations in Working with Family Members.”](#)
- If you have established that the child you are working with experienced abuse, and you must include this information in the immigration application and/or petition, it may help to consider the first, worst, and last incidents of abuse they experienced to learn more about the abuse the child suffered. You can also get an idea for the frequency and severity of the abuse that the child experienced by framing the conversation in this way.
- It should be the goal not to retraumatize the client. See tips included in Section IV.E. on [“Preventing Re-Traumatization.”](#)
- If the child is currently not safe, then it is important to talk with the child about their safety. It may be important to help them create a safety plan and to provide them with local resources to get more immediate assistance. See some resources regarding safety planning in [Section II.C.](#) Your level of involvement may depend on the particular facts involved and the level of risk your client currently faces. Additionally, consider whether you are a mandatory reporter or not depending on your state law. Also consider any other internal organizational rules or policies.
- If the youth you are working with is experiencing abuse within a teen dating relationship, see more information in [Section VI.A.i.](#)
- **Keep in mind [Rule 1.6\(b\)\(1\)](#) of the ABA Model Rules regarding an attorney’s duty of confidentiality: “A lawyer may reveal information relating to the representation of a client to the extent the lawyer reasonably believes necessary: (1) to prevent reasonably certain death or substantial bodily harm.” Additionally, consider [Rule 1.14\(b\)](#) regarding clients with diminished capacity (which can be due to minority/age, mental impairment, or another reason): “When the lawyer reasonably believes that the client has diminished capacity, is at risk of substantial physical, financial or other harm unless action is taken and cannot adequately act in the client’s own interest, the lawyer may take reasonably necessary protective action, including consulting with individuals or entities that have the ability to take action to protect the client...”**

PAST AND CURRENT ABUSE AND HARM: WHERE TO LOOK FOR MORE INFORMATION

- CILA, [Working with Unaccompanied Children: Mental and Behavioral Health Toolkit](#)
- CILA, [Pro Bono Guide: Working with Children and Youth in Immigration Cases](#)



- CILA, [“Tips on Working with Migrant Youth and Trauma-Informed Lawyering”](#)
- CILA webinar, [“Caring for Yourself While Advocating for Your Clients Working with Clients Living with Domestic or Intimate Partner Violence”](#)
- CILA Symposium presentation, [“Vicarious Trauma: Best Practices for Serving and Honoring Sexual Abuse Victims”](#)

SUICIDAL IDEATION AND SELF-HARM

SUICIDAL IDEATION AND SELF-HARM: POINTERS TO HELP GUIDE YOU IN CONVERSATION

- Your organization may have policies in place for these situations. If you can, familiarize yourself with these guidelines in advance, so you are prepared. Planning for situations of emotional distress and the need for crisis management may be beneficial due to the high risk of serving clients who have experienced (past or current) trauma.
- Be fully present and listen to your client as they share their thoughts and experiences with you.
- Think about and delicately assess the immediacy of the harm and level of risk involved while your client is talking with you. For example, a client may call you while they are thinking about committing suicide or engaging in other acts of self-harm, and the risk is very present and/or imminent. In other situations, they may tell you about more general thoughts they are experiencing without an actionable plan. In other situations, a client may tell you about self-harm they have inflicted in the past or about past suicide attempts.
- The immediacy of the harm and risk will likely affect your response.
- You may be in a position where you need to try to calm your client down—to deescalate the situation. Express your concern and that you want to help. Importantly, be there to listen and let them talk. Remind them of their value and importance. Encourage them not to take any actions with permanent impacts; their thoughts do not need to be acted on. Try to normalize what they are going through. If you can, offer to stay on the phone with them. Let them know that they are not alone and that you care about them. (Even if you have another appointment or things to do, this situation and being there for this client most likely are the most important things you can do at this time.)
- Something that can help is to safety plan with the youth. Ask them scaling questions, "on a scale of 1 to 5, with one being not so much to 5 being all the time, how often have you thought of killing yourself?" Do not be afraid to ask direct questions. This is the most effective way to get a correct answer. If the child is alone, you can make a safety pact with the youth, and have them promise you that they will not hurt themselves that day, or until they see someone for help. A youth who is actively



saying they are going to kill themselves should not be taken lightly and you should call 911 or have someone dial 911 and send help.

- Also, please listen for cues that a child who has indicated previous or current depression or despair, is planning to kill themselves. Cues may include: if the youth expresses that they are no longer interested in their case, or begins to gift his belongings to others, or sudden changes in mood, a youth who was very depressed but suddenly is acting extremely happy and euphoric. These are cues that should be followed up on as they could indicate the child is acting relieved after coming to a decision about killing themselves.
- Encourage your client to seek external support from a friend, family member, and/or health provider, such as a counselor. Encourage your client to call 911 in times of emergency, including if they are thinking about committing suicide or inflicting self-harm. Ensure that they are not alone.
- Consider if you need to call 911 due to the situation and/or disclose information to prevent harm. If you are unable to ensure they are safe and you are concerned for their safety, you likely need to call 911.
- Try to get someone to also support you when in the situation and/or afterwards if it is not possible during the incident/conversation.
- **Keep in mind [Rule 1.6\(b\)\(1\)](#) of the ABA Model Rules regarding an attorney's duty of confidentiality: "A lawyer may reveal information relating to the representation of a client to the extent the lawyer reasonably believes necessary: (1) to prevent reasonably certain death or substantial bodily harm." Additionally, consider [Rule 1.14\(b\)](#) regarding clients with diminished capacity (which can be due to minority/age, mental impairment, or another reason): "When the lawyer reasonably believes that the client has diminished capacity, is at risk of substantial physical, financial or other harm unless action is taken and cannot adequately act in the client's own interest, the lawyer may take reasonably necessary protective action, including consulting with individuals or entities that have the ability to take action to protect the client..."**
- If your client is expressing concerning statements like "I'm done with all of this," "I feel worthless or invisible," or "I can't stop the pain," then you may have to assess if these are words of frustration or words expressing suicidal ideation. You may need to ask directly if they are having thoughts of ending their life and if they have a plan. See more in CILA's [Working with Unaccompanied Children: Mental and Behavioral Health Toolkit](#), starting at page 18.
- Ask your client what has helped them when they have experienced difficult situations in the past, by listening to music, grounding exercises, breathing exercise, etc.
- If your client is not comfortable talking with you about these issues, let them know that is okay. Also, see if there is someone that they are comfortable talking to, as it is important to get help and support in times of need.
- Encourage seeking care to meet the current need(s) and ongoing mental health care.
- Since these situations arise, have contacts and resources available to share with your clients. Resources could include suicide awareness hotlines and/or information



regarding local mental health connections. Of course, always remind clients to call 911 in times of emergency so they can get immediate help.

SUICIDAL IDEATION AND SELF-HARM: WHERE TO LOOK FOR MORE INFORMATION

- CILA, [Working with Unaccompanied Children: Mental and Behavioral Health Toolkit](#)
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, [What to do when someone is at risk](#)
- [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) – Call or text 988. Interpretation is available in over 240 languages. Lifeline chat is available. TTY: 711 then 988. See information in [Spanish](#). Clients can use this hotline. Advocates can also call if they need support or help.

GRIEF AND LOSS

GRIEF AND LOSS: POINTERS TO HELP GUIDE YOU IN CONVERSATION

- Grief and loss are not always associated with death. A child moving to a new country and adjusting to a new culture and way of life may grieve their loss of identity, family, language, and culture. Additionally, if a child is dealing with a health condition, they may also grieve the loss of being able to do things they once could do. Most information below relates to death of a close person in their life. Read information in CILA's [Working with Unaccompanied Children: Mental and Behavioral Health Toolkit](#) regarding migratory grief and loss, starting at page 29.
- Provide support for your grieving client by being a listening ear, and offering support and words that you are sorry for what they have experienced. Express empathy. Try to normalize their experience and affirm that grief can be confusing.
- Ask your client what has helped them when they have experienced other difficult situations in the past, by listening to music, grounding exercises, breathing exercises, etc. Try to empower them in this way and to incorporate what has worked for them.
- Keep in mind that, depending on the child's level of grief and the facts involved, their grief may impact your working relationship. This could be due to the impact the loss has had on the child, because the child witnessed the person's death or was around during that time, or for other reasons. This could also affect the working relationship because the person's death directly relates to the child's legal case, and, as a result, it is a topic of conversation in case preparation. The child may be emotional; may have difficulty processing past events; or may have feelings of deep sadness, guilt, or feelings of being stuck in the past with difficulty being present and seeing the future. They may also have fears related to losing others in their life and/or to their own well-being and stability. They may also experience guilt for continuing to live and moving on after a traumatic experience.
- A child survivor who experiences grief of a loved one—who was also a past aggressor/abuser to the child—may have complicated feelings related to their passing.



- Provide resources to the child and referrals for ongoing support and care from a counselor to help them in their grieving process and to be supported over time. Be patient in your work with the child as grief often lives with us and changes over time.
- Remember that grief looks and operates differently in each person. We all grieve in different ways, and there is not a timetable or timeline attached to grief. Additionally, different cultures may have different practices and mindsets associated with grief and loss. Keep these things in mind as you work with a client experiencing grief and loss, and remind yourself to exercise understanding to grieving clients.

GRIEF AND LOSS: WHERE TO LOOK FOR MORE INFORMATION

- The Hackett Center, Trauma & Grief Center, [Virtual Learning Library](#) with various webinars and resources including: [“Five Signs a Grieving Child or Adolescent May Need Extra Help”](#) and [“Guidelines for Parents/Caregivers: Helping Bereaved Youth after the Death of a Loved One”](#)
- Bo’s Place with information for those who are grieving and to support someone who is grieving. Information is available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).
- CILA, [Working with Unaccompanied Children: Mental and Behavioral Health Toolkit](#)

INCONSISTENCIES AND CREDIBILITY

INCONSISTENCIES AND CREDIBILITY: POINTERS TO HELP GUIDE YOU IN CONVERSATION

- Incorporating a grounding or centering exercise is particularly helpful if you know you are going to have a difficult conversation or if there is potential for the conversation to escalate.
- Talk with your client about truthfulness and remind them how this is always important when working together. It is helpful to start out the relationship going over this expectation, so it is known from the outset. This also makes it much easier to address any issues that arise in the future that you need to raise with your client.
- If you are working with a very young client, you may need to check for understanding regarding the truth and a lie.
- Remember that trauma can cause children to forget, omit, or change certain details out of fear, shame, or doubt. Explain your goals and reasons for asking about any inconsistencies. Approach inconsistencies or misunderstandings with the mindset that you need to clarify the issue rather than with judgment or suspicion.
- Be mindful of your tone and demeanor as you ask a client about inconsistencies in their case. Avoid accusing the client of lying or assuming the worst.
- For example, if you are collaborating with a client on a declaration, perhaps wait until after the client has fully shared the information to ask about inconsistencies as



sometimes the issues become clear while they are talking. Other times, there are very simple explanations for the inconsistencies once you ask, so ask for more information in a neutral manner rather than in a way that is judgmental. Keep your tone in mind.

- Explain how inconsistencies play out in immigration court or at USCIS.
- Explain that inconsistencies, even the smallest ones, can have a larger effect on an agency's decision to grant or deny relief.
- Attorneys must keep in mind [Rule 3.3](#) of the ABA Model Rules regarding candor toward the tribunal.

INCONSISTENCIES AND CREDIBILITY: WHERE TO LOOK FOR MORE INFORMATION

- CILA, [Pro Bono Guide: Working with Children and Youth in Immigration Cases](#)

TIMELINE AND CASE DEMANDS

TIMELINE AND CASE DEMANDS: POINTERS TO HELP GUIDE YOU IN CONVERSATION

- Remind your client of their role in case preparation—that the case is their case and that they play a critical role in the case and the outcome of their case. Take a collaborative approach and explain the need for this approach.
- Attorneys should keep in mind [Rule 1.3](#) regarding diligence and [Rule 1.4](#) of the ABA Model Rules about communications.
- Remind your client to prioritize their case and review the client's goals. This can help remind the client that their legal case can help them achieve their goal of remaining in the United States.
- Remind the client of the importance of their participation to their overall success and to the success of their case. The advocate cannot work without the assistance of the client.
- Set expectations with the client at the outset, and regularly remind the client of these expectations.
- If you have a retainer or representation agreement with the client, explain the agreement with the client clearly and ensure their understanding before accepting their signature.
- As you ask for increased participation or for new tasks of the client, explain the purpose.
- While some emergency deadlines cannot be planned or accounted for, try to be realistic with the client and with yourself when setting deadlines in the case. Consider your client's life outside of their case (whether they work, attend school, or care for young children, for example) and how this may impact or affect all case deadlines—considering especially imminent deadlines. When possible, try to give advance notice for meetings or assignments to the client.



- Send reminders to the client of tasks or meetings. Sometimes, a one-time notification or request is not enough, especially if a client is balancing work, school, and household or familial demands outside of their case. Ask the client if they have a preferred method of communication for receiving reminders.
- Remember that “life happens” to us all, even to clients. Harmless error, forgetfulness, and distractions happen and sometimes cannot be avoided or prevented. A one-time instance—or even a few instances—of not meeting a case expectation does not always indicate a pattern of future behavior that the client will neglect their case or their duties in their case.
- If a client continually does not show up to scheduled meetings or deliver requested items or documents—even after reminders—it may be time to address this with the client and check in regarding that issue. Be direct and remind them that you are only trying to help them. You may want to ask questions including: “What is going on? Is something preventing you from working on the case? Does the scheduled time or day not work for meetings? What times or weekdays would be better? Would it help to write a note for your employer or school? Is transportation an issue?” Consider how you can help the client meet or complete these tasks.
- As you work on the case, you may need to document conversations and expectations in writing. For example, after discussing potential evidence needed to support the case and discussing which information you would like your client to gather, you may include the list in writing and include a “deadline” to get you this information. If that “deadline” is not met, you should follow up with the client in person or phone, and if it is still not received, you may want to send another letter indicating that the information you requested was not provided to you, reiterating the need and purpose of the information, stating the potential negative consequences of not receiving this needed information, and requesting the information again. Of course, this approach may not be appropriate for all clients, depending on their age and developmental abilities.
- A similar approach may be used for clients who are non-responsive and difficult to reach. Keep in mind however that there may be many reasons that it is difficult to maintain communication with a client or for a client to follow through. This may include housing instability, an unsafe home environment, lack of resources, mental health concerns, or something else. Do not make assumptions, and try to collaborate with your client. At the same time, it is often necessary to document your attempts to reach a client and/or gather the information you need to carry out your role.
- Sometimes, it is necessary to remind a particularly non-cooperative client of expectations set forth in representation agreements. Remind them of their responsibilities or obligations to their case and to the professional relationship. Remind them that you cannot put forth energy or effort into their case without reciprocal energy or effort from them.



NO RELIEF AND REMOVAL ORDERS

NO RELIEF AND REMOVAL ORDERS: POINTERS TO HELP GUIDE YOU IN CONVERSATION

- Not every youth will qualify for legal relief. This is an unfortunate but common reality. Attorneys and Department of Justice (DOJ) accredited representatives analyzing whether there is legal relief should exercise due diligence in assessing whether a child qualifies for legal relief and “leave no stone unturned” in evaluating the client’s options.
- When a youth does not qualify for legal relief, the attorney or DOJ accredited representative must directly and gently convey this to the youth and then explain what their remaining options are.
- Be honest and straightforward in conveying what “no relief” means in a youth’s case. Do not give the youth false hope, and do not mislead or confuse them.
- Explain why they do not qualify for legal relief, explain what a removal order is, and explain what the consequences are for remaining in the United States with a removal order.
- Explain that you cannot advocate or promote a practice that is not in accordance with the law.
- Ensure that the youth understands what you are telling them if they do not qualify for legal relief. Test their comprehension by asking them to repeat-back concepts.
- Consult your organization’s practice for situations when a youth does not qualify for relief from removal, and know your organization’s practice(s) before meeting with the youth. For example, consider voluntary departure eligibility factors and requirements. You will likely need to explain this information to your client.
- Telling a youth that they do not qualify for legal relief is not an easy thing to convey or for the youth to hear and understand. Give the youth space and understanding as they process what “no relief” means for them and their life. They may experience a range of emotions. Be prepared to answer questions. It may be necessary to follow up afterwards with a meeting to answer additional questions or to review information when they are not as upset.



Section VII



Self-Care

VII. Self-Care

A. Self-Reflection and Self-Care

Recognize that, while having difficult conversations is often necessary, it is not easy. Acknowledge your own strength and responsibility in having to engage in difficult conversations with youth. Take the time to engage in self-reflection after conversations. Process your own discomfort when having these difficult conversations, and maybe even share that with the client so they see your vulnerability with it, too. Think of the different ways you can be open about your vulnerability with the client in navigating difficult conversations. For example, when you meet with the client, consider saying something such as, “I know this is a hard topic to discuss. It is difficult for me, too, and I understand. I do think it is important though, so let’s give it a try together.”

When you engage in self-reflection, think about the conversation with the client itself. Think about the tone of the conversation and if the information was presented thoroughly, accurately, and effectively. Some questions you can ask yourself can include:

- “Did I give examples?”
- “Did I give my client choices throughout the conversation?”
- “Did I check in with the client, ask how they were doing or feeling throughout the conversation?”
- “Did the client understand what I said? Did I make sure that they understood?”
- “Did I make the client feel safe and understood?”

These questions are intended to help you grow from your experience and the conversation. If it did not go well or how you wanted, or if you know you could have done better, do not beat yourself up. Keep a list of lessons learned and integrate them into your practice. We are always evolving, and we each have much to learn. Give yourself grace to grow and space just like you would for a colleague or friend. We can often be our own harshest critic when we do not deserve it. This work is tough, and these conversations are tough. You can only do your best.

Importantly, when you engage in self-reflection, think about the impact of the conversation *on you*. Check in with yourself by asking yourself some of the following questions:

- “How do I feel now that the conversation is over?”
- “How did I feel before and during the conversation?”
- “Which part was the most difficult for me to think or talk about?”
- “How can I support myself or seek support after this conversation?”

If you feel uncomfortable with the topic discussed and find yourself ruminating on it, ask yourself why you feel uncomfortable. Pinpoint your feelings and emotions—name them and ask yourself directly how you feel. Are you frustrated, sad, stressed, overwhelmed, or anxious? As you identify your feelings, do not feel guilty for your feelings or thoughts. Being human and feeling emotions is a part of this valuable work that we engage in, and it is important to understand your feelings and give yourself space, kindness, and understanding to approach and navigate your emotions. Keep in mind how you can support yourself after the conversation. Can you reach out to a colleague or someone you trust for support? Can you burn off some steam or nervous energy by going for a walk, run, or bike ride? Can you relax in another way that works for you?

Self-care may seem like a buzzword or may seem overused or irrelevant in many contexts, but it is a necessity when working as attorneys, legal staff, and social services staff. Incorporating self-care into your practice while working with immigrant youth in immigration proceedings and navigating difficult situations with youth will help you more sustainably do this work.

Self-care is often confused with the concept of “self-soothing.” Self-soothing practices or acts address moments or needs that arise in crisis or distress, while self-care is a longstanding practice to address your physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional needs. For example, deciding to buy yourself that pint of your favorite gourmet ice cream because you had a particularly bad day may feel like self-care, but it is actually a self-soothing decision sparked by a moment of distress. This does not mean that self-soothing practices are bad or ineffective. Self-soothing practices do as they are intended—they soothe you when you are in need. However, a key difference between self-soothing and self-care is that self-care practices meet your needs over time rather than once or spontaneously.

At CILA, we value self-care and encourage advocates to incorporate self-care into their practice and their day-to-day routine. Taking care of yourself and your mental health is not only beneficial to you, but it is beneficial to your clients. An advocate who engages in self-care can more zealously champion on behalf of their clients and value their own needs while preventing feelings of burnout and compassion fatigue.

B. Tips for Practicing Self-Care

Think about acts that you can routinely engage in that would incorporate self-care into your role or work and think of how to plan these acts into your day. Engaging in these self-care acts may not always be possible or necessarily go according to plan, but they may serve as a starting point for routinely engaging in self-care in your work and advocacy. In the same way that you can plan for difficult conversations with a client, you can plan for your own needs as well. Knowing that this work is tough, how can you support yourself? You are valuable. You matter and deserve happiness, time, and a life



separate from work. Give yourself the time and reprieve that you need. For example, consider:

- Engaging in self-reflection after a difficult conversation allows you to process the conversation in the “here and now” and learn from the conversation. Self-reflection helps you learn what your emotional needs are after engaging in a difficult conversation.
- Creating a routine to engage in “winding down” or recentering yourself after having difficult conversations with clients is a form of self-care. This routine should be tailored to your needs, your idea of tranquility, and what helps you center yourself.
 - For example, if you identify through self-reflection that you feel anxious after difficult conversations, consider taking a brisk walk or getting some fresh air before diving back into work after each difficult conversation.
- Being mindful of your schedule. Try to space out those inevitable difficult conversations, and maybe try to avoid scheduling difficult conversations or meetings back-to-back, if it can be helped or accommodated.
- Practicing self-affirmations. Remind yourself that you are doing your best and that you are learning every day with each conversation and experience. Be kind to yourself. Remind yourself of the positives that happened that day—even the littlest of things. Express gratitude for yourself in identifying your needs and taking care of you and your needs.

While we hope that this toolkit assists you in your self-care journey, there are additional resources that can lead you in the right direction with self-care, some of which are noted in [Section VIII](#), below. Additionally, reach out to those who make you feel supported and empowered, and consider the ways these connections can reinforce or supplement your plan for self-care. Lastly, we hope that CILA can be a resource to you in your self-care journey. Reach out to us if you need assistance or support in your work. We are here for you, and we have experienced the challenges of this work and need for self-care, too! You are not alone in the experience.



Section VIII

Additional Resources for Advocates

VIII. Additional Resources

SOME RESOURCES TO PROVIDE CLIENTS AND/OR CAREGIVERS

In addition to researching resources that are available in your local community, here are some helpful resources that may help.

- CILA's [*Pro Bono Guide: Working with Children and Youth in Immigration Cases*](#) (the *Pro Bono Guide*) includes resources that advocates can share with clients. For example, page 25 of the *Pro Bono Guide* includes links to learn more about working with survivors of domestic violence and/or child abuse, including:
 - The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence's (NCADV) [website](#), that provides survivors with numerous resources and various hotlines;
 - The National Domestic Violence Hotline's website on [supporting others](#);
 - [WomensLaw.org](#) (also available in Spanish), where individuals can find resources—such as advocates in domestic violence programs and shelters, legal assistance organizations, courthouse locations for filing a protection order, and sheriff departments across the country; and
 - ASISTA's [Resources for Survivors and Advocates](#), which includes phone numbers and resources in Spanish.
- Your client and/or their sponsor might be struggling due to challenges at home. Consult and share CILA's resource *Navigating Reunification Challenges: A Toolkit for Sponsors of Unaccompanied Children*, available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).
- Your client may benefit from reviewing CILA's resource *A New Path: My Toolkit for Navigating Life in the United States*, available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#). This resource discusses key topics relevant to unaccompanied youth including mental health, immigration proceedings, access to health care and education, and the importance of building a support system.
- Your client may also benefit from other information provided on CILA's youth page, available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#), including informational videos, updates on SIJS, and information relevant navigating the immigration system.

SOME RESOURCES FOR UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA & PROVIDING SUPPORT

- Check out *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, Bessel van der Kolk, 2014.
- Listen to the podcast from The On Being Project, [How Trauma Lodges in the Body](#), Bessel van der Kolk, July 11, 2013.



- CILA's social work program developed a toolkit for advocates, [Working with Unaccompanied Children: Mental and Behavioral Health Toolkit](#), intended to serve as an overview of mental and behavioral health concerns and best practices.

SOME RESOURCES FOR SELF-CARE & UNDERSTANDING VICARIOUS TRAUMA

- Watch the video from the Stanford Series-UTRGV, ["Video 4: Proactive Self-Care for Attorneys"](#) (8 minutes), November 7, 2019.
- Check out CILA's webinar, ["Secondary Traumatic Stress and Self-Care"](#) (1 hour, 2 minutes), March 30, 2022.
- Access this presentation from CILA's 2023 Symposium, ["Vicarious Trauma: Best Practices for Serving and Honoring Sexual Abuse Victims"](#) (56 minutes), May 18, 2023.
- Watch this presentation from CILA's 2023 Symposium, ["Keeping the Work Sustainable: The Inside & Out of Trauma Informed Practice"](#) (1 hour), May 19, 2023.
- Read this article from *The Atlantic*, ["When PTSD is Contagious,"](#) December 14, 2015.
- Check out *Atlas of the Heart: Mapping Meaningful Connection and the Language of Human Experience*, Brené Brown, 2021.
- Learn more with *Transforming the Pain: A Workbook on Vicarious Traumatization*, Karen W. Saakvitne and Laurie Anne Pearlman, 1996.
- Check out the bestseller *Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others*, Laura van Dernoot Lipsky with Connie Burk, May 4, 2009.



Section IX

Conclusion

IX. Conclusion

We hope this toolkit offered you some helpful guidance for navigating difficult conversations. Every child is an individual, as is every advocate, and accordingly, every conversation will be different. Our tips come from experience working with immigrant children and youth and with the knowledge that we are most effective as advocates when we are our authentic selves, when we remember to listen, and when we practice self-care.

In the [Appendices](#), you will find a handout for advocates with tips, considerations, and guidance for supporting clients before, during, and after a difficult conversation. Additionally, you will find the Spanish versions of the role-plays that are incorporated into this toolkit.

We all develop expertise with each new conversation we have, and the CILA team welcomes the opportunity to learn from you. If you have comments regarding this toolkit or would like to add to it by sharing helpful tips, scripts, or resources, we invite you to do so by writing to us at cila@abacila.org. We would love to hear from you!

The CILA team hosts [trainings](#), creates space for practitioners to collaborate and have community in [working groups](#), writes [resources](#), and answers [technical assistance](#) questions. Please reach out to CILA and view our materials available on the CILA [website](#) to learn more and guide you in your practice with immigrant youth. Resources available on CILA's *Additional Resources* [webpage](#) are password protected. If you need the password, please contact CILA at cila@abacila.org.



Section X

Appendices

X. Appendices

Appendix 1

Handout for Advocates: *Reminders, Tips, and Considerations to Support Advocates and Clients Before, During, and After Having Difficult Conversations*



HANDOUT FOR ADVOCATES

Reminders, Tips, and Considerations to Support Advocates and Clients Before, During, and After Having Difficult Conversations

Difficult conversations are inevitable when working with immigrant youth in the context of a legal case. CILA developed this handout to support advocates and provide some quick tips and guidance for navigating these difficult conversations.

TIPS TO STAY ORGANIZED & PREPARED

Advocates have much to keep track of while working with an immigrant youth on their legal case. When navigating a difficult conversation with a client, there are additionally some important considerations to keep in mind to ensure that you are meeting your obligations to the client, properly managing their case, and working within your organization's guidelines. Here is a non-exhaustive list of some tips to help you stay organized and prepared before, during, and after difficult conversations.

- Consider whether your organization has specific guidance or policies on the issue you are discussing with your client. Ask your supervisor or if you are working on the case pro bono, ask your contact for direction, if needed.
 - Does your organization have policies/procedures relating to these types of issues or conversations?
 - Do you need to ask your supervisor for support/guidance before or after a difficult meeting?
 - If this is a pro bono case, and you are working with a pro bono coordinator or a referring nonprofit organization, is this an issue where they may want you to confer with them before proceeding?
- Are you being careful about what types of notes you are taking? Where will those be stored? Who has access to that material? Is it on a secure platform? What information do you need to share with others in your organization or on your legal team? What information is important to document in case others are involved in the case later on?
- As an advocate, in addition to helping support a client when they are in a moment of crisis, there may be additional legal relief that your client may be eligible to seek based on information your client shares.
 - For example, if your client experienced harm in their home country, this may relate to facts that can create the foundation for an asylum case. If



your client experienced domestic violence while in the United States, they may be eligible to pursue a U visa.

- It is sometimes best to schedule a separate meeting to explore the new form of legal relief rather than diving into that conversation immediately because that may be overwhelming. Sometimes, it helps to at least mention that they could be eligible for the form of relief and that you want to discuss this further later. Unfortunately, you never know if you will see a client again, as many factors can occur or prevent a meeting in the future, so it is important to let the client know the potential for an additional form of relief if this seems viable or worth investigating further.
- Take time to prepare yourself for the conversations you are going to have.
 - This depends on the practitioner and individual work styles. It may help to plan out an agenda for the meeting. Write down the key issues you want address, information you want to share, and questions that you want to ask the client.
 - Help yourself by jotting down some talking points to help guide you or keep you on track during the meeting. This is particularly helpful, if it will be a difficult meeting, where perhaps you must tell the client some bad news or provide information that you think may disappoint or upset them, or if you have to address a problem issue with your client. Consult the above resource as a starting point since the resource includes several specific scenarios and pointers to help guide you in different conversations.
 - Try to anticipate what questions may come up from the client and how you would answer these questions.
- It can be easy to be preoccupied or distracted with pending tasks or assignments when you meet with your client. Be sure to actively listen to the client and eliminate distractions. Center yourself for the meeting by zeroing in on your client and their case.
- Stay connected over time with the client through consistent communication and update them about changes in their case and ask if they have any updates for you. This is generally important and necessary in every case.
 - Also keep in mind when working with young clients that their level of understanding and ability to engage in their case may change over time.
 - This is also especially important after a difficult conversation, as regular communication with the client may make the difference in the client feeling more comfortable working with you.
 - Since cases last a long time over many years, plan for how you can stay connected over time.



TIPS TO PUT YOUR CLIENT AT EASE

To have a positive working relationship, it is important to know how to put your client at ease. Due to the nature of immigration cases and the issues that must be discussed, this can sometimes feel like an impossible task. In some working relationships between an advocate and client, this can come somewhat easily or naturally. In those situations where it does not come easily, consult this list of tips to help put your client at ease so you can discuss their case and support them effectively.

- Build rapport with the client. Read CILA's resource, ["Tips for Working with Migrant Youth and Trauma-Informed Lawyering."](#) to learn about questions you can ask your client to build rapport with them.
- If the client is not comfortable speaking with you, ask them if they would like to speak to someone else or if they would prefer for a trusted individual to attend the meeting or conversation with them.
- If you are meeting with the client and can tell—whether from verbal or physical cues—that the client is not comfortable or at ease, ask if another time would be better to have this meeting or conversation. While it may feel like this takes too much time or is inconvenient, it will save time in the long run and allow you to meet your client where they are mentally and emotionally. Providing some flexibility is often appreciated. We all have days when we are better suited to doing a particular task or not feeling up to a certain task. Also, the reality of legal work means that there are often deadlines outside of advocates' control, so schedules cannot always be accommodated, and those reasons should be fully explained.
- When interviewing your client about difficult topics, approach the conversation cautiously and with sensitivity.
- Remember how vulnerable you are asking your client to be. Ensure that you have dedicated time to the conversation or topic before jumping in to get to know your client.
- Remember to stay calm and create a safe environment for the child. Keep your emotions in check. Do not respond in anger, frustration, or irritability.
- Make your role clear: Part of your role is to consider U.S. law and the client's life experiences to consider if they are eligible for potential legal relief and to help them prepare their case.
- Take the time to remind the client of your duty of confidentiality to them.
- Approach situations with the intent to create solutions, not to have an argument.



- Prepare the client for the conversation. Take the time to ground your client and make sure that they are focused before the conversation.
- Terminology matters. A client may shut down, feel defensive, or feel attacked if you use words that feel inflammatory, offensive, or extreme to the client and their cultural background. Choose your words and phrases carefully when approaching sensitive topics and working with clients from other cultures.
- Why does terminology matter?
- Here is some specific terminology to think about:
 - Generally, you may want to avoid the word “abuse” when talking with a client about child abuse or inquiring about child abuse. Instead, consider using:
 - “Did your parent hit you?”
 - “How did parent/caregiver respond when you misbehaved?”
 - “If you misbehaved or did not listen to your parents or caretakers, how did they react? Were you punished? How were you punished?”
 - Generally, depending on the situation, you may want to avoid overtly saying “domestic violence” or “intimate partner violence” if you are talking with a client about domestic violence. Instead, consider:
 - “How is your relationship? How does it make you feel?”
 - “Do you feel safe in your relationship?”
 - “Does your partner make you feel safe and secure?”
 - “If you get in arguments or disagree, how does that go?”
 - “How do you feel when you get in an argument with your partner?”
 - “How does your partner act if you disagree on something or if you do not want to do something?”
 - Additionally, using a power and control wheel can be very useful to help you guide this conversation. Example power and control wheels are included in CILA’s handout accompanying the webinar “Caring for Yourself While Advocating for Your Clients: Working with Clients Living with Domestic or Intimate Partner Violence.” Check out the [handout](#) with resources.
 - Generally, you may want to avoid saying “female genital mutilation (FGM)” and generally the word “mutilation.”
 - Instead, consider using “cutting” and “circumcision” to frame the topic or conversation.
 - Remember that the practice of FGM is a common cultural practice in some cultures and that a client may not understand why you are asking about this practice.



- If you are asking the client about FGM with the assistance of an interpreter, you can ask the interpreter for the correct word to frame it in way that is more understandable or clear for the client.
- When working with interpreters, be careful to provide guidance to the interpreter regarding the use of specific, more sensitive language.
- It might help to include music during or after the meeting to help your client during the stressful conversation. Additionally, you may want to provide fidget toys, stress balls, squishy toys, pop-its, and/or something to color with to help get nervous energy out.
- Acknowledge that these are difficult conversations and issues for everyone and that it is okay if your client experiences frustration.
- Share with the client that it is not an easy conversation for you, too. Be vulnerable in that way.
- Try to keep it conversational, so that it is more engaging and feels less like an interrogation or question after asking the client questions.

TIPS TO COMMUNICATE SIGNALS OF CARE

You can show support to your clients through signals of care, including communicating warmth, empathy, and safety to your clients. Below are some examples to communicate warmth, empathy, and safety. You can consider how you could naturally incorporate these phrases at the beginning, throughout, and after difficult conversations in a way that feels organic and personable to you.

- Communicating warmth shows support to your client by demonstrating your efforts and your desire to make the client feel comfortable, secure, and safe.
 - “I’m so glad you’re here today.”
 - “Did you have any trouble finding my office today?”
 - “How are you feeling today? How is your family doing?”
 - “Tell me about your day.”
 - “Do you have plans after this meeting?”
- Communicating empathy to your client throughout the difficult conversation shows the client that their voice is heard and that their feelings are valid, and communicating empathy also shows the client that you value their thoughts and feelings.
 - Many times, you can communicate empathy not by what you say but by giving your time, by giving space for others to share, and to be there and



truly listen. This time and being present can help show others that you genuinely care.

- “Thank you for trusting me enough to share such a personal and difficult story.”
 - “Thank you for sharing your story with me today. I can see that was difficult for you, and it is okay for you to feel sad.”
 - “What happened to you was not your fault.”
 - “I know that conversation we had today was difficult. Let me know how I can support you in processing that conversation.”
- Communicating safety to the client promotes safety, facilitates further communication, and prevents retraumatization of the client.
 - “You can sit anywhere you please. Pick wherever you want to sit.”
 - “Would you prefer to keep the door closed, or do you want the door open?”
 - “Would you prefer to have this conversation with a trusted relative, friend, or advocate with you?”
 - “It is not okay that they hurt you. You deserve to be safe and not worry about someone hurting you.”

TIPS TO EMPOWER YOUR CLIENT

Focusing on empowering your client in your communications will help encourage your client as you work on the case together and will likely positively impact them in other ways as well.

- Using a strengths-based approach as discussed above in the toolkit in Section IV.C. can significantly help an advocate when working with a client.
- Remind the client that they have agency over *their* case: it is *their* case, and the decisions are *their* decisions. Afterall, it is their life that is most impacted by the case, not yours. Consider ways that you can make this concept known to your client.
- If you are an attorney, you can let the client know that their decision is the decision that you will act in accordance with throughout the case.
- Give space for your clients to share their thoughts. Avoid one-sided conversations. Do not talk “at” the client. Rather, talk with the client. Create a dialogue between the client and yourself.
- Empower your client by giving them all of the information, such as explaining why you are having a difficult conversation or asking difficult questions.

Appendix 2

Handout for Advocates: *Role Play Scripts in Spanish*

Role Play: Diego está ansioso, podría beneficiarse de nuevas estrategias

En este escenario, Diego, un joven guatemalteco de 15 años, se reúne con su defensor. Diego se ha estado sintiendo ansioso. Su defensor está tratando de involucrar a Diego en la resolución de su ansiedad con técnicas terapéuticas. Su defensor alienta a Diego a considerar nuevas estrategias además de las que ya utiliza y confía.

Defensor: ¿Cómo te has sentido últimamente acerca de la ansiedad que me mencionaste la semana pasada?

Diego: Más o menos.

Defensor: Del uno al diez, siendo diez el nivel más alto de ansiedad, la semana pasada me dijiste que te sentías como si estuvieras a los seis. Esta semana, ¿qué nivel te darías a ti mismo?

Diego: Yo siento lo mismo, seis.

Defensor: ¿Pudiste implementar las técnicas de respiración y meditación que practicamos la semana pasada?

Diego: En realidad no.

Defensor: Lamento escuchar eso. ¿Hay alguna razón por la que no pudiste practicar?

Diego: No estoy acostumbrado a meditar y siento que me veo extraño. En cambio, comencé a rezar el rosario.

Defensor: Entiendo, y tienes razón, puede parecer extraño al principio. Es como cualquier cosa que hacemos por primera vez. Pero con el tiempo y la práctica, te sentirás menos raro, y creo que te ayudará a regular la ansiedad. ¿Crees que orar te ayuda a reducir tu ansiedad?

Diego: ¡No estoy seguro, porque todavía siento lo mismo! No sé qué pensar.

Defensor: Sé que orar por ti mismo es especialmente importante y creo que es algo que no debes dejar de hacer, incluso si no parece que te esté ayudando con la ansiedad. Tal vez te esté ayudando de otras maneras, ¿qué piensas?

Diego: Creo que orar me da paz y esperanza.

Defensor: ¡Eso es maravilloso, eso es un comienzo! La paz y la esperanza son ingredientes clave para combatir la ansiedad. Tal vez lo que está sucediendo es que se necesitan agregar uno o más ingredientes para que surta efecto. ¿Qué te parece?



Diego: ¿Como qué?

Defensor: ¿Has notado que cuando estás relajado, tu respiración es profunda y relajada? No estás pensando en eso. Pero cuando estás ansioso, tu respiración se vuelve más corta y rápida. Y cuando tu corazón late más rápido, tu cara se sonroja y tus músculos se ponen tensos.

Diego: Sí, algo así.

Defensor: La respiración profunda puede ser increíblemente efectiva para disminuir los efectos del estrés y la ansiedad. ¿Qué tal agregar respiración profunda junto con la oración, para empezar? Luego la próxima semana veremos cómo te sientes, podemos reevaluar y agregar algunas otras técnicas si es necesario. ¿Qué te parece? ¿Estás dispuesto a probarlo?

Diego: Ok, sí, voy a intentarlo.

Defensor: Puedes comenzar con una vez al día durante el tiempo de oración, pero lo ideal es hacerlo cada vez que te sientas ansioso. No tiene que ser algo que tome mucho tiempo, solo lo suficiente para que te sientas mejor. Me gustaría practicar la respiración profunda contigo antes de terminar nuestra visita, para que te sientas más a gusto cuando lo intentes en privado. ¿Te parece bien?

Diego: Está bien.



Role Play: Felipe está nervioso en su primera reunión con el defensor

En este juego de roles, el defensor se reúne con Felipe, un joven hondureño de 11 años. Felipe nunca había salido de su pueblo antes de viajar a Texas. El defensor se reúne con Felipe por primera vez y ha notado el lenguaje corporal de Felipe. Felipe está nervioso. El defensor y el joven practican diciendo que necesitan un descanso y que no entienden una pregunta.

Defensor: Hola Felipe, ¿cómo te sientes hoy?

Felipe: *(Felipe mira hacia abajo y alrededor, pero no al Defensor.)* Estoy bien.

Defensor: ¿Necesitas algo antes de que empecemos? Noto que estás mirando a tu alrededor y pareces incómodo. ¿Hay algo que pueda hacer por ti?

Felipe: No necesito nada. Estoy un poco nervioso...

Defensor: Puedo entender que estes nervioso. Es un gran paso. Hay muchas cosas pasando al mismo tiempo. ¿Hay algo que pueda hacer para que esto sea más fácil para ti?

Felipe: No, estoy bien. Podemos empezar ya.

Defensor: Genial. Me alegra escuchar eso, pero primero, hagamos un trato. Me puedes dejar saber si en algún momento te sientes incómodo, y te prometo que podemos tomar un descanso. ¿Trato?

Felipe: Está bien.

Defensor: Practiquemos. "¿Podemos por favor parar? Necesito un descanso". Ahora es tu turno de decirlo...

Felipe: ¿Podemos por favor parar? Necesito un descanso.

Defensor: ¡Sí, Felipe, así es! ¡Tomemos un descanso! ¡Buen trabajo! ¿Cómo se sintió decirlo?

Felipe: *(Felipe sonríe.)* Nada mal, estuvo bien.

Defensor: ¿Qué tal si tienes una pregunta sobre algo que no entiendes? ¿Qué dirías?

Felipe: Yo diría: "¿Podemos parar, por favor, no entiendo?"

Defensor: ¡Exactamente, eres muy listo!



Role Play: Felipe se siente en conflicto por estar en los Estados Unidos

En este juego de roles, la defensora se reúne con Felipe, un joven hondureño de 11 años. Felipe se siente en conflicto por estar en los Estados Unidos. Fue liberado de un refugio y ha estado viviendo con su hermana, que tiene dos hijos, y su esposo en una zona rural de Tennessee. Se siente solo y está considerando volver a casa, ya que extraña a los abuelos que lo criaron. La defensora utiliza reflexión de sentimientos y resumiendo en este juego de roles.

Defensora: Es un placer verte, Felipe. Sé que dijiste que querías hablar conmigo. Y quería asegurarme de que no tuvieran ninguna pregunta antes de ir a la corte. ¿Tienes algo en mente?

Felipe: No estoy seguro de todo esto.

Defensora: *(No pregunte "¿qué?", trate de extraer la respuesta con sus propias palabras.)* Cuéntame más sobre eso, Felipe.

Felipe: No lo sé. Esto es difícil para mí estar lejos de mis abuelos. *(Felipe está conteniendo las lágrimas y está tratando de mantener la compostura, así que deje que este proceso continúe orgánicamente.)* ¡Es solo que ya no estoy seguro de querer quedarme aquí en los Estados Unidos!

Defensora: Ya no estás seguro de querer quedarte aquí en los Estados Unidos. *(Esta es una declaración, sin ninguna inflexión, para reflejar lo que escuchaste).*

Felipe: No, no hay nada que hacer, y mi hermana siempre está ocupada, así que no ha podido llevarme a la escuela, y no tengo dónde trabajar por aquí. Y mis abuelos me necesitan.

Defensora: Felipe, tú has estado preocupado por muchas cosas últimamente. Eso debe ser difícil. Tienes tanto en mente.

Felipe: Sí, y estoy muy cansado. Es demasiado. Solo quiero detenerlo todo y volver a casa.

Defensora: Estás cansado y solo quieres volver a tu país.

Felipe: No lo sé, tal vez.

Defensora: Estoy escuchando que no sabes lo que quieres hacer en este momento, ¿verdad? *(Felipe vuelve a emocionarse.)*

Defensora: Lamento que te sientas agobiado. Estas son emociones difíciles, y veo que te están afectando. Felipe, no estás solo, ¿tal vez tú y yo juntos podemos explorar tus pensamientos y sentimientos para ayudar a entenderlos? ¡De esa manera no sientes que todo descansa sobre tus

hombros, fuertes como son! ¿Quieres que te ayude con algo? ¿Hay algo que pueda hacer para ayudarte en este momento?

Felipe: No lo sé.

Defensora: Comencemos con una cosa ... Si tuvieras una varita mágica en este momento y pudieras tener un deseo, ¿agitarías tu varita mágica y...?

Felipe: Mis abuelos vivirían conmigo aquí, y yo no estaría solo.

Defensora: ¿Cuándo fue la última vez que hablaste con ellos Felipe?

Felipe: No puedo estar llamándolos todo el tiempo, pero los llamé el mes pasado. Me preocupo por ellos.

Defensora: Es difícil dejar atrás a aquellos que amamos. Puedo ver que te sientes responsable. Tal vez podemos encontrar una tarjeta telefónica para que puedas llamarlos una vez a la semana los sábados, de esa manera no parecerán tan lejanos.

Felipe: Supongo que sí. Eso me gustaría.

Defensora: Bien, ¡pongamos eso en una lista de deseos! Lo siguiente que mencionaste es el tiempo que pasas con tu hermana. Ella está bastante ocupada estos días, supongo.

Felipe: Sí, ella no tiene tiempo para hacer mandados conmigo, especialmente para la escuela. Así que dejé de ir. De esa manera ella no tiene que llevarme.

Defensora: ¿Has hablado con tu hermana sobre cómo te sientes?

Felipe: No, no quiero preocuparla, tiene mucho que hacer.

Defensora: ¡Absolutamente, todos tenemos muchas cosas que hacer a la vez! ¿Qué tal si te preguntas de una manera diferente, cómo te ha demostrado tu hermana que le importas?

Felipe: En muchos sentidos... Ella me patrocinó.

Defensora: ¡Sí! Ella quería ayudarte, y te esperó cuando estabas en el refugio, (*Felipe asiente*) e hizo una cita con el Defensor.

Felipe: Y ella fue a la escuela y llenó todos esos papeles y fue a todas las reuniones.

Defensora: ¡Correcto! Entonces, me parece que hay muchas pruebas de que ella te cuida y te apoya mucho.

Felipe: *(Felipe mira hacia abajo y no dice nada.)* Sí, ella ha sido muy buena conmigo. Tal vez debería decírselo.

Defensora: Ver todo el apoyo y las acciones positivas, tal vez te ayude a tener una perspectiva diferente. Y tal vez ella también pueda ayudarte a ver a través de esto. Ella parece bastante buena cuidándote; que no estes solo y que a ella sí le importas. Eres muy importante para ella.

Felipe: Yo también me preocupo por ella.

Defensora: ¡Sí, puedo verlo! Si quieres, puedo estar allí cuando te reúnas con ella. A menos que quieras hablar con ella antes de nuestra próxima reunión.

Felipe: Hablaré con ella primero. Tal vez te llame si necesito ayuda. *(Felipe se ríe.)*

Defensora: ¡Sí, por supuesto! Bien, ¿entonces te importaría si te llamo la próxima semana para ver como seguiste y tal vez hablar con los dos? ¿Suenan bien contigo?

Felipe: Sí, ya habré hablado con ella para entonces. Eso suena bien.

Defensora: Me da mucho gusto, Felipe, gracias por hablar conmigo sobre lo que estabas sintiendo. Es importante hablar sobre nuestras emociones, incluso si son difíciles, y no mantenerlas embotelladas porque eso puede ser muy doloroso y no tienes que hacerlo solo.

Felipe: ¡Gracias! Sí, lo entiendo.

Defensora: ¿Quieres hablar sobre la corte ahora?

Felipe: Sí, estoy listo.

Defensora: Quiero que sepas que eres muy valiente Felipe. Está bien tener dudas, a veces nuestros pensamientos y miedos están tratando de distraernos del camino que tenemos ante nosotros, y debemos organizarlos y decirles que esperen hasta que estés listo y te sientas lo suficientemente seguro para prestarles atención.

Felipe: Sí, hay muchas cosas en mi mente.

Defensora: ¡Exactamente! ¡No hay prisa! Tenemos tiempo. ¿Cómo te sientes ahora?

Felipe: ¡Mejor!

Role Play: Ana se preocupa repasando su declaración en la que habla sobre abuso

En este juego de roles Ana, una joven de 13 años de El Salvador, se reúne con su defensor. Durante una reunión previa, Ana se incomodó al hablar sobre el abuso de su padre. Su defensor ahora necesita revisar la declaración de Ana con ella y sabe que esto podría ser doloroso. Su defensor ha planeado con anticipación con Ana para que haya espacio para sus emociones elevadas, y puedan trabajar juntos para brindarle apoyo.

Defensor: Buenos días, Ana. Me alegro de verte de nuevo. Gracias por darme la oportunidad de hablar contigo.

Ana: ¡Buenos días!

Defensor: Ana, ¿recuerdas la última vez que hablamos, me viste tomando notas y te dije que iba a usar esas notas para preparar tu declaración para la corte?

Ana: Sí, lo recuerdo.

Defensor: Bueno, pude escribir la declaración, y ahora me gustaría compartirla contigo para asegurarme de que escribí correctamente lo que compartiste conmigo. Para mí es importante que la declaración refleje y respete tus recuerdos. Podemos leerlo juntas si lo deseas, ya que puede incluir palabras "legales" que son difíciles de entender. O si quieres, puedes leerlo tú misma en silencio. De cualquier manera, puedo aclarar cualquier duda o pregunta que tengas.

Ana: Bueno, me gustaría leerlo yo misma en silencio.

Defensor: ¡Claro! Pero antes de eso, me gustaría hablar sobre algo importante contigo. La semana pasada, cuando me contabas tu historia, te causó dolor, tristeza y agitación. ¿Y recuerdas que hablamos de esas técnicas de respiración profunda y afrontamiento para ayudarnos a nosotros mismos cuando tenemos esos sentimientos? ¿Recuerdas el que tú y yo practicamos juntos? ¿Te ayudó ese ejercicio?

Ana: Sí, lo recuerdo, y me ayudó mucho.

Defensor: ¡Me da muchísimo gusto escuchar eso! La razón por la que quería hablar de eso es porque es muy posible que tengas la misma reacción o algo similar cuando leas tu historia, me gustaría que estuviéramos preparados para eso. ¿Qué piensas si planeamos en caso de que esto suceda?

Ana: Está bien.

Defensor: Como hablamos anteriormente, es importante que sepas cómo reconocer en ti mismo que algo te está afectando. Eso significa que conozcas o aprendas a leer tus sentimientos, emociones y la

forma en que tu cuerpo está reaccionando. Me mencionaste que tu corazón comenzó a latir más rápido y que realmente querías llorar la última vez. Esas eran señales de que tu cuerpo te enviaba que algo te estaba afectando. Es importante, si eso vuelve a suceder, que te digas a ti misma (y a mí) que hagamos una pausa. ¿Estás de acuerdo?

Ana: ¡Sí!

Defensor: Lo siguiente es recordar que a veces nuestra mente puede engañarnos, y puede sentirse como si estuvieras de vuelta en ese lugar y momento en que alguien te estaba lastimando. Para ayudar a romper ese momento, necesitamos llevar nuestra mente al mismo lugar y tiempo que nuestro cuerpo, a este tiempo y lugar, a este ahora y al presente donde nadie te está lastimando y estás a salvo. ¿Recuerdas cómo podemos hacer esto?

Ana: Sí, decirme a mí misma, estoy aquí y estoy bien. Puedo decirlo en voz alta para recordarme a mí misma.

Defensor: Y si eso no es suficiente, ¿qué más puedes hacer?

Ana: Puedo usar mis cinco sentidos para hacerlo, diciendo cinco cosas que puedo ver, cuatro cosas que puedo tocar, tres cosas que puedo oír, dos cosas que puedo oler, y una cosa que puedo saborear.

Defensor: Perfecto, ¿te gustaría que te ayudara a guiar la técnica contigo en ese momento o prefieres hacerlo solo?

Ana: Sí, me gustaría que me ayudaras.

Defensor: Ok, ahora que tenemos un plan, ¿te sientes lista para leer la declaración?

Ana: Sí. *(Ana lee la declaración y se ve que algo la molesto. Ella comienza a llorar, temblar y apoya la cabeza sobre la mesa.)*

Defensor: Puedo ver que leer la declaración está trayendo emociones que son difíciles para ti. ¿Quieres que hagamos una pausa?

Ana: Sí... Eso creo. *(Permita cualquier tiempo que Ana necesite para sentirse mejor. No trates de apresurarla a ella o a la situación. Puedes hacerle saber que estás allí para escuchar y apoyar. También puede recordarle que respire profundamente y tome un poco de agua. Una vez que se haya calmado visualmente, puedes preguntarle cómo puedes ayudarla en el momento actual).*

Defensor: ¿Cómo puedo ayudarte en este momento? ¿Puedo conseguirte algo?

Ana: *(Ana está llorando)* ¡Es solo que, amo a mi papá! ¡Realmente él no quería lastimarme!



Defensor: Ana, lamento mucho que esto te haya sucedido. Parece que estás pasando por un momento difícil. Es difícil sentir dos cosas a la vez. ¡A veces esto puede ser confuso! Quiero que sepas que es posible sentir emociones contradictorias por alguien, especialmente cuando la relación ha sido dañada. Por ejemplo, es posible amar a tu padre y al mismo tiempo odiar la forma en que te trató.

Ana: A veces me siento culpable.

Defensor: Cuénteme más sobre eso...

Ana: Que todo esto pasó por mi culpa. ¡Que es mi culpa...! *(Ana está llorando)*

Defensor: Entiendo. Lo más importante es que sepas que no tienes la culpa de cómo se comportó tu padre. Eso es algo con lo que tu padre va a tener que lidiar por su cuenta como adulto. Lo importante en este momento es que estés bien y que te sientas segura. Estoy aquí para apoyarte y escucharte.

Ana: Bien, gracias. Pensaré en eso.

Defensor: ¿Qué tal si tomamos un descanso para estirar nuestros cuerpos y respirar profundamente varias veces? *(Use una redirección saludable de la atención para volver a enfocar la conversación más tarde).*

Ana: Sí, está bien. *(Realice ejercicios calmantes. Ana bebe un poco de agua, se estira y respira profundamente, pero una vez que reanuda la lectura de la declaración, se derrumba emocionalmente de nuevo).*

Defensor: Ana, puedo ver que al continuar leyendo esto, está sacando a relucir muchas emociones fuertes. ¿Qué tal si activamos el plan que discutimos?

Ana: Está bien.

Defensor: Quiero que te diga a ti misma: "Hoy es 8 de mayo de 2023, y estoy en un lugar seguro, estoy con personas seguras y estoy a salvo".

Ana: Hoy es 8 de mayo de 2023, y me estoy reuniendo en un lugar seguro, estoy con personas seguras y estoy a salvo.

Defensor: Genial, ¿puedes repetirlo de nuevo, por favor?

Ana: Hoy es 8 de mayo de 2023, y me estoy reuniendo en un lugar seguro, estoy con personas seguras y estoy a salvo.



Defensor: ¿Cómo te sientes ahora?

Ana: ¡Mucho mejor!

Defensor: Parece que esto ha sido más difícil emocionalmente de lo que esperábamos. ¿Qué tal si en lugar de seguir leyendo la declaración, nos detenemos por ahora? Lo que es más importante en este momento es que te sientas bien.

Ana: ¡Sí, gracias!

Defensor: Tú me dijiste que tu consejera le ha estado ayudando mucho. ¿Cómo te sentirías si nos acercáramos a ella para pedirle apoyo? Ella puede ayudarte a explorar formas de sobrellevar los momentos emocionalmente difíciles y también puede ayudarme a mi aprender formas en como apoyarte en esos momentos. ¡Solo haría esto si estuvieras de acuerdo con eso!

Ana: ¡Eso estaría bien!

Defensor: Me alegra que te sientas mejor y que estés de acuerdo con que me comunique con tu consejera. La llamaré más tarde.



Role Play: Diego habla con su defensor sobre identidad de género y orientación sexual

Diego es un joven guatemalteco de 15 años. Ha estado en un refugio de ORR durante un par de semanas y planea reunirse con su hermano mayor en Houston, Texas. Se está reuniendo con su defensor que está haciendo un seguimiento de algunas preguntas relacionadas con la admisión original. Su defensor debe preguntarle a Diego sobre su identidad de género y orientación sexual.

Defensor: Diego, sé que he estado haciendo preguntas que pueden parecer intrusivas o demasiado personales y quiero asegurarme de que te sientas bien antes de pasar a más preguntas. ¿Necesitas ponerte de pie y estirarte o beber un poco de agua?

Diego: No, gracias estoy bien.

Defensor: Estas otras preguntas que tengo para ti son sobre la sexualidad. Aunque son preguntas que le hacemos a todos, sé que puede ser incómodo para algunos hablar sobre el tema. Quiero asegurarme de que estés de acuerdo con discutir esto conmigo. ¿Qué te parece?

Diego: ¡No estoy seguro de lo que me está hablando!

Defensor: Claro, ¿Diego, podrías decirme lo que entiendes sobre lo que es la sexualidad?

Diego: ¿Creo que se trata de quién me gusta, o con quién he salido antes? Pero ¿por qué tenemos que hablar de eso?

Defensor: Sé que esto es probablemente lo último que quieres discutir, especialmente con un adulto que acabas de conocer. Esto me ayudará a aprender más sobre ti, tu caso, y cómo mejor apoyarte.

Diego: ¿Qué pasa si no quiero responder a esas preguntas tan personales?

Defensor: ¡Excelente pregunta! Por favor, quiero que sepas que a pesar de que te estoy haciendo estas preguntas, tienes la opción y el derecho a elegir si deseas responder / hablar de esto conmigo. Además, es tu elección con quién deseas compartir información sobre tu sexualidad o cualquier otra cosa. ¿Está bien?

Diego: Sí, lo entiendo.

Defensor: ¿Está bien si continúo haciendo más preguntas sobre tu sexualidad?

Diego: Sí, está bien.



Defensor: Gracias. Diego, ¿puedes decirme con tus propias palabras lo que significa la sexualidad para ti?

Diego: Bueno, cuando dos personas se gustan, salen y tienen una relación, ¿y tal vez se casan?

Defensor: Bueno, sí, y se trata de un poco más de cuando las personas se quieren.

Diego: Entonces, ¿cómo el sexo? ¿Cuándo te gusta alguien más que solo ser amigos?

Defensor: Eso es ciertamente otra parte. La sexualidad puede también ser sobre identidad de género y orientación sexual. Se trata de cómo te sientes, y cómo te ves a ti mismo, y cómo te relacionas con los demás, con quién sales y con quién te casas, si quieres casarte. Me gustaría explicártelo, si estás de acuerdo.

Diego: Sí, está bien.

Defensor: La identidad de género es diferente de la orientación sexual. Algunas personas por ejemplo se ven a sí mismos como chicos, algunas se ven a sí mismas como chicas, y algunas personas no se ven como ninguno de los dos. Cuando nacimos, y en función de nuestra anatomía, se nos asignó un género, hombre o mujer. Pero algunas personas sienten que lo que les dijeron que era su género, no es lo que sienten que son por dentro. Sienten que su identidad de género, o quiénes sienten que son, no coincide con el género que se les asignó. ¿Tiene sentido lo que estoy diciendo?

Diego: Sí. Creo que sí, he visto chicos que se visten como chicas.

Defensor: ¡Sí, y eso se llama expresión de género! Pueden identificarse como chicos/hombres y usar vestidos simplemente porque les gusta vestirse así, o pueden hacerlo porque se identifican de manera diferente que al género que se les asignó al nacer. Muchas veces, la forma en que las personas se sienten por dentro les hace querer expresarse a través de cómo se ven en el exterior, por lo que usan la forma de vestir y tal vez maquillaje, incluso su caminar y su tono de voz para identificarse mejor con cómo se sienten por dentro. La identidad de género no se trata solo de femenino/chica o masculino/chico, sino también de poder identificarse como cualquier, o ningún género. Cómo te identificas es muy personal e individual para cada persona.

Sé que es mucha información, ¿quieres que te explique más sobre esto?

Diego: No. Creo que lo entiendo.

Defensor: ¡Genial! Ahora, la orientación sexual por otro lado se trata de quién te gusta y quién te atrae; muchas personas se sienten atraídas por alguien del sexo opuesto, y algunas personas se sienten atraídas por otros géneros, o el mismo género. Los nombres que se le dan a esa "atracción" son: heterosexual si a una persona le gusta alguien de un género diferente al suyo, gay si le gusta



alguien del mismo género que es, y bisexual si hay atracción hacia más de un género. Incluso hay personas que se sienten atraídas por todos los géneros.

Diego: Sí, sé un poco sobre esto.

Defensor: Está bien. También quiero agregar que la orientación sexual para algunas personas es fluida, eso significa que al género a quien alguien se siente atraído ahora, puede cambiar o puede permanecer igual durante toda la vida. Sé que es mucha información, quiero hacer una pausa aquí para verificar contigo ¿Cómo te sientes hasta ahora?

Diego: Estoy bien, gracias, esto me ha ayudado a entender un poco mejor.

Defensor: ¡Genial! Entonces, la pregunta que tengo para ti es sobre tu identidad de género y orientación sexual. Esto puede ayudarme a entenderte mejor a ti y a tu caso e identificar cualquier recurso que pueda ser útil para ti. Independientemente de lo que me digas, estoy aquí para ayudarte. No hay una respuesta incorrecta. ¿Está bien?

Diego: Sí, lo entiendo.

Defensor: ¡Listo! Diego, ¿puedes contarme de alguna vez que estuviste enamorado o te sentiste atraído por alguien?

Diego: Antes de venir aquí me gustaba esta chica que estaba en la escuela conmigo, pero nunca salimos. Pero conocí a este chico durante mi viaje con el que me acerqué mucho, pero no salimos. Estoy un poco confundido ahora, no sé si me gustan las chicas o los chicos, pero sé que me siento como masculino por dentro. Me siento extraño hablando de todo esto así. Dime de nuevo ¿por qué necesitas saber esto para ayudarme?

Defensor: ¡Buena pregunta! Permíteme comenzar diciendo que está bien si no sabes de que género te sientes atraído, esa también es una respuesta. Cualquier género que te atraiga puede ser algo que no sepas de inmediato, y depende de ti y solo de ti seguir encontrando y explorando tu sexualidad y haciendo preguntas. Algunas personas lo saben de inmediato. Para otros se lleva más tiempo. No hay prisa. ¿Qué piensas al respecto?

Diego: Eso tiene sentido, y me hace sentir mejor.

Defensor: Me alegra saberlo. Quiero volver para responder a tu pregunta. La razón por la que pregunto es porque también puede ser relevante para tu caso de inmigración, por ejemplo, si has sufrido de alguna manera debido a cómo te identificas o debido a tu orientación sexual. Además, los jóvenes que pertenecen a estos grupos minoritarios sexuales, lo que significa que se identifican como lesbianas / gay / bisexuales / transgénero u otros, tienen ciertas protecciones bajo la ley aquí en los



Estados Unidos porque a veces experimentan desafíos, maltrato y discriminación por parte de otros que responden negativamente a su orientación sexual, identidad de género o expresión de género.

Es por eso por lo que pregunté, quiero poder proporcionar todos los recursos e información sobre cualquier alivio de inmigración, derechos, protecciones, apoyo y orientación que puedas necesitar. Por tanto, podría conectarte con las personas o grupos adecuados que mejor te ayudarán dondequiera que vayas a vivir, si estás interesado en esa información.

Diego: Entiendo. ¡Gracias por eso!

Defensor: ¡De nada! Me dijiste que no estás seguro cuál es tu orientación sexual; ¿alguna vez has hablado de esto con alguien?

Diego: Hablé un poco con mi médico. Pero no estoy listo para hablar más sobre eso todavía. No sé qué pensar al respecto.

Defensor: ¡Respeto tu decisión! Por favor, quiero que sepas que solo tú puedes decidir cuándo y con quién te gustaría compartir esta parte de ti mismo. Entiendo tu reserva; A veces las personas son muy rápidas para juzgar y etiquetar a otros que perciben como "diferentes"; sin embargo, eso es cosa de ellos, y no de ti.

Diego: La gente juzga, y puede ser mala.

Defensor: Sí, pueden serlo. Lo importante que debes saber es que importas independientemente de tu orientación sexual o identidad de género. Quién eres y cómo te sientes, pero especialmente que te sientas seguro, es lo más importante. Además, no tienes que usar ninguno de los términos que mencioné anteriormente para describirte, pero si lo haces, esa es tu decisión y no la decisión de otros. Siempre queremos que te sientas que estás en un espacio seguro y que te traten con respeto y dignidad.

¿Alguien te ha hecho sentir inseguro/incómodo aquí o en cualquier otro lugar?

Diego: Aquí no, ¡todos aquí me han hecho sentir bienvenido y respetado!

Defensor: ¡Que bueno Diego, me alegra saberlo! ¿Dices que aquí todo bien, pero no tanto en otras partes? ¿Entendí bien?

Diego: Pues no, en el pasado no estuvo todo bien. Pero eso fue hace mucho tiempo.

Defensor: Diego, entiendo que tal vez no sea nada agradable hablar de lo que pasó. Aunque ya haya pasado mucho tiempo, tal vez sea importante para tu caso. ¿Qué tal si hablamos brevemente de lo que te ocurrió?