

HOW TRAUMA IMPACTS THE ATTORNEY-CSA CLIENT RELATIONSHIP

- Trauma can interfere with an effective and strong attorney-client relationship.
- Trauma may affect how clients hear and process information.
- CSA clients have an array of issues with trust and authority
- CSA Clients may have lots of triggers
- These triggers can activate the stress response system – Flight, Flight & Freeze (Fawn)
 - Fight – they may start yelling or exhibiting signs of agitation
 - Flight – they walk out of the room or hang up the phone
 - Freeze – they become quiet and withdrawn
- The triggers make clients feel as if they are presently in danger – it feels real
- The stress may be manifested in moments of anger, fear, panic, walking out of a room, withdrawing, disassociation, loss of focus or memory.
- CSA clients have stress responses to seemingly innocuous events in the legal system and process.

WHAT ATTORNEYS CAN DO

1. During intake/consultation don't rush them through the story of their abuse. They need to be heard, often repeatedly.
2. A calm and quiet place is best for intake/consultation.
3. Listen with full attention (eyes/body/facial expressions) – If you are taking notes let them know.
4. Encourage them to seek therapy and continue therapy and to reach out to trusted adults.
5. Clear Communication is key – ask them ahead of time about the type of communication most effective for them.
 - How much do you want to know as we move through the litigation process?
 - How frequently do you need updates?
 - Do you want to be updated on everything or just the major events?
6. CSA clients have issues with trust, power, and loss of control.
7. More TRANSPARENCY = more TRUST
8. Be as clear as possible on the procedural timing of things. Generally, it's a hurry up and wait. Let them know that. Also share procedural timing "Defendant has 30 days to..." "We have to respond in..." "But the parties may stipulate to more time..."
9. Inform them of the purpose, process, and potential outcomes.
10. Check in with CSA clients - quick 30 second emails – the radio silence makes them feel "alone" again, "not heard again" "unimportant" "forgotten"
11. If in Mediation or Settlement advise your client to talk to a financial advisor/tax consultant