

LANGUAGE AS AN ELEMENT OF RESPONSE TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE

A survivor may encounter multiple service providers along their path to healing when trying to access medical care, victim services and resources.

Intentional communication can be an element of healing when a service provider uses language to create positive experiences and a safe environment for American Indian and/or Alaska Native individuals receiving services as a result of sexual violence.

The survivor should feel safe to share their experiences and express what they need on their healing journey. The service provider must understand how to communicate with the survivor as well as grasp the meaning behind what is being communicated.

Here are some ways a service provider can validate a survivor's experience and provide a restorative healing experience through language:

▶ CREATE SAFETY

- Acknowledge all layers of a survivor's trauma and use open and thoughtful communication to address any concerns about interacting with service providers.
- Use words, examples, and concepts that acknowledge the traditions, values, and dignity of the survivor that are free from assumptions.
- Remain conscious of the authoritative dynamic that exists in a service provider/survivor relationship.
- Avoid professional terms that can be off-putting, confusing, or minimize the survivor's experience.

▶ OFFER AUTONOMY

- Allow survivors to use their preferred language when illustrating their experiences.
- Provide ample and understandable information to survivors throughout all interactions, ensuring that they are active participants in all decisions being made.

▶ LISTEN WITH INTENT

- Use mindful body language that highlights that you are giving your full attention to the survivor and are receptive of the information being shared.
- Practice active listening.
- Allow the survivor to express themselves without interruption before asking clarifying questions.
- Create time and space for the survivor to process shared information, ask questions, and provide their responses.



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