



# Cultivating Safe Spaces for Victims of Crime

A Closer Look at Environment,  
Gender, Race and Power  
Dynamics

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# ABOUT ME

Hi! I'm Lillian. I'm a Licensed Creative Arts Therapist (LCAT) with over 20 yrs of experience. Most of my career has been focused on helping people who have experienced a variety of traumas, primarily domestic violence/intimate partner violence, child abuse and attachment trauma. I provide psychoeducational trainings and workshops on Art Therapy, Intimate Partner Violence, Teen Dating Violence, Trauma-Informed Care, Sound Healing, Guided Meditation and Workplace Wellness.





# *Introductions*

Turn to your neighbor..

Introduce yourself..

Share why you are here today and  
what you hope to gain from this  
time together

## Definition of Safety

The condition of being protected from or unlikely to cause danger, risk or injury

"There is safety in numbers"

"Safety first!"

Be aware that people perceive safety in a variety of ways...be open to the various interpretations.



# Visualization of Safety

What do you see? What do you hear? What do you  
smell? What are the surfaces like?  
Temperature/climate? Who is there and what do  
they look like? Familiarity/sameness?

# Trauma-Informed/Trauma Aware Spaces



# Physical Space/Environment

## Trauma Informed Space

Soft surfaces/warmth/comfort

Offer a variety of seating options

Muted colors/color palette that is not overstimulating

Consider adding plants as they can be welcoming/inviting



# Physical Space/Environment

- Walls should not be bare and also not overcrowded
- Have a variety of textures in decorative pieces, picture frames, blankets, rugs
- Images should honor/reflect the cultures within the community served

# Nurturing Spaces

Soft lighting options, alternatives to overhead florescent lights, such as floor or table lamps with softer hues

Add subtle scents that are calming and not overpowering (lavender, vanilla, eucalyptus)

Provide warm or cold beverages (tea, coffee) and have snacks available if possible



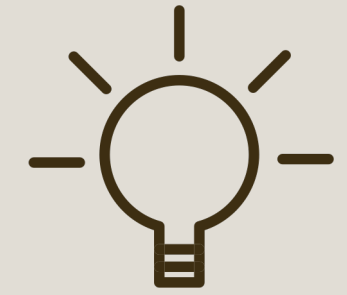
Unicef Interview Room (children & adults)



# Austin Police Department Soft Interview Room



# Spaces for Children



## Should be child- centered/focused

Child sized furniture and tools, modern child specific material, can be more colorful than the adult spaces; have snacks available if possible



## New/Newer Toys & Supplies

Children feel special/cared for when the toys and art supplies in a space are new, newer or gently used. Make sure supplies are clean, not damaged and age appropriate



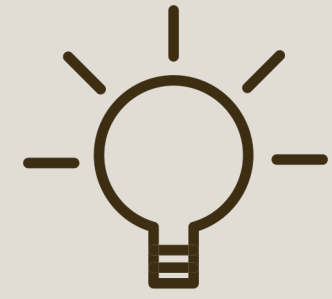
## Clean, organized, but lived in feel

Space should be inviting and show that it has been well-loved, well taken care of; not empty



## Books, Rugs, Comfortable Seating Options

Provide soft rugs for sitting on the floor, comfortable chairs/sofas, bean bag chairs, blankets and/or yoga mats. Reading materials that are age appropriate



# Spaces for Children



- Hang children's artwork (if possible in accordance with the agency's confidentiality policy)
- Seeing the evidence of other children in the space can make a child more comfortable and feel safer; can normalize the experience
- Space should be playful, vibrant and comfortable for kids



Photo of Loudon County Child Advocacy Center

# Self/Body Awareness



## Facial Expressions

Warm smiles, gentle presence, do not force eye contact, be aware of your own emotions and reactions

## Personal Space

Be aware of proximity to victims and their need for physical space; ask permission to be closer. Sit with victims, do not stand over them. Use language of invitation and choice.

## Clothing/Hygiene

Be aware of strong scents (body odor/perfumes/colognes)





Non-judgmental



Choices/Options



Consistency/Reliability

# Emotional Safety

being seen and heard for who you are, being appreciated, being treated with respect and fairly, being able to show up as our authentic selves, having feelings, thoughts and experiences validated

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# Language Choices

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- Employ people who speak the languages of the community you serve.
- Hire translation/interpreter services via phone or video (important for those who use sign language).
- Make sure forms and any written information are in a variety of languages, including braille.
- Do not use children of victims as interpreters.
- Accessibility is key!

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# Power Dynamics

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Position/Title: Be aware of the inherent power dynamics in your position or job title when working with a victim of crime. People often defer to people who are police officers, doctors, lawyers, therapists, teachers, etc. as they might assume that someone in this position "knows best", especially if the victim of crime has experienced traumas or devalues their own experience. Support this person's right to options/choices. Respect that they can be the expert in their own lives and communicate this to them. Empower the communities you serve!

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# Power Dynamics

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Race: Be aware of the inherent power dynamics within this country and the community regarding race. Historically, due to racism, discrimination and oppression of people in BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) communities by systems of white privilege and supremacy, any person who is white or white-appearing is felt to hold more power and privilege than those who are not. Be aware of this power dynamic and acknowledge any discomfort or distrust when meeting with victims. Confront and work on your own personal biases. Use language of choice and invitation when interviewing victims of crime. Empower the communities you serve!

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# Power Dynamics

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Gender/Sexual Orientation: Be aware of the inherent power dynamics within this country and the community according to gender and sexual orientation. Historically, cis-gender heterosexual males hold the most power and people who are not cis-gender heterosexual males often feel disempowered when questioned/interviewed by them. Acknowledge that this is evident and use language of invitation/choice to empower the victims you work with. Ask the victim about who they would feel safer with, if possible. Empower the communities you serve!

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# Power Dynamics

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- Actively recruit, hire and promote staff that look like and are members of the communities you serve.
- All staff should participate in trainings on racial/cultural awareness to learn about their own biases and increase familiarity and understanding of other cultures.
- All staff should participate in trainings on gender identities and sexual orientations
- Evaluate and assess your outreach efforts. Is your agency actively working to build a trusting relationship with the people in the community?
- People feel safer where they are welcomed and understood.

## **Group Work!!**

Turn and talk to your other neighbor...

- Discuss your current agency/work space
- What can you add, take away or continue?
- What small changes can be made that could be helpful?

"Without inner change, there can be no change. Without collective change, no change matters."

-Rev. angel Kyodo williams



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# Questions/Comments

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# Contact Information

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