

# GROUND RULES FOR INTERACTION

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1. Be nonjudgmental and kind. This is the building block for all future interactions.
2. Address emergency and basic needs first. Youth cannot engage in a substantive dialogue if these primary needs are not addressed.
3. Check your environment. Interview space should be youth-friendly, comfortable, and confidential.
4. Time. Allow for plenty of time and space to develop rapport and engage with a survivor prior to the interview. Most youth do not disclose all details of their victimization in the first interview. It may take several interactions before they begin to trust you.
5. Be flexible. While there are certain goals that you want to achieve with the youth during this time, it is important to begin the empowerment process from the start of the conversation. Allowing youth to guide or prioritize the conversation can ultimately help you achieve your goals at a later time.
6. Be upfront. Tell the youth in the beginning who you are and your goals for the conversation. Be very clear about your mandated reporting requirements and make sure the youth fully understands what it means, providing examples that include prostitution. Some youth may be dissuaded from disclosing their victimization at first, in which case the practitioner should focus on building rapport and providing resources or services to fit the perceived needs.
7. Ask for permission. If you must use a form or take notes during the interview, make sure that you ask permission first so that the youth knows what and why you are writing down information about them. Also, clarify for what the information will be used and whether it is confidential.
8. Language. Use youth-friendly language and mirror (appropriate) language used by youth when asking questions about events in their story.
9. Body language. Ensure that your body language is open and communicates a desire to hear all, including unpleasant or uncomfortable details.
10. Limited personal references. Balance the amount of personal information shared. While it is important to participate in the conversation so it does not feel one-sided, sharing significant or extremely personal stories in an effort to connect can place an inappropriate burden on the youth to counsel the practitioner.
11. Minimal interjections. Limit interruptions when youth begin to share information, as a continuous line of questions from the practitioner can feel invasive rather than relational. However, if during the course of disclosure, the youth's behavior changes or distress is noticed, practitioners should "check in" with the youth and ask what is happening for that person right now – "What are you feeling right now?" could be a good prompting question. Then, the practitioner should listen to that and respect it. Taking short breaks throughout the disclosure process ensures proper respect and balance in the nervous system before re-engaging in the disclosure or narrative. The practitioner should never be so focused on hearing the "whole" story or completing the intake process that the youth feels revictimized.

12. Meet the youth where they are. Respect where the youth is psychologically and emotionally in understanding their situation. The youth may not acknowledge the situation as exploitative and may even have to or “want to” return to the abusive situation. Working first to understand and define the youth’s immediate and long-term goals, it is then the practitioner’s role to guide the youth (over time) into defining and understanding the situation, not to assign a label.
13. Setting boundaries for the youth. Practitioners should respect personal boundaries set by the youth, especially regarding touching the youth. While touch (e.g., hugging) may seem like a comforting gesture, for exploited youth it may feel invasive and uncomfortable. Practitioners should not touch a youth without permission. Additionally, if permission is given by the youth to hug, the interaction should be led by the youth. Lots of warmth can be communicated through smiling, nodding and otherwise affirming and empowering the youth.
14. Setting boundaries for practitioners. Practitioners need to set realistic goals and expectations for youth regarding the services with which they can assist. Promises should never be made unless it is certain that they can be achieved. Additionally, unless other protocols have been established within an agency/organization, shared personal information (home address, cell phone number, etc.) should be limited, too.
15. Professionalism. A multidisciplinary team approach is vitally important to holistically caring for the youth. It should be expected that the youth will bond more closely with certain practitioners. Practitioners should resist taking this personally and recognize that this is human nature. Additionally, practitioners should refrain from colluding or talking disrespectfully with the youth about other practitioners on the team.
16. Be transparent. Survivors of domestic minor sex trafficking have been abused and hurt by most adults in their life. Trust should not be expected – it is earned. The more a practitioner can involve the youth in recommended actions and conversations to achieve the youth’s goals, the more quickly trust can be built. For example, if the practitioner is referring the youth to another agency for additional services, the youth can be included in the referral call. The youth can watch “her” practitioner interact with another professional, as well as hear how and why the practitioner is recommending this referral.

**Additional ground rules for interacting with victims of gang trafficking:**

17. Show respect. Gang-involved youth may have a natural resentment of authority or may be chronically angry. Respect in the gang culture is paramount. These youth tend to have a personal code of fairness that isn’t always apparent in initial interactions and practitioners should monitor their language, tone and demeanor when working with them. The practitioner should focus on extensive rapport-building before beginning the interview to gain a sense of how the youth perceives themselves and their environment. The survivor must never feel like she/he is being patronized or disrespected.
18. Be aware of your clothing. Survivors of gang trafficking are hypersensitive to signs, symbols, colors, etc., that reflect gang affiliation. They are taught to reject people and possessions that display colors touted by rival gangs. If the practitioner is wearing an article of clothing that displays an offensive color or symbol, the survivor may display signs of aggression or negative attitude and may be unwilling to cooperate with the interview process. Practitioners may minimize this response by asking if the victim has a favorite color during the rapport building interactions.