

A Toolkit for Navigating Difficult Conversations with Child Clients

November 2024





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

2024

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updated November 2024

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substitute your own research and analysis.****



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INTRODUCTION

Section I.



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 this work, CILA hopes 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 offers more trainings and working groups to a national audience.

Complementary and critical to 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 in Texas and beyond, thereby ensuring stability in the lives of youth so that they may meaningfully participate in their immigration cases.

- [Visit https://cilacademy.org](https://cilacademy.org) to learn more about CILA, request technical assistance, register for upcoming trainings and working groups, and view our resources.
- [Create a CILA account](#) to access more CILA resources.
- [Express interest as a pro bono attorney or volunteer](#) to help immigrant youth on CILA's platform, Pro Bono Matters for Children Facing Deportation.
- Sign up to receive a CILA newsletter: [Champions for Immigrant Youth](#) (monthly) and/or [Pro Bono Matters](#) (quarterly).
- Follow CILA on social media ([Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [X](#), [YouTube](#)) to connect with us and learn about current happenings.

[Donate to CILA](#) to further CILA's efforts to support advocates working with immigrant youth and share encouragement and the tools needed for effective legal and social services advocacy.



B. About this Toolkit

Advocates working with immigrant youth in the immigration context must often 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 two situations are identical 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, we highlighted several specific issues that frequently arise and included 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.



PRE-ENGAGEMENT WITH A CLIENT

Section II.



II. Pre-Engagement with Client

Navigating difficult conversations begins even before you bring up a specific challenging topic, or pre-engagement. Understanding a client's circumstances and trauma impacts can help you approach difficult subject matter with intentionality. Additionally, 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. Before engaging, it can be key to think about various aspects of the space where you will meet the 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, altered 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 with adequate preparation. Sometimes, however, you will have very little information about a client's particular circumstances. Still, you can 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. Take a step back, look around, and see the space through the eyes of your client.

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, you can still 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.

For virtual meetings, intentionality is equally important. Consider letting the client choose whether to be on or off camera and being transparent about your environment. For



instance, you might say, “I’m working from home, but there is no one else here,” or I’m working from home but am in a separate room with the door closed and a sound machine, so our conversation will still be private.” Additionally, you can let the client know about any potential interruptions beforehand, such as pets or children, to set expectations. Offering to start with a brief check-in to ensure the client is comfortable with the virtual setup can also be helpful. You might ask if the client prefers a particular virtual background or if they are comfortable with yours. Suggesting that the client find a private, comfortable space for the meeting to ensure confidentiality, and offering a few minutes at the beginning of the session for the client to adjust their audio and video settings to their liking, can further enhance the virtual meeting experience. These small steps can make a significant difference in creating a comfortable and supportive atmosphere for your clients, regardless of the setting.

Providing trauma-informed advocacy involves paying close attention to the space, layout, and type of furniture present. Consider what art, painting, or decor you have, what the lighting is in your space, and the benefits of 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? Additionally, be mindful of the seating arrangement. For instance, avoid sitting behind a desk while the client sits across from you. This creates a physical and visual barrier that can reinforce power differentials and may make the client feel intimidated or uneasy. This is particularly important when working with child clients. Instead, you can try seating side-by-side or at a slight angle as this can be less intimidating and more supportive, making it easier to build rapport and trust.
- If you know your client has mobility limitations, 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. 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.

- Incorporating sensory-based items can also enhance the child-friendly atmosphere. Items such as scented lotions, candles, fuzzy pillows, and stress balls are great options. However, strong scents or certain textures might be overwhelming to some. Always ask for preferences and provide options that cater to various sensory needs. Sensory items can provide comfort and help children better manage their emotions. Stress balls are a favorite among children. They can help children feel more at ease and offer a comforting distraction if needed. When working with neurodivergent children/youth, be mindful that some children may have sensory sensitivities.
- In choosing your meeting location, whether at the office or elsewhere, 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 as to whether the client feels safe or comfortable. This can help you both avoid miscommunication and failed encounters.

C. Interacting in 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 or caregivers. 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:

- Are you meeting with an individual alone or with that person and others? Keep in mind the duty of confidentiality and the attorney-client privilege if others are present. Note, however, guidance in the [commentary \(3\) to ABA Model Rule of Professional Conduct 1.14](#): Client with Diminished Capacity, providing that “[t]he client may wish to have family members or other persons participate in discussions with the lawyer. When necessary to assist in the representation, the presence of such persons generally does not affect the applicability of the attorney-client evidentiary privilege.” This guidance may be relevant when working with some child clients.
- 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 people 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:

- 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 if they cannot make it to the meeting?
- Is there anything noteworthy 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), you are already helping the client to feel safer and more secure about entering an unknown and scary situation. This is especially true if there is a history of trauma.

Courthouse/USCIS office:

- Prior to arriving at a court setting or USCIS office, especially if the client has not encountered that type of setting before, provide time for the client to “see” the space before they go there for a hearing, appointment, or interview. For example, 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/office works and what the client can expect, including the possibility of a body search and scan upon entering the courthouse, and what effect, if any, that can have. For example, certain items are not allowed inside and may be taken away.
- 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, including explaining what to expect upon arrival.
- If you are working with a youth who may need to testify before an immigration judge, review CILA's resource, “[Youth's Testimony in Immigration Court](#),” for helpful ways to prepare your client for what court will be like. Additionally, CILA's resource, “[How to Prepare for an Individual Hearing: Different Practitioners' Perspectives](#)” is a helpful resource to consult if you are preparing for a merits hearing in immigration court.



Detention space:

- When meeting in a space where the client is detained, 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 to have a productive meeting in which the client feels comfortable.
- Using calming and intentional dialogue (as described [below](#) in [Section III.B.](#)) 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:

- Although this last environment is not as common, the client's home environment may be 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's own 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 address 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 comfort level of your client and build time and space to have a one-on-one conversation with them about how they feel and your observations.
- If you detect discomfort during a video call, a good idea is to quietly address it by writing in the chat or sending a text. This approach ensures that, even if someone can overhear the conversation on your client's end, they will not know you are checking in on your client's well-being or hear their response.

Special Considerations in Working with Family Members

- **Working with Family Members:** Some cases will require that the advocate work not just with the youth but also with their family members. Keep in mind the



duty of confidentiality and privacy owed to clients, even when working with the youth's family members.

- **Confidentiality and Consent:** When discussing confidentiality and consent, it is crucial to set clear expectations right from the start. Explain to both the child and their parent(s)/caregiver(s) that the attorney-client relationship is built on confidentiality, meaning what the child shares with you is private. Inform them that, as standard practice, there will be times when you need to speak with the child alone to ensure the child can speak freely and comfortably, thereby protecting their interests. Start with a meeting that includes both the parent(s)/caregiver(s) and child to explain your role, the goals, and why accurate information is vital. Then transition to a one-on-one conversation with the child, explaining that this private discussion is to better advocate for them and reassure them of your role as their advocate.
- **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. [The National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) provides an [interactive tool](#) to create a safety plan; [1800RESPECT](#) also provides a helpful safety planning [checklist](#). Ensure that you have a safety conversation with the client in private. Asking them in front of someone else might make them feel pressured. If you sense reluctance or the client wants to meet privately but does not want to say this to the person they are with, offer to frame it as your preference or office policy to meet privately with clients. This way, the other person does not realize it is the client's request. Additionally, if you work with a supportive adult to create the safety plan, it may be beneficial for the youth client to be aware of this safety plan, too.
- **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 would 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. For more guidance on discussing parental benefits with youth clients, see the [SIJS](#)



[Parental Benefit Resource](#) by CILA and the [National Immigration Project \(NIPNLG\)](#).

- [Asylum](#): Asylees can petition for a parent if they are granted asylum. The basis for the asylum grant may factor in, however. It is possible, for example, that the government could review the youth's A file and take issue with the fact that the youth's 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 the youth. 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. To start, read CILA's resource, "[Cultural Competence and Humility: Guidance for Legal and Social Services Staff Working with Unaccompanied Children](#)." More information on this topic is also covered in [Section II.E](#).

A client's age, development, and maturity may affect their overall engagement when 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.

There are some helpful questions to contemplate as you consider context. 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? Have they ever interacted with an attorney or advocate? Are attorneys or advocates trustworthy in their country? 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 life. Do not make assumptions or guesses to “fill in the gaps” when working on a client’s case. Learn more about trauma-informed lawyering by reading CILA’s resource, [“Tips for Working with Migrant Youth and Trauma-Informed Lawyering.”](#)

E. 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 a 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.

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. The role play below demonstrates one way to do so.

Role Play: Diego is anxious and 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: Hi Diego, it’s good to see you today. How have you been feeling?

Diego: About the same.

Advocate: *[Provide a safe space and time to explore their feelings and emotions.]* 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. I've been really anxious lately. It's hard to focus on anything.

Advocate: *[Be empathetic while validating their feelings and emotions.]* It sounds like you've been dealing with a lot! Anxiety can be really tough to navigate. I know you've mentioned before that you pray when you feel anxious. Has that been helping?

Diego: Yes, it helps sometimes, but lately, it doesn't seem to be enough.

Advocate: *[Start from where the client is.]* I know that praying is especially important for you, 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 to help you with your anxiety. 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, that's how I feel.

Advocate: *[Recognize the value of the client's beliefs and incorporate them. This is not a limitation but a strength and an opportunity to expand or enhance their internal coping tools.]* Sometimes, it can be helpful to combine what we already know with new strategies. Would you be open to trying some grounding and breathing techniques along with your prayers?

Diego: *(hesitant)* I guess so. What kind of techniques?

Advocate: There are a few simple ones we can start with. For example, grounding is a technique where you focus on your physical senses to help calm your mind. There are also deep breathing exercises that can help slow your heart rate and make you feel more relaxed.

Diego: How does grounding work?

Advocate: Grounding involves paying attention to things you can see, touch, hear, smell, or taste in your immediate environment. It can help you stay present and reduce feelings of anxiety. Would you like to try it now? Maybe doing so will help you know if this is something that could help you.

Diego: Okay, I'll try it.

Advocate: Great! Let's start with something simple. Look around the room and find five things that you can see. Take your time.

Diego: (*looking around*) I see the clock, the window, the books on the shelf, the plant, and the picture on the wall.

Advocate: Excellent. Now, let's focus on four things you can touch. Go ahead and feel them and describe their texture.

Diego: (*touching objects around him*) The chair is smooth, the carpet is soft, the book is rough, and my sweater is warm.

Advocate: Perfect. Next, let's listen for three sounds you can hear right now.

Diego: (*listening*) I hear the ticking of the clock, the hum of the air conditioner, and people talking outside.

Advocate: You're doing great. Now, let's find two things you can smell. They can be anything around you.

Diego: (*sniffing*) I smell the fresh air from the window and the scent of the plant.

Advocate: Finally, one thing you can taste. If you don't have anything to taste right now, you can just imagine a flavor you like.

Diego: (*thinking*) I imagine the taste of my mom's cooking.

Advocate: Wonderful, Diego. How do you feel after doing that exercise?

Diego: I feel a bit calmer because it kept my mind from thinking of my constant worries. It was different, but I liked it.

Advocate: I'm glad to hear that. Remember, you can use this grounding technique anytime you start to feel anxious. It works well with your prayers, too. Sometimes combining different methods can be really effective. Would you like to learn a deep breathing exercise as well?

Diego: Yes, I'd like that.

Advocate: [*Practicing this exercise with your client can foster a sense of normalcy, control, and mutual trust.*] Okay, let's try a simple one called "4-7-8 Breathing." You inhale quietly through your nose for a count of four, hold your breath for a count of seven, and exhale completely through your mouth for a count of eight. Let's try it together a few times. Ready?

Diego: (*nodding*) Ready.

Advocate: (*guiding Diego*) Alright. First, find a comfortable sitting position. Close your eyes if that feels comfortable for you. Inhale... two, three, four... hold... two, three, four, five, six, seven... exhale... two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. How was that?

Diego: It felt good.



Advocate: Excellent. Let's try a few more together. Inhale... two, three, four... hold... two, three, four, five, six, seven... exhale... two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight.

Diego: *(taking a deep breath)* It felt good.

Advocate: That's great to hear. Now, would you like to see how you can incorporate deep breathing with praying?

Diego: Yes, I would like that.

Advocate: *[Create a supportive and non-intimidating environment; ensure client's comfort with the plan.]* Ok. When you begin to pray, start with deep breathing. For example, before each short prayer, take a deep breath in, hold it, and then breathe out slowly. This way, you're combining your prayer with deep breathing. Would you like and feel comfortable practicing with a short prayer?

Diego: Okay.

Advocate: *(guiding Diego)* Let's try a few more together. Inhale... two, three, four... hold... two, three, four, five, six, seven... exhale... two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. Now, say a short prayer. *(Prayer...)*. Again, inhale... two, three, four... hold... two, three, four, five, six, seven... exhale... two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. Now, say a short prayer. *(Prayer...)*.

Advocate: How did that feel?

Diego: Relaxing and peaceful...

Advocate: Excellent. Try to integrate this deep breathing into your prayer routine even if you do not feel anxious. This can help you master these exercises and make it easier and prepare you to readily use them during anxious moments. Next week, we can discuss how this combination is working for you and make any necessary adjustments. Does that sound good?

Diego: Yes, I will try that. Thank you.

Advocate: You're welcome, Diego. I'm here to support you. Let's practice a few more deep breaths together before we end our visit today.

Diego: *[repeats prayer with breathing]*

Advocate: *[Aim to end your meeting on a positive note. While not all challenges may have been resolved, goals have been identified. This can instill a sense of hope and reassures that things will get better.]* I'm glad you found it helpful, Diego. Remember, it's all about finding what works best for you. Combining your prayers with these techniques can give you a stronger toolkit to manage your anxiety. Keep practicing, and we can check in on how you're feeling next time we meet.

Diego: Thank you. I'll practice these techniques.



Advocate: You're welcome, Diego. You're taking important steps, and I'm here to support you. See you next time!

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

Learn more about cultural humility by reading CILA's resource, "[Cultural Competence and Humility: Guidance for Legal and Social Services Staff Working with Unaccompanied Children](#)" and view the May 2024 CILA Symposium presentation, "[Cultural Humility in Trauma-Informed Services: Auditing Implicit Bias to Provide Culturally Humble Legal Support](#)."



CLIENT COMMUNICATION

Section III.



III. 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. Mirroring language can also be helpful, as it can foster connection and understanding. It can involve using similar phrases, terminology, or speech patterns as the youth to help. However, it's important to have a balance; overdoing it or mimicking them excessively could come across as insincere or patronizing. Use their vocabulary for key terms and concepts, which can demonstrate that you are listening and understanding their perspective. Maintain your own authentic speech style while being mindful of their language, as this ensures you remain sincere, and avoid mimicking accents or slang that you wouldn't normally use.

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 tools like 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 III.B.](#) and [C.](#)

Role Play: Felipe is nervous at his first meeting with an advocate.

In this role play, the advocate is meeting with Felipe, an 11-year-old youth from Honduras. He had never left his small, rural community 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: I'm doing okay.

Advocate: Do you need anything before we start?

Felipe: No, I don't need anything.

Advocate: *[Use reflective listening and observational skills to acknowledge Felipe's body language and emotions.]* I see that you are looking around and seem uncomfortable. Is there anything I can do for you?

Felipe: I am a little nervous...

Advocate: *[Validate Felipe's feelings and normalize his nervousness to make him feel at ease.]* I can understand you being nervous. There's a lot going on. Is there anything I can do to make this easier?

Felipe: No, I'm okay. We can start.

Advocate: Great. I'm glad to hear. If you start to feel uncomfortable at any point, you give me a heads-up, and we can pause. Does that work for you?

Felipe: I can try.

Advocate: Would you like to practice saying it?

Felipe: Sure.

Advocate: Would you like for me to go first?

Felipe: Yes.

Advocate: *[Demonstrate the language to ensure Felipe is comfortable speaking up when needed.]* "I need a break, can we please stop?" Now it's your turn to say it...

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

Advocate: *[Provide positive reinforcement to build Felipe's confidence]* That sounded great! How did that feel for you?

Felipe: Not bad, it was good.

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

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



Advocate: Yes, great!

Advocate: *[Recognize potential stress and offer a physical and mental break to support Felipe's comfort.]* You've been doing great so far, Felipe. Would you like to take a quick break to stretch your legs or get some water before we continue? We can pause anytime.

Felipe: Yeah, maybe a quick break would be nice.

Advocate: *[Validate the importance of self-care during stressful situations.]* That's a great idea. Let's stand up, stretch, and grab some water. Taking small breaks can help us feel more refreshed.

Felipe: Okay, thanks.

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

B. 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, and it 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:

- **Validating and affirming.** Recognize and respect the other person's experience, regardless of your own thoughts or feelings. It's important to fully engage with their experience and show empathy. For example, you might say, "That sounds really tough. I can understand why you'd feel hurt and upset." Or you can counter negative thoughts with positive ones. You can approach them with curiosity by asking questions like: "When did you first start having these thoughts?", "What emotions come up for you when you think like that?", "What would you rather believe about yourself?", and "In what way does holding onto this belief benefit you?"
- **Staying strengths-based.** Try to stay focused on the positive side of the conversation, on the client's strengths, positive attributes and abilities, and on what is going well. However, be mindful of not being dismissive of their feelings/emotions/thoughts. Acknowledge their experience, then gently remind them of their resilience or past successes. For example, you can say, "It's understandable to feel this way given what happened. Remember, you've handled



similar challenges before, and you've developed great coping strategies.” Balancing validation with a strengths-based approach ensures clients feel heard and respected while being reminded of their inner strengths and capabilities. Keep expectations manageable, however, so as to not overwhelm your client.

- **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. It may take practice, but it is important to 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.

C. Motivational Interviewing

Motivational Interviewing is a collaborative, goal-oriented style of communication that requires special attention to be given 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 William Miller and Stephen Rollnick's book, *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 are unable to 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 toward the goal of 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 toward 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 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, “It means a lot that you came in to meet with me today. I know that took a lot of courage.” Or “I can see how much you’re dealing with right now, and I respect the strength it took to share this with me.”

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 how they are 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 **OARS** in Motivational Interviewing, access the handouts found online in the University of New Hampshire’s Institute on Disability resource library [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.



Role Play: Eduardo is feeling overwhelmed by school and stopped attending.

Eduardo is a 16-year-old youth from Nicaragua. He moved to Houston, Texas seven months ago. As a new student, he is feeling overwhelmed by school, especially in classes that don't interest him. He struggles with attendance but finds joy in his art class. As his advocate, you meet with Eduardo to explore how best to support him. Using Motivational Interviewing (MI) skills, your goal is to understand his ambivalence about school and help guide him toward positive change.

Advocate: *[Motivational Interviewing (MI) Skill - Open-Ended Questions: Use open-ended questions to invite Eduardo to share his feelings and perspective, encouraging him to explore his reasons for missing school in his own words. This approach helps build rapport and allows Eduardo to take the lead in the conversation.]* Eduardo, I've noticed you've been missing a lot of school lately. Can you tell me a bit about what's been going on?

Eduardo: I just don't see the point. I feel like I'm not good at anything, and it's really stressful.

Advocate: *[MI Skill - Reflective Listening: Use reflective listening by summarizing and reflecting back what Eduardo is feeling. This shows that you are listening carefully helps Eduardo feel understood. This approach also allows him to clarify or expand on his feelings.]* It sounds like school feels overwhelming and you're not finding it worthwhile right now. Is that right?

Eduardo: Yeah, exactly. But part of me knows I should be going; I just can't seem to make myself do it.

Advocate: *[MI Skill - Developing Discrepancy: Develop discrepancy, by highlighting the conflict between Eduardo's desire to avoid school and his recognition that attending school is important. This helps Eduardo see the gap between where he is now and where he wants to be, which can increase motivation for change.]* I hear you. On the one hand, school feels really tough and stressful, but on the other hand, you know it's important. That sounds like a difficult place to be. Is there anything about school that you do enjoy or find interesting?

Eduardo: Well, I do enjoy my art class. It's the one thing I actually look forward to.

Advocate: *[MI Skill - Affirmation: Use affirmation, by highlighting Eduardo's strengths and positive experiences. By focusing on Eduardo's enjoyment of art, the advocate helps Eduardo see that there are aspects of school that he values and that can motivate him to attend more regularly.]* It's great that you have something you enjoy and feel good about. How do you think it would feel to have more days where you get to participate in art class?

Eduardo: I think I'd like that, but I'm not sure how to get through the other classes.

Advocate: *[MI Skill - Evoking Change Talk: Use change talk-eliciting questions to encourage Eduardo to think about solutions and small steps he can take to improve his situation. This helps Eduardo start to take ownership of the change process by considering what actions he*



could attempt.] That's understandable. What small steps do you think you could take to make it a bit easier to attend your other classes, so you can enjoy art more regularly?

Eduardo: Maybe if I start by just focusing on getting through one class at a time, it might be less overwhelming. But I still worry that it won't make a difference.

Advocate: *[MI Skill - Normalizing and Goal Setting: Normalize to validate Eduardo's concerns and doubts, which helps reduce his anxiety. Then shift to goal setting, encouraging Eduardo to start with small, manageable steps, which can increase his confidence and sense of progress.]* It's normal to have those doubts, especially when things have felt so challenging. Starting small and building up could make a big difference. How about we set a goal for the next week and see how it goes? It might help to have a plan and see some progress, even if it's just a little at a time.

Eduardo: Yeah, I guess it's worth a try. I do want to be there for art at least!

Advocate: *[MI Skill - Collaborative Planning: Engage in collaborative planning, working together with Eduardo to develop a plan that will help him achieve his goals. By involving Eduardo in the decision-making process, you can foster a sense of empowerment and ownership over his actions.]* That's a good start. Let's work on a plan together to make it easier for you to get through the other classes and enjoy the parts of school that you enjoy.

Additional Considerations:

Change usually occurs when someone is willing, able, and ready to change, meaning they not only recognize the need for change (willing) but also believe they have the capacity or resources to make it happen (able) and feel mentally and emotionally prepared to take action (ready). This alignment of motivation, confidence, and readiness creates the ideal conditions for meaningful and sustainable change.

If a youth is not yet ready for change, it is important to meet them where they are by using empathy and reflective listening, helping them explore their feelings without pressuring them, and gently increasing their awareness of the potential benefits of change.

As you continue working with Eduardo, allow him to express any remaining ambivalence by using reflective listening, such as: "It sounds like you're still feeling unsure about whether these small steps will make a difference—can you tell me more about that?" This encourages Eduardo to process his doubts openly. Also, encourage Eduardo's sense of autonomy by reinforcing his ability to make decisions about his progress, saying something like: "It's great that you're willing to try focusing on one class at a time—how do you want to track your progress over the next week?"

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



D. Preventing Re-Traumatization

Trauma-informed advocacy emphasizes the importance of minimizing or resisting re-traumatization for individuals who have experienced trauma. It recognizes that clients may have undergone various traumatic events, and re-experiencing such trauma can have negative impacts on their well-being and recovery. A trauma-informed approach aims to create a safe, supportive, and respectful environment that acknowledges the pervasive impact of trauma. 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 about their needs, 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 would 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 converse with them. 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 are discussing that is



triggering your client? Are they giving you cues that they are 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 IV.B.](#)
- 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 with Ana in [Section IV.B.](#)
- If your client is having a reaction to the conversation, explore how they are reacting to understand their feelings and needs.
- 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 to 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.”

Role Play: Sara becomes anxious as she discusses a traumatic event.

Sara is a 19-year-old youth from Venezuela. She recently immigrated to the United States and is living with her mother. She experienced a difficult situation before leaving Venezuela. She feels overwhelmed and anxious as she talks about it with her advocate. Using trauma-informed skills, the goal of the advocate is to help Sara process her experiences and emotions and minimize the risk of re-traumatization.

Advocate: *[Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) Skill - Acknowledge Sara’s emotional difficulty, using empathic validation to ensure Sara feels heard and supported.]* Thank you for sharing what happened, Sara. I can see this has been really difficult for you. How are you feeling right now as we talk about this?

Sara: I'm not sure. I just feel so overwhelmed and anxious thinking about it.

Advocate: *[TIC skill - Reflective listening and emotional regulation: Use reflective listening to validate Sara’s emotions and normalize her feeling of overwhelm. This technique helps de-escalate anxiety by giving Sara space to explore her feelings, promoting a sense of control and safety during the conversation.]* It sounds like this is bringing up a lot of strong emotions for you. Can you tell me more about what is making you feel overwhelmed and anxious?

Sara: It’s just... everything. Remembering what happened, how people reacted, and now talking about it again is really difficult for me.

Advocate: *[TIC skill - Breaking down overwhelming experiences: Help de-escalate Sara’s overwhelming emotions by breaking the situation into smaller, more manageable pieces.]* I hear you. It seems this is affecting you in various ways, beyond just the event itself. What specific part do you think is the most difficult for you right now?

Sara: I think it's mostly the fear of being judged. Every time I talk about it, I worry about what people think of me or if they'll think I did something wrong.

Advocate: *[TIC skill - Validation of emotional responses: Validate Sara’s fear of judgment and use empathic words to acknowledge that Sara’s feelings are legitimate and important.]* That’s a very real and understandable concern. Feeling judged can add a lot of stress to an already tough situation. Have there been times when sharing felt supportive for you, or has it mostly been this difficult to do so?



Sara: There have been a few times talking helped, but mostly it's been hard because of the fear.

Advocate: *[TIC skill - Offering choices and empowerment: Offer choices, ensuring that Sara feels in control of the conversation. This approach helps reduce the risk of re-traumatization by giving Sara agency over how and when she's ready to open up, promoting her sense of safety.]*

It's important for me to understand when and how this process can feel supportive for you. I want to make sure this space feels safe for you. What can we do right now to make this conversation more comfortable?

Sara: Maybe we could take a break? And then, if we continue, it would help if we could focus on one small part rather than everything at once.

Advocate: Absolutely, let's take a break. When you're ready, we can tackle things piece by piece. You're in control of this process, and I'm here to support you however you need.

Sara: Thank you. That helps a lot.

Additional Considerations:

As you proceed with the conversation with Sara continue to check in with her using questions like "How are you feeling now?" to ensure she remains comfortable throughout the conversation. This prevents escalation of distress and helps Sara feel safe. When discussing traumatic events, allow Sara to tackle one small aspect at a time, focusing on manageable pieces. This approach helps avoid overwhelming her and promotes healing in a way that feels less daunting.

You can explore and introduce coping strategies with Sara that she might find helpful during overwhelming moments, such as deep breathing exercises, or mindfulness techniques. You can ask, "Have you tried any activities or practices that help you feel calm when things get overwhelming? Would you be open to exploring a few options together?"

You can explore or practice grounding techniques such as the 5-4-3-2-1 method (naming five things you can see, four you can touch, etc.) can help her focus on the present. Suggest, "When you start feeling overwhelmed, grounding techniques can help you stay in the moment. Would you like to try one with me now, so you can see how it feels?" See the role play in [Section II.E.](#) above for guidance on grounding techniques.

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



SUPPORTING CLIENTS DURING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Section IV.



IV. Supporting Clients During Difficult Conversations

A. Providing Space for Emotions

Our work entails difficult conversations. It also involves 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, at 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.

Role Play: Pedro is conflicted about being in the United States.

In this role play, the advocate is meeting with Pedro, a 14-year-old youth from Honduras. Pedro 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 to Honduras, as he is missing the grandparents who raised him. The advocate utilizes the techniques of reflecting feelings and summarizing in this role play.

Advocate: Great to see you, Pedro. 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?

Pedro: I am not sure about all this.

Advocate: Tell me more about that, Pedro.



Pedro: I don't know. It is hard for me being away from my grandparents. *(Pedro is holding back tears and trying to stay composed.)* It's just that I am not sure I want to stay here in the United States anymore!

Advocate: *[Avoid asking "what" and instead use reflective listening by repeating Pedro's words, a Motivational Interviewing skill.]* You are not sure that you want to stay here in the United States anymore.

Pedro: 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: *[Continue using reflective listening by repeating Pedro's words without judgment or a questioning tone, helping him feel heard and validated.]* Pedro, you have been worried about many things lately. That must be difficult. You have so much on your mind.

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

Advocate: *[Validate Pedro's emotions, acknowledging the complexity of his situation. This demonstrates compassionate listening and reassures Pedro that his feelings are important.]* You are tired, and you just want to go back to your country.

Pedro: I don't know, maybe.

Advocate: *[By repeating Pedro's sentiment back to him, the advocate is encouraging him to clarify his thoughts further. This is a non-directive approach that encourages self-reflection.]* I am hearing that you don't know what you want to do right now, is that right?

(Pedro becomes emotional again.)

Advocate: These are difficult emotions, and I see that they are affecting you. Pedro, you are not alone, maybe you and I together can sort out your thoughts and feelings to help you make sense of them. That way you don't feel like everything is resting on your shoulders, strong as they are! What do you think? Is there anything I can do to help you right now?

Pedro: I don't know.

Advocate: *[Express empathy and support, offering to share Pedro's emotional burden. Frame the problem as something you can work through together.]* Can I ask you a question? ...If you had a magic wand right now and you could have one wish, what would you wish for?

Pedro: For my grandparents to live with me here, and I would not be alone.

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

Pedro: 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 that you feel responsible. Maybe we can find a calling card so you can call them once a week, that way they won't seem so far away.



Pedro: 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. It seems that she is pretty busy these days.

Pedro: 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?

Pedro: No, I don't want to worry her. She has a lot of worries already, I wouldn't want to add to that.

Advocate: I hear what you are saying. How about asking yourself a different question - how has your sister shown you that she cares?

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

Advocate: Yes! She wanted to help you and waited for you when you were in the shelter.

(Pedro nods.)

Advocate: And she made an appointment with the attorney also.

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

Advocate: *[Close the conversation about Pedro's sister on a positive note before switching the conversation to discuss court.]* Right! So, it seems to me that there is a lot of proof that she cares and supports you very much, and I think she would care and would like for you to talk to her about your concerns. Do you think you can set up a time to talk to her?

Pedro: Yes, I think that would be a good idea. Thank you for encouraging me!

Advocate: I'm glad I was able to help. Do you want to talk about court now?

Pedro: Yes, I am ready....

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

B. 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. 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. 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 who is having strong emotional responses is to tell them, “I am so sorry this happened to you. I see that you feel sad and anxious talking about what happened, and that is okay. I have been sad and anxious, too. You are not alone.” Although you have done nothing wrong, some clients have never heard an apology, not from any aggressor(s), nor from their parent(s), nor from anyone in their life. This apology is symbolic, and for some clients, it is important for them to hear. A genuine “sorry” 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 helps 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 bring the client back to 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, and/or insecurity with oneself and/or one’s 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 term “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.

Some grounding techniques can be mental, physical, and self-soothing. An effective grounding mental technique may be to observe and describe—where you can notice your environment without any judgment, bias, or emotion attached the surroundings and take a mental note of what is observed. “The walls are light green, and there are five chairs in this room. I see several house plants—that one has shiny leaves. That one is in a tall vase. I can count the ceiling tiles—one, two, three...” This exercise is mental in nature in that the observer is quieting their mind by remaining objective yet staying alert in capturing their



surroundings through vision and thoughts. You can also encourage a client to mentally note smells or the temperature in the room to help focus them on where they are currently, in a safe space. Another thing the observer can observe and describe is incoming feelings—though still, without attaching judgment or bias. This can help clients identify triggers, understand their emotional reactions, and realize when grounding is needed or when it is time to pivot to another type of exercise. For example, “The room is warm, and I feel like I’m becoming sweaty. I sense that my stomach feels fluttery. As I think about my exam tomorrow, I notice that I feel less relaxed.”

Physical grounding entails focusing on listening to and being aware of their body. For example, ask the client to focus their attention on their breathing and guide them to practice controlled breathing like the 4-4-4-4 method: breathe in for four seconds and then breathe out for four 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, whether it is warm or cold, and ask whether the client is thirsty.

Finally, self-soothing grounding is rooted in 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. Another self-soothing practice could be forward-looking, focusing, for example, on 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 emotional escalation, but it can also help them feel comfortable with the techniques and more willing to use them when needed.

For more tips and guidance on working with trauma-impacted individuals, grounding techniques and de-escalation, please refer to the CILA resource, [Working with Unaccompanied Children: Mental and Behavioral Health Toolkit](#). Additionally, for a demonstration of approaching grounding with a client, see the following role play.



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 when speaking about her father's abuse. Her advocate now needs to review Ana's declaration with her and knows that this could be painful. Ahead of time, her advocate has planned 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: *[Introduce the purpose of the session and set expectations clearly.]* 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: *[Encourage Ana's autonomy by offering options on how to approach the declaration.]* 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. 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: *[Gently remind Ana about coping strategies and prepare her for potential emotions.]* 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: *[Proactively prepare Ana for the possibility of emotional distress. Offer trauma-informed care by anticipating triggers and offering a plan for managing them.]* I'm 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 today. I would like for us to be prepared for that. What do you think about us planning in case this happens?

Ana: Ok.

Advocate: *[Emphasize the importance of self-awareness and teach Ana how to recognize early signs of emotional distress.]* As we talked about earlier, it is 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 reacts. 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 is important that if that happens again you tell yourself and me to take a break. Do you agree?

Ana: Yes.

Advocate: *[Reinforce grounding techniques and remind Ana of her coping tools.]* The next thing is to remember that sometimes our mind can trick us, and it can feel like you are 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 declaration?

Ana: Yes.

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

Advocate: *[Recognize Ana’s distress and offer a pause.]* I can see that reading the declaration is bringing up emotions that are difficult for you. Do you want us to take a break?

Ana: Yes...I think so.

Advocate: *[Allow Ana as much time as she needs to feel better. Do not rush her or the situation.]* How can I help you right now? Can I get you anything?

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

Advocate: *[Gently address Ana’s conflicting feelings and offer her reassurance.]* 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 is 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: How long have you felt like that? Tell me more about that....

Ana: A while. I feel that all of this happened because of me. That it's my fault...!

Advocate: *[Reassure Ana and help her reframe her sense of guilt.]* 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: *[Suggest a break for healthy redirection.]* How about taking a break to stretch our bodies and take several deep breaths?"

Ana: Yes, ok.

(Ana takes a break, stretches, drinks water, and practices deep breathing. Once she resumes reading the declaration, she becomes upset again.)

Advocate: *[Recognize Ana's distress and activated the plan.]* 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: *(she nods)*

Advocate: Say to yourself, "Today is *(insert date)*, and I'm in a safe place, I am with safe people, and I am safe."

Ana: Today is *(insert date)*, and I am in a safe place, I am with safe people, and I am safe.

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

Ana: Today is *(insert date)*, and I am in a safe place, I am with safe people, and I am safe.

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



C. 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 for you.

Many advocates experience uncomfortable emotions or even secondary trauma after having these difficult conversations. Some advocates who have experienced trauma in their own lives have a strong emotional reaction because the client discloses something that closely resembles an experience the advocate had or witnessed. Find adequate time to explore your reactions after you have a difficult conversation with a client.

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 a 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 listening attentively to important information that can help the youth. We never want to lose sight of the reason we are there.

Professionals working alongside and empathetically advocating for survivors of violence and negative circumstances may experience indirect trauma themselves through exposure to their clients’ trauma. As you communicate with clients who have experienced trauma, consider the impact of that trauma on you as well and think about ways to protect yourself from experiencing various or secondary trauma. Think about what may trigger you and how you can set professional limits to advance your client’s interests while protecting your emotional state.

If you need to take a break and pause the conversation, 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 suggesting to the youth that perhaps you would both benefit from taking a break—to both get some water, take a brief walk, get some fresh air, or do a grounding exercise together. If instead you need to wrap up the meeting earlier than planned, that is okay as well, though you should have a plan to meet again with the youth so they understand you will follow up. If you know in advance of a meeting that the conversation will be heavy, dwelling on traumatic experiences, or



triggering for you, consider preparing for the meeting with a colleague. If you are co-counseling a case with another attorney, consider asking that attorney to lead and guide the conversations that make you feel anxious or uneasy.

D. 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, seek support from a colleague or supervisor. Remember to ask for help and that you are not alone. Your organization may have policies or procedures for addressing crisis situations. It is helpful to learn about these protocols and any guidance before an emergency arises, as well as any key contacts. If you are not aware of any emergency procedures for your organization, ask your supervisor if your organization has any, or if they can provide any helpful guidance.

Consider whether your client has any alternate contacts and/or emergency contacts that you should notify and communicate with during a potential emergency. Ensure that you have your client's permission to speak with those individuals. Also, if the client you are working with has a mental health provider, that may 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:

- The National Alliance on Mental Illness provides helpful guidance if you need to [call 911](#) when there 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](#).



Reviewing all of the nuances that go into emergency planning is beyond the scope of this resource. For example, certain factors at play could include ethical obligations, potential liability, dire health needs, privacy, confidentiality, insurance/funding for health coverage, law enforcement response, and more. However, it is important to think through how you would respond if different types of emergencies arise. Many times, the response will depend on your organization's approach and the specific facts related to the emergency.

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. That may mean support with food assistance, healthcare access, and/or a safe space to live or to meet. Keep this in mind and, if time allows, consider researching local resources for information 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](#).



ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Section V.



V. Ethical Considerations

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 below 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. More information can be found on the ABA's Center for Professional Responsibility's *Resources* [webpage](#).

Depending on your role and background, state rules may govern your licensing and practice as a social worker. In addition, the [National Association of Social Workers \(NASW\) Code of Ethics](#) provides guiding standards that may 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. Be aware of your team's structure and 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 mandatory reporting requirements that you should be aware of. These will vary per state.

Some ethical rules frequently arise including the following ABA Model Rules: [Rule 1.2 Scope of Representation](#), [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.

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\(a\)](#), [Rule 1.14\(a\)](#), and [Rule 1.14 Comment 1](#).

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.

Keep in mind that professional duties for attorneys and social workers can differ, vary by state, and be impacted by the organization's structure. If social workers are part of the legal team, this can have implications for issues such as an attorney's duty of candor, the attorney-client privilege, mandatory reporting obligations, and confidentiality. For additional information on these topics, see CILA's recorded training "[Considerations and Strategies for Integrating Social Services and Legal Teams Serving Unaccompanied Children](#)," (from 0:51:16 to 1:02:15:), the ProBAR written resource, "[Blueprint for the Integration of Social Work Within Immigration Legal Services](#)," and the Vera Institute of Justice and Los Angeles Center for Law and Justice's written resource, "[Integrating Social Service Staff into Immigration Legal Teams in California](#)."

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 within your organization's structure. After gaining an 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.

If there is a situation when you need to involve a third party to obtain or share information, it is generally necessary 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.

For additional information on ethics see the [CILA Pro Bono Guide: Working with Children and Youth in Immigration Cases](#), the ABA's [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](#)," and CILA & Loyola's [Considerations for Tender-Aged Children in Immigration Court Proceedings](#). Also, read CILA's blog posts, "[Prospective Clients & Conflicts of Interest in Unaccompanied Children's Cases](#)" and "[Protecting Unaccompanied Children who are Not Competent to Participate in Removal Proceedings](#)."



BUILDING RAPPORT

Section VI.



VI. Building Rapport

Rapport-building is fundamental to having difficult conversations with child clients. Good and steady rapport between the advocate and youth creates a professional relationship of mutual trust, communication, and understanding—all of which are key elements in trauma-informed advocacy. Building rapport may make the youth feel more comfortable and at ease in speaking with the advocate, and, consequently, may assist the youth in processing and engaging with the advocate during difficult conversations.

When working with children and speaking with them about sensitive topics, best practice is to not dive into the complex, delicate issues of the case or the child’s background immediately upon meeting them. Take the time to get to know the child and understand them on a personal level—as the child will likely be more receptive in talking and collaborating with the advocate if the advocate expresses interest in the child’s life. Absent rapport, a client may feel defensive or violated by certain questions or conversation topics broached by a stranger—even if the intention is to help.

A standard model on building rapport with youth does not exist, as youth vary in age, lifestyles, and interests. Each youth is unique. Some good topics to consider as starting points may include asking the youth about their hobbies, favorite things, and day-to-day life. CILA’s resource “[Tips for Working with Migrant Children and Trauma-Informed Lawyering](#)” also provides information on rapport building and provides a list of ideas to further engage youth. In addition, the National Center for Child Traumatic Stress resource “[Psychological First Aid for Unaccompanied Children](#),” may be helpful. Depending on the case and child, if possible, it may also help to have a meeting or a portion of a meeting where the purpose is to do an activity or game together to further build trust and develop the working relationship before engaging in a difficult conversation. During a difficult conversation, it can be helpful to practice mindful breathing. And after a difficult conversation, it can be helpful to reserve time for a grounding exercise to prevent the child from leaving the meeting feeling overwhelmed.

Practical Tips: How to Approach Sensitive Issues with a Client

- Keeping notes on the youth’s answers to rapport-building questions can help you remember this information over the long-term. Asking follow-up questions or bringing these topics up at later meetings shows the child that you pay attention to them and keep their case in mind.
- As you ask your client questions to learn more about them and build rapport, consider sharing information about yourself, too. For example, if your client says they have a pet dog—and you also have a pet dog—you can share that you have a dog, too, and maybe even share a picture of your pet. Engaging in conversation



and being open with your client in these general opening conversations can show your client that you want to get to know them as a person, and that they are more than the trauma they have suffered.

- Here are some general life questions that may assist you with building rapport: “Tell me about your family. Do you have any siblings? When is your birthday? Do you have a favorite holiday, and/or do you have a favorite season or a favorite time of year? Do you have any pets, and what is your pet’s name? Do you have any pictures of your family or your pet? Who lives with you? Who did you live with before you came to the United States, and who do you live with now?”
- If the child is enrolled in school: “How is school going? Are you enjoying any classes at school? Are you making friends at school? How far is your school from your house? Do you wear a uniform to school? Do you ride a school bus? What do you like to do outside of school? Do you eat meals at school, can you tell me what you had at lunch at school today?”
- Take the time to ask your client about their favorite things to do or things that they enjoy. For example: “Do you have a television, and if so, what television shows or movies do you enjoy? What do you think of the United States so far? Have you tried any new foods? Do you have a favorite food or candy? Do you have a favorite singer/song? What is your favorite animal? Do you have a favorite sport or game to play? Oh, I like *fútbol*, too! Who is your favorite player or your favorite team? Did you used to play in your home country?”
- Asking your client about customs and cultural aspects of their home country and giving them the space and opportunity to discuss these things may bring them a sense of community and home that they may long for. Consider asking your client about their community, culture, and other aspects of their background to understand your client. For example, “I would love to learn more about where you came from. I know that you are from Honduras, and you mentioned that you’re from a small town. Can you describe it to me? What does it look like—are there many trees and mountains? Thank you for sharing that, that sounds beautiful. Can you tell me about your favorite dish that you liked to eat in Honduras?”



TYPES OF DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS WITH A CLIENT

Section VII.



VII. Types of Difficult Conversations with a Client

A. Overview

There are many potentially challenging issues that advocates may face when working with clients. This section covers several of these issues, providing background information and general considerations, as well as some practical tips and pointers to engage in conversations with a client on these issues. There are also additional resources relating to these scenarios.

This section of the resource is designed to be a user-friendly tool that you can easily access before and/or during a difficult conversation with a client. To help make the resource more navigable, the topics covered are included below with a direct link to the location in the resource.

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

- [Teen Dating Violence](#)
- [Unstable Housing and Homelessness](#)
- [Sex and Labor Trafficking](#)
- [Pregnancy and Reproductive Rights](#)
- [Gender Identity and Sexuality](#)
- [Mental Health](#)
- [Past and Current Abuse and Harm](#)
- [Suicidal Ideation and Harm](#)
- [Grief and Loss](#)
- [Inconsistencies and Credibility](#)
- [Timeline and Case Demands](#)
- [No Relief and Removal Order](#)

Sometimes, having a difficult conversation with a client after an issue arises (such as one of the challenges included 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 they lead to 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.

B. Teen Dating Violence

Many adolescents confuse jealousy for love and fail to recognize control over their autonomy when 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 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. For some, 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 their situation, 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 protection under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). 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.

Teen dating violence may not be the only form of relationship abuse that an advocate observes. Advocates may work with clients in relationships that are otherwise toxic due to power imbalances. Relationships involving unbalanced power dynamics may include differences in age, finances, immigration status, positions of employment, and resources (for example, housing), and these power dynamics directly impact the ability for the partner with less “power” to provide consent in the relationship. That is, when one partner maintains power over the other, the other partner may feel pressured to say “yes” or feel as though they do not have a choice in the relationship.

Vulnerable populations may be at a higher risk of falling into an imbalanced relationship and leaning onto an individual who promises to “provide” stability and security, and in engaging in the relationship, they may believe that the relationship is on equal footing and that they are able to provide true consent to sexual relations and other aspects of the relationship. However, consent is a façade and cannot be truly given when one partner holds greater relationship power over another. For example, in situations where there is an age gap between partners, consent can be complicated even if the relationship is “legal.” The older partner may have much more sexual experience than the younger partner, and the younger partner may feel as though they must live up to that expectation in providing sex. The younger partner may also be in high school, lack a job, live with parents, only engage with those their own age in social circles, lack a vehicle, or lack income—all things that an older partner may use as pressure points to influence the younger partner to stay in the relationship or have sex.



Practical Tips: 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. For example, consider whether the youth is experiencing emotional abuse such as isolation, control, insults, or threats.
- As an advocate, it is important to be aware of signs that might suggest your client is experiencing domestic violence. While not every sign will be indicative of abuse, recognizing these signs can prompt you to ask questions and provide the right support and resources. The following are some of the signs you should be aware of:
 - Bruises (various stages of healing), cuts, or other injuries that they might explain away as clumsiness or accidents.
 - Your client may mention being discouraged or even prohibited from seeing friends or family.
 - Clients may seem unusually anxious, jumpy, or overly concerned about pleasing their partner or might exhibit signs of fear, such as avoiding eye contact or shutting down when discussing their partner.
 - We know clients cancel or do not show up for appointments from time to time. This can occur for many reasons, but this can also be a sign they are being controlled or monitored by their partner.
 - The client may mention not having access to money, identification documents, or their phone.
- Bringing up the topic of domestic violence can be challenging, yet so important to have. We have included some conversation starters that can help you approach this conversation with your client:
 - "I want to make sure you are feeling safe and supported. Is there anything about your living situation or relationships that makes you feel uncomfortable or unsafe?"
 - "I've noticed you seem a bit anxious today, and I just want to check in. Is there anything on your mind that you are worried about or something you are going through that you would like to share?"
 - "How are things going at home or with your partner? Sometimes relationships can be difficult, and if there is ever anything you need to talk about, I am here to listen."
 - "Many people go through situations where they do not feel in control or where someone else is making decisions for them. If that is something you ever experience, I can connect you with resources or someone to talk to."



- 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 a [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 working relationship with the youth, it is also important to confirm that you have the best and safest communication methods. For example, is it safe to leave a voicemail using the phone number you have on file or are there preferable alternative contact methods? Also inquire if it is safe to send them emails or letters—whether their mail is secure or if they think someone may be reading their communications. Discuss what is safe to include in a voicemail and writing or not.
- 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 you as their advocate to know. Also, try and find something you have in common with the youth, as this will help build rapport as you are conversing. Remember to keep in mind though that rapport with clients should remain professional and not encroach any boundaries. It is generally not advisable to compare experiences.



Sharing something in common may be something simple, rather than something deep. It depends on the situation and person, as it is also okay to show your own vulnerability and humanity. Yet be careful not to share anything that can be burdensome or redirect the focus.

- 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,” or if there are stereotypes regarding males that they cannot be raped or abused.
- 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 support 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 their 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, anger management, substance use treatment, etc. It will depend on the factors of each case, but generally in adjudications, it is helpful to show rehabilitation efforts.

- Consent is complicated and may be difficult for clients to grasp in this context, especially for those from other cultures and countries. Try to break it down into child-friendly terms and start simply. Maybe do not start with power dynamics at first, ease into it at the basic level, “Do you know what ‘consent’ means? Consent is the ability to give permission. Can you give me examples of when you have given consent? Let’s walk through some examples together. You gave me consent to talk to you about your asylum case today and to read this document, for example.” For a role play that demonstrates more discussion of consent, see below in [Section VII.B](#).
- From there, continue the discussion with relationships, for example, “Healthy relationships are built on trust and mutual respect. They are also built on consent. We just discussed consent, right? So, in a relationship, if there is consent, what does that mean?” Asking the client questions throughout the conversation ensures that they are participating and following along.
- If the client tells you that they are in a relationship, you can ask if they feel safe and if they are able to provide consent. “Thank you for sharing that you are in a relationship. Do I have your permission to ask about your relationship? (receives affirmative response) Thank you. How do you feel in your relationship, does it feel safe? Are you able to make choices and give consent?”
- If your client discloses facts about the relationship that give you cause for concern about differences in power dynamics, you should take the time to discuss consent in that context. “Sometimes, when someone is in a relationship with someone else who is older and who has all this other stuff that they are providing for the other person, the other person becomes dependent on the ‘provider’ or person who has more ‘power’ in the relationship. And then they feel like they have to say yes to everything, like sex or all the relationship choices—such as who to hang out with or what to do. That person with the power ‘calls the shots’ in the relationship, and the other person says ‘yes’ because they don’t feel like they don’t have a choice. Have you heard about that before? See, the person is giving consent and saying ‘yes,’ but it’s not really a ‘real’ yes.”
- Consider, “I understand that you now live with Michael, he drives you to school and work, and he gives you an allowance. Do I have your permission to ask you some further questions about your relationship? If Michael did not provide you with those things—if he was a normal boy in your high school, not seven years older, and not giving you those things—would you still say yes to sex and stay in



the relationship? Do you feel like you can really say no? Can we talk about that further? This is a safe space to think about that, I promise.”

For additional information on approaching this topic see the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) and the [National Center for Victims of Crime](#). For relationship support and resources, especially for youth visit [Love is Respect](#). Additionally, [Esperanza United](#) provides information and resources for immigrants experiencing domestic violence. For information on immigrants experiencing domestic violence and their rights visit the [Women’s Law](#), the [National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights](#) and the [National Immigrant Women's Advocacy Project](#).

Role Play: Luisa is dating an older man and her mother has expressed concern.

In this role play Luisa, an 18-year-old youth from Peru, is meeting with her advocate. Luisa recently reunited with her mother in Texas. Luisa's mother is worried about her daughter’s secrecy regarding a romantic relationship, which Luisa eventually discloses involves a 24-year-old man. Her mother has expressed her concern to you—the advocate—about the relationship. The purpose of this role play is not to get into the ramifications of a situation that involves statutory rape, which may involve ethical obligations, mandatory reporting, law enforcement, and more. As context for the role play below, assume the advocate has reviewed their state laws to ensure that statutory rape laws are not implicated because Luisa began a romantic relationship after reaching the age of 18 and the age of consent is 17. Because they are not, any legal protections for youth are not the focus of the discussion with Luisa. Instead, the advocate's goal is to discuss healthy relationships, power dynamics, cultural norms, and consent while using Motivational Interviewing and cultural humility to ensure Luisa feels supported and empowered to make informed decisions.

Advocate: Hi Luisa, it's really nice to see you again. How have you been adjusting to living here with your mom? I know it can be a big change, especially after being apart for a while.

Luisa: Yeah, it’s been okay. A little different, but I'm getting used to it. My mom’s happy I’m here.

Advocate: *[Use reflective listening to validate Luisa’s feelings and encourage her to share more.]* It sounds like it’s been a bit of an adjustment, but you’re managing well. It must be nice to be back with your mom, even if it’s a bit different.

Luisa: Yeah, it is. But she worries a lot, you know? Sometimes it feels like she doesn’t trust me.



Advocate: *[Use empathy and validate her feelings to build trust and encourage openness.]* I imagine that can be frustrating, especially if you feel like you've grown a lot during the time you were apart. It's natural for moms to worry, but that doesn't make it any easier on you.

Luisa: Yeah, exactly. She doesn't understand that I'm not a little kid anymore.

Advocate: *[Gently introduce the topic of relationships, with open-ended question to explore Luisa's thoughts.]* It sounds like you're really trying to show her that you're mature and responsible. Part of growing up is figuring out relationships, too. How have things been going with that? Any new friendships or anything else you've been excited about?

Luisa: Well... I have a boyfriend, but I don't really talk to my mom about him. She wouldn't understand.

Advocate: *[Use reflective listening to validate Luisa's feelings and gently probe further.]* It sounds like you care about him, but you're worried about how your mom might react if she knew. That's a tough spot to be in.

Luisa: Yeah, she's old-fashioned. She thinks I'm too young to be dating. But I'm not a kid anymore.

Advocate: *[Affirm Luisa's autonomy while beginning to explore the relationship.]* You're right, you're growing up and figuring out what's important to you. It's great that you feel confident in your decisions. Can you tell me a bit more about your boyfriend? How did you two meet?

Luisa: He's 24. We met through some friends. He's really nice to me, and he understands me more than people my age.

Advocate: *[Use cultural humility while exploring the cultural context and avoid judgment.]* It sounds like he's someone you feel really connected to, which is important. In some cultures, relationships with older people can be viewed differently. How do you feel about the age difference between you two?

Luisa: I don't really think about it that much. He's mature, and I like that. People my age just seem so immature.

Advocate: *[Explore Luisa's perspective and begin to introduce considerations around age differences.]* It makes sense that you'd appreciate his maturity and the way he treats you. Sometimes, though, it can be helpful to think about how those differences might impact the relationship. Like, have you ever talked about your future together or what each of you wants from the relationship?

Luisa: Not really. We just hang out and have fun. I don't know... sometimes I feel like he makes the decisions, but that's because he's older and knows more, right?

Advocate: *[Explore power dynamics and emotional boundaries.]* It makes sense that you'd appreciate his maturity. But sometimes, with an age difference like this, it's important to think



about how it might affect your relationship. Does he listen to you when you talk about what you want or how you feel?

Luisa: Yeah, I mean... I guess. He's just more experienced, so sometimes I just follow his lead.

Advocate: That's understandable. But do you feel like he respects your boundaries? For example, if you say you're uncomfortable with something or you want to do something different, does he listen to you and respect that?

Luisa: Sometimes... I guess I don't really speak up all the time because I don't want to argue.

Advocate: *[Be direct with your questions about respect and boundaries, especially if this involving sexual relations.]* I hear you. It's really important that in any relationship, especially one with an age difference, your boundaries are respected—whether that's emotional or physical. Are you two being physical or having sex? And if so, do you feel like he listens to you when you say no or set limits?

Luisa: We are, yeah... I mean, he's always nice, but sometimes I feel like he's a little pushy, you know? Like if I'm not in the mood, he'll keep trying, until I cave in.

Advocate: *[Highlight consent and power imbalance.]* It's really important that he listens to you when you say no or aren't in the "mood." You have every right to say no at any time, and he needs to respect that. Even though you're in a relationship, consent still matters. It's not just about saying yes or no one time; it's about making sure you're always comfortable and not feeling pressured. Do you feel like he respects that?

Luisa: I guess... sometimes I feel like he doesn't really think it's a big deal, but I don't want to make him mad.

Advocate: *[Encourage reflection on healthy relationship dynamics and emotional safety.]* That's really important to talk about, Luisa. In a healthy relationship, both people respect each other's boundaries and feelings—whether it's about sex, spending time together, or making decisions. It shouldn't be about one person pushing the other, and you deserve to feel comfortable saying no at any point without feeling guilty.

Advocate: *[Help Luisa feel empowered by evaluating the relationship and consent.]* When you think about your relationship, do you feel like you're able to speak up for yourself and be heard, or do you feel like he has more of the control?

Luisa: I don't know... I feel like he makes the decisions most of the time because he knows more, but now that I think about it, maybe I do need to say more about what I want.

Advocate: *[Reaffirm Luisa's autonomy and boundaries.]* That's really important, Luisa. You have every right to speak up for yourself and set boundaries that make you feel safe and comfortable, no matter your age or experience. I'm here to help you think about what's best for you and to support you in figuring out how to communicate that.



Luisa: I mean, I don't feel pressured or anything, but I guess sometimes I just go along with what he wants.

Advocate: *[Empower Luisa by providing information about consent and legal information in a non-judgmental way.]* You deserve to feel like an equal in any relationship, no matter the age difference. It's really important that both people respect each other's boundaries and that you feel safe and comfortable making decisions together. Here in the United States, there are laws that protect young people in relationships with older individuals, and there are different cultural norms related to age differences when one person is a minor. For example, if you were 16, this could be a very different conversation because the law would prohibit sexual relations between you and your boyfriend, and he could be found guilty of a crime.

Luisa: I didn't know that.

Advocate: Yes, the laws are meant to protect youth in relationships. These laws recognize that an older person can have more influence or control and seek to ensure that youth are protected.

Luisa: But he's not trying to control me. He's just older.

Advocate: *[Affirm her feelings while gently encouraging further reflection.]* I hear you, Luisa. It sounds like you really care about him and don't feel like he's intentionally trying to control you. At the same time, it's good to think about what you want and need in a relationship. You deserve to be with someone who values your input and makes sure you feel just as important as they are.

Luisa: Yeah, I get that. I just don't know what to do.

Advocate: *[Offer support and reinforce Luisa's autonomy in decision-making.]* It's okay to feel unsure. What's most important is that you take your time to think about what's right for you. I'm here to help you explore your options and figure out what feels best. Whether that's talking more about what a healthy relationship looks like, to discussing how to communicate with your boyfriend, or even thinking about how to talk to your mom—I'm here for you.

Luisa: Thanks... I think I'd like to talk more about it, maybe figure out how to make sure things are good between us.

Advocate: That sounds like a great idea. We can definitely talk more and work through this together.

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



C. 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 may be 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.

Practical Tips: How to Approach the Issue with a Client

- In your conversations with youth, 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, consider exploring 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, do not try to 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 their 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.

For additional information on approaching this topic see the [National Runaway Safeline](#) or call 1-800 RUNAWAY (1-800-786-2929) for youth who have run away from home. For help finding shelters or seeking resources, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services provides resources through its webpage [Help for Families & Youth](#), and they offer an [interactive map](#) to locate shelters around the United States. To better understand the rights and services available to immigrant students experiencing homelessness, you



can explore resources offered by the [National Center for Homeless Education](#). Additionally, [School House Connection](#) offers resources and support specifically for immigrant and migrant students facing homelessness. Lastly, [USA Hello](#) provides a guide to finding housing for immigrants and refugees.

D. 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 some cases, the youth’s family or sponsor may have enabled, encouraged, or facilitated trafficking of the youth.

Immigrant youth are sometimes 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 sharing information about their situation. This could also mean that a youth may not be able to seek help or feel empowered to share information 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.



Practical Tips: 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, owing a sum of money to their sponsor, and/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? If they are not relatives, how did they meet? How long have they known each other?
- A red flag should be raised for you 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?
- Consider the dynamics with advocates as well. Does the sponsor control the youth or prevent them from meeting with 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 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, view the recorded presentation from CILA’s Symposium, “[T Visa Practice Updates & Best Practices for Children and Youth](#),” presented by Lauren Fisher Flores and Alexa Sendukas, May 2023.

E. Pregnancy and Reproductive Rights

Some immigrant youth arrive at the border pregnant, aware or unaware of the pregnancy. Upon apprehension and before placement in ORR, youth receive a brief assessment of their physical health, during which time they are prompted to disclose their pregnancy. Most youth answer truthfully, but sometimes they are unaware that they are pregnant.

Once the youth arrive at an ORR 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 and the paternity. Sometimes they know the biological father, although some are reluctant to explain who that person is. For the ORR clinician, this often becomes a reporting concern, since the father may be older, and the child or youth may be a survivor of abuse, assault, or exploitation. Advocates should be aware of the mandatory reporting requirements related to child abuse in their jurisdiction and how it affects their role.

Some children and youth do not know who the father is. Others may be in a relationship with or married to the biological father, and perhaps the youth traveled to the United States with them, got separated during the journey, or are waiting on their partner to join them. In some cases, the child or youth is no longer in a relationship with the biological father.

Youth and children are then asked how they feel about being pregnant and offered either prenatal care or information about the alternatives, such as family planning or abortion. The ORR UC Manual of Procedures, [Section 3: Services](#), addresses procedures when a



minor is pregnant and/or requesting an abortion at 3.4.3.B. 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 and in accordance with [ORR Field Guidance No. 21](#) and the [ORR Policy Guide](#). A pregnant youth may be placed in Transitional Foster Care with a family, a smaller shelter setting, or, when capacity is lacking, remain in larger congregate care. There are several shelters nationwide that have programs which aid pregnant youth. Youth without sponsors might also be placed in Long Term Foster Care or the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors program, which includes placement with a family or in a group home. If they do have a sponsor, the youth is given the choice, if over the age of 14, as to whether to disclose their pregnancy to the sponsor or to maintain confidentiality.

Pregnant youth released from ORR to live with a sponsor should provide their attorney with their ORR packet during the meeting to initiate representation. Though the packet will have notes about the client's disclosures related to pregnancy and the medical documents confirming the pregnancy, the attorney should—in a child-friendly and healing-centered manner—confirm the information in the assessment, ask if any updates need to be made, and see if any additional details should be included. See the “Practical Tips: How to Approach the Issues with a Client” section below for some suggestions on how to begin this conversation. Clients may also become pregnant after coming to the United States. In this situation, the attorney should talk with the client about the pregnancy, as described *infra*, and see how that factors into the client's existing case.

No matter the timing—whether a youth enters the United States pregnant or if they become pregnant after entering the United States—attorneys should determine if any facts surrounding the pregnancy lend to eligibility for legal relief. They should also discuss the pregnancy to understand if the attorney needs to refer the child to a social worker for further support.

Social workers can collaborate with pregnant youth in several important ways to ensure their needs are met and they receive the necessary support. First, they can offer trauma-informed resources to help youth cope with the challenges of pregnancy while transitioning out of detention—ensuring a smoother adjustment to their new environment. Social workers can work alongside the youth to create a care plan that addresses their physical, emotional, and social needs. This might include connecting them with prenatal care providers, mental health services, parenting classes, or housing assistance and helping them navigate these complex systems. Social workers can consider non-clinical and culturally connected social supports including community mom groups and socializing



opportunities, including nursing support groups like [La Leche League](#) and teen and/or first-time mom support groups at local non-profits.

Social workers can also advocate and ensure the youth's voice is heard and taken into consideration in decisions about their care and legal matters. Additionally, they can help facilitate communication between the youth, their sponsor, healthcare providers, and legal representatives to ensure all providers are working together to help address all aspects of the youth's well-being.

Attorneys should discuss reproductive rights in the United States with unaccompanied youth, including a pregnant client's options. The discussion should include information regarding their state's laws surrounding abortion or termination. It is helpful to know how far along in the pregnancy your client is, to understand how the information will pertain to them. Youth may have estimates as to how far along they are in their pregnancy, but it can be important for advocates to confirm this information with shelter staff.

If a client has yet to see a medical provider or does not have their next appointment scheduled but is considering termination, the attorney should convey the need for medical care and the key element of time implicated in states' abortion laws. See [below](#) in this section's "Practical Tips: How to Approach the Issues with a Client" for an example on opening this conversation with a client.

Attorneys working with pregnant immigrant youth should become familiar with their state's laws on abortion access, potential restrictions on obtaining an abortion, and other factors implicated in post-[Roe v. Wade](#) conversations surrounding reproductive rights. Check out Planned Parenthood's "Is Abortion Still Accessible in My State Now That Roe v. Wade Was Overturned?" [map](#) to see whether abortion access is still available and, if so, what restrictions are in effect, if any. However, the laws change quickly, so attorneys and advocates should also consult AbortionFinder's [State-by-State Guide](#) for the most current and comprehensive updates to states' abortion access laws.

[ORR Field Guidance 21](#) (last revised November 2022) provides information relating to the care and treatment of pregnant unaccompanied immigrant youth and for unaccompanied youth needing reproductive healthcare while in ORR custody. Advocates working with unaccompanied immigrant youth should familiarize themselves with this field guidance. Among its many provisions, one of the key provisions is that ORR will make all reasonable efforts to secure a legal abortion for a pregnant youth who requests the procedure. ORR must prioritize placing pregnant youth and survivors of sex-crimes in states without abortion bans and with broad access to reproductive health care for minors.



Pregnancies generally involve regular medical appointments with consultations to monitor the mother and child’s health. Having regular physician’s visits are important. Advocates can ask clients who have been released whether they have identified a treating physician or need resources in order to connect with one. Local resources may be most helpful, but advocates might also share information about the [Migrant Clinicians Network](#) with clients. If the client moves forward with pregnancy and is aware of their estimated due date and milestone doctor’s appointments, advocates should keep track of these dates in the case notes. The attorney can determine if any scheduled hearings or important deadlines conflict with the estimated due date and then see what advocacy may be needed to change any dates.

Certain factors—including trauma, a history of mental health distress, and lack of support—make an expectant mother more prone to experiencing [postpartum depression \(PPD\)](#) and/or [postpartum anxiety \(PPA\)](#) following childbirth. Understandably then, pregnant immigrant youth may be at an elevated risk. Attorneys should regard this with case plans and expectations after the client gives birth but also take this into particular consideration from a lens of compassion as well, in case the client needs referrals to social services for support. PPD and PPA are medical conditions requiring medical intervention, and postpartum mothers cannot prevent their onset.

Practical Tips: How to Approach the Issues with a Client

- Pregnancy is a sensitive topic. Generally, youth of all ages are not comfortable discussing sex with adults who they do not know, and delving into pregnancy may bring up sex, family and personal relationships, consent, medical history, and more. The child’s pregnancy may be more physically or emotionally complicated for the youth than the practitioner is aware, too. All of this to say, it is likely that the youth will be reluctant or hesitant to have this conversation—which is why rapport matters.
- Ease into the conversation and establish confidentiality at the outset. Refrain from immediately pointing out the client’s pregnancy, even if it is visually obvious. Consider: “Thank you for sharing that about yourself. Can we go through some information in your ORR packet together? Can I ask you some questions about this document?” As the conversation progresses, best practice is to confirm the information and ask if anything additional should be noted—keeping the conversation child-friendly and giving the child choices throughout. “Thank you for being open and honest with me and for being willing to go through these documents with me. Can I read this document to you? This document is a medical exam. *Show client.* This shows that on this date indicated on the document, you were eight weeks pregnant. Does that sound right, is that correct? Thank you for confirming that for me. Now, I need to ask if there are



any updates about the pregnancy or additional details that I should be aware of. Please let me know if you need to take a break or if you want to take a pause during the conversation, okay? To start, we confirmed you were pregnant while in ORR custody, are you still pregnant? Okay, thanks for confirming. How far along are you? How are you feeling—are you doing okay? Have you gotten medical care or seen a doctor yet? I see, thank you for letting me know. I understand, it can be hard to find a doctor who you're comfortable seeing. Would you like me to connect you with my office's social worker? She can help connect you to an immigrant-friendly doctor and some other resources. I'll only connect you to her with your permission, but my team's social worker is a person we can trust to help you with your pregnancy as we work on your case."

- To create a safe space for a youth to speak freely about their pregnancy, best practice is to ask the youth if they want to talk to you privately rather than have their sponsor present.
- Advocates should keep in mind that if the child found out about the pregnancy via medical testing in ORR, they may still be processing that information and reconciling that with their new life in the United States. Maybe the youth does not have a plan; maybe they have not told their sponsor; or maybe they have shut down after receiving the news. Perhaps even, due to maturity or age, the child is not concerned with the pregnancy or does not want to think about it. Situations like these may indicate that the child does not have support or that they are emotionally dysregulated and need help.
- Many pregnant teens may feel shame, sadness, fear, or guilt due to their pregnancy. Ensure the child that you are coming from an objective, judgment-free place in the questions that you ask and the information that you give. It can be helpful to explain why you need to ask certain questions, and how the information you request will be used to advocate on the client's behalf.
- "Abortion" or "termination" may be hot-button words to clients who come from certain religious backgrounds or from countries where it is an outlawed procedure. Some youth may be misinformed about abortion procedures or lack information about abortion altogether. A client may immediately become defensive or feel ashamed when those words come up, they may shut down, or they may ask to stop the conversation. If your client seems to be misinformed about abortion and/or focused on stigma because of cultural norms, ask them if they would like more information. An advocate can inquire, "Can I provide you with some medically verified sources that explain abortion?" The advocate can also indicate that maternal healthcare may involve a number of reproductive health options, including termination of a pregnancy.
- Abortion and pregnancy laws in the United States can be confusing for an individual arriving from another country. Attorneys can explain, for example, "In the United States, each state has different laws for abortion or termination of pregnancy depending on different factors, like time and the circumstances of the



pregnancy—rape, incest, age of the mother, or danger to the mother’s health. There is not one broad law across the country. For example, in our state, the law says that abortions can be obtained up until this (*describe*) point and under these circumstances (*explain*). To contrast, in this other state, they do things differently—individuals can access abortions later than our state and with fewer restrictions (*explain*). That’s how it is in the United States. Does that make sense to you? Do you have any questions about that?”

- Child-friendly language is important, though understandably, it may be difficult to find child-friendly words to discuss reproductive rights. Consider the following for younger children, “Sometimes, a person doesn’t want to be pregnant, and a doctor can help with that decision.”
- Advocates should be prepared to speak objectively on reproductive rights and pregnancy and provide facts and accurate information.
- Center the youth when you are talking to them about pregnancy but also throughout the case—remind them of their value, personhood, and autonomy outside of their pregnancy. They are still a youth, after all, and they still have interests like other children, though they are preparing for parenthood. Ask them about school and their homelife and see if they have a community to support them throughout pregnancy and parenthood. Even after they become a parent, ensure that their individual needs are met, and continue to check in on the youth as an individual—not just as a parent.

For additional resources to share with youth, see Planned Parenthood’s [“For Teens”](#) webpage that allows them to explore various topics including sex, birth control, STDs, going to the doctor, relationships, and more. For new parents, advocates can share resources like the [Parent Stress Line](#), offered by Parents Helping Parents and available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with translation services. Another resource that advocates can provide to Spanish-speaking pregnant youth is [MothertoBaby’s Spanish website](#), which houses a plethora of information related to gestational and reproductive health, including [250 fact sheets](#) about medical conditions and vaccines during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

Role Play: Dora is pregnant and needs help understanding her options.

In this role-play, Dora, a 15-year-old from Mexico, meets with her Advocate. Dora recently reunited with her aunt and just found out that she became pregnant after a brief relationship during her trip to the United States. Overwhelmed and unsure about her options, Dora seeks guidance. The advocate’s goal is to provide Dora with clear and compassionate information about her pregnancy options, support her in making an informed decision, and ensure that she feels cared for and not alone during this difficult time.



Advocate: Hello, Dora. I am glad that we are meeting today. Your aunt shared with me that you received unexpected news that you are pregnant. I want you to know that I am here to support you in everything you need. This is a safe space; we can talk about it and process this news at your pace. How are you feeling right now?

Dora: I'm scared. I didn't expect it at all. I don't even know what to do. I only had a short relationship with a guy I met on the trip. I feel so alone.

Advocate: *[Use reflective listening to validate Dora's feelings and encourage her to share more.]* It sounds like you're feeling really distressed and insecure about what's to come. It's completely normal to feel this way, especially with everything you've been through. Can you tell me a little bit more about what you're thinking or feeling right now?

Dora: I don't know what my options are. It's just that I don't want to make a mistake or choose something and regret it later.

Advocate: I understand. This is a big decision, and it's important that you take your time to think about your options. Let's talk about what you're considering so you can feel more informed and confident about the possibilities out there. Do you have any ideas about what you'd like to do?

Dora: I haven't really thought about it much. I don't even know what my options are or what they mean. I'm very worried.

Advocate: *[Provide clear and compassionate information about the options available, ensuring Dora feels supported.]* Okay, Dora. It's important to go through this step by step. There are several options you can consider:

- **Parenting:** If you decide to keep the baby, you'd be making a plan for how to care for the baby, including where you'll live and how you'd manage things like school and health care. There are resources and support systems available to help young parents.
- **Adoption:** This means choosing a family that can raise and provide a permanent home for the baby. This may be an option if you feel like you can't care for the baby right now. There are agencies and counselors that can help you with this process.
- **Termination of pregnancy:** This option consists of aborting the pregnancy. It's important to know the procedures and potential implications so that you can make an informed decision. There are medical professionals who can provide you with information and support.

We can talk more about each of these options, and I can help connect you with resources and people who can provide more detailed information.

Dora: I don't know what's best for me. I don't have anyone to talk to about this and I'm afraid of making the wrong decision.

Advocate: It's normal to feel insecure and worried. This is a big decision and it's important that you take the time you need. You don't have to make this decision alone. You can talk to medical



professionals, counselors, and support groups to learn more to help you think about what's best for you.

You also have the right to seek support from people who care about you and who can help you evaluate your options. I'm here to support you through this, whether you need someone to talk to, help accessing resources, or just a listening ear.

Dora: I think I'd like to learn more about each option before I decide. I want to make sure I understand everything.

Advocate: [*Affirm Dora's choice and provide next steps.*] Sounds like a good plan. I can help by connecting you with professionals who can provide you with more details about each option and answer any questions you may have. We can also talk about any worries or fears you have along the way. Remember, it's all about finding what's best for you, and it's important to make a decision calmly.

Dora: Thank you. I feel a little better knowing that I can talk to someone about this.

Advocate: I'm glad to hear that, Dora. You don't have to go through this alone. To start, I have here a couple of brochures from [Planned Parenthood](#) that cover parenting, adoption, and abortion in more depth. You can review them when it's convenient for you, and we can talk about anything in them if you'd like to learn more.

Dora: I'll think about it more and read these booklets. I'll let you know when I'm ready to talk more.

Advocate: That sounds good. Just remember that you can reach out to me or your social worker if you have any questions or need support. We'll support you through this process, and we're here to help.

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

F. Gender Identity and Sexuality

Discussing gender identity and sexual orientation can be key to working with immigrant youth—whether in the detained or the released context. Asking questions about sexual orientation and gender identity is often a part of performing an intake. These aspects of a youth's life may be motivators for their journey to the United States and/or the foundation for their 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 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 identity 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.

Practical Tips: 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 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 after setting up a free [CILA account](#).
- Some children may not understand what you are asking, so initially asking the question directly is 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 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.”

- In Spanish, gender pronouns are traditionally gendered, with *él* (he) for masculine and *ella* (she) for feminine. Recently, gender-neutral pronouns like *elle* have been introduced to be more inclusive of non-binary individuals. Similarly, Latinx and Latine have emerged as gender-neutral alternatives to Latino and Latina. Latinx is widely used in the United States, particularly in academic and activist circles, though it has faced criticism for being difficult to pronounce in Spanish. In contrast, Latine is gaining popularity among Spanish speakers for being more natural and easier to pronounce, as it replaces the gendered "o" or "a" with an "e." Both terms and pronouns aim to promote inclusivity and reflect evolving understandings of gender identity.
- 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. 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 for Working with Migrant Youth and Trauma-Informed Lawyering.”](#) Additionally, view CILA’s webinar, [“Being an Ally: Working with and Advocating for LGBTQ+ Unaccompanied Youth”](#) and [“Best Practices for Serving LGBTQIA+ Unaccompanied Youth.”](#) To learn and understand more on non-binary vocabulary in Spanish you visit the following online sources: [Sobre el lenguaje incluyente: ¿Es correcto utilizar la ‘e’ para referirnos a personas no binarias? ¿Por qué?, Tú, yo, elle y el lenguaje no binario](#) and [Trans and Non-Binary Identities in Spanish: A Guide for Students](#). For a role play demonstrating one way to approach a conversation with a youth about gender identity and sexual orientation, see below.

Role Play: Pascual’s advocate discusses gender identity and sexual orientation with him.

In this role play Pascual 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 New York. He is meeting with his advocate who is following up on some questions related to the original intake. His advocate needs to ask Pascual about his gender identity and sexual orientation.

Advocate: Hi Pascual, thank you for being here with me today. I know we’ve had a lot of conversations about different parts of your life and your journey. Before we get started, I thought it would be nice to hear something funny or interesting about your day. Is there anything you’ve done recently that has caught your attention or made you feel good?



Pascual: Hmm... well, I guess drawing. I tried drawing for the first time in a long time. It didn't come out perfect, but I liked it.

Advocate: That's great! Drawing can be a good way to relax and express yourself. What did you draw?

Pascual: I drew my dog, Nacho. I miss him very much. Only his nose did not come out well. As to everything else, it looks like him.

Advocate: Yes, I imagine you miss Nacho a lot. You know, I have two dogs too. One is called Camila and the other Luna. They can be mischievous, but I love them very much!

Pascual: Are they big?

Advocate: No, they are both small, but they sure can eat a lot.

Pascual: Nacho eats everything, even shoes.

Advocate: Yes, Camila and Luna get into everything. Well, changing the subject a little, today it's my turn to be a little meticulous. I'd like to talk to you about a topic that may seem quite personal: things like gender and sexuality. We have these conversations with all the young people we work with because it helps us understand each person's needs and gives us the opportunity to offer the best support possible. I know these questions can sometimes seem awkward and I completely understand if that's the case.

Pascual: Why do you have to talk to me about this?

Advocate: *[Add context to why these questions are asked.]* The reason I ask these questions is to help identify any needs or challenges that may arise for you. It could even be relevant to your immigration case. For example, if you've faced difficulties because of your gender identity or sexuality, knowing that can help us advocate for you in the best way possible.

In the United States, people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or otherwise have certain protections under the law. Sometimes people face challenges or discrimination based on their identity, and if that's your situation, I want to make sure you know the protections, rights, and support available to you. Does that make sense?

Pascual: I think so. But, hmm, I'm not quite sure what you mean by... gender and sexuality. Aren't they the same?

Advocate: *[Provide a clear and brief explanation and check for understanding.]* Excellent question. Many people wonder the same thing. Gender identity and sexual orientation are connected, but they are not the same. Gender identity is how you feel about yourself, whether you feel like a boy, a girl, something in between, or something else. It's about how you understand yourself in terms of being a man, a woman, or another identity. *[Pause briefly for him to absorb this.]*



Then, there's sexual orientation, which has to do with who you're romantically or physically attracted to, that is, whether you feel that way about guys, girls, both, or neither. Does it make sense so far?

[You can also choose to use a visual like the "Gender Unicorn," as this might help the youth understand better this topic.]

Pascual: Yes, I understand.

Advocate: To help explain it a little more, I have a graphic of the [Gender Unicorn](#) that I can show you. This image can help to understand the differences between gender identity, gender expression, sex assigned at birth, sexual attraction, and romantic attraction.

So, think about this: *[Point as you read about each part of the unicorn's body.]*

- Gender Identity: One's internal sense of being male, female, neither of these, both, or another gender(s).
- Gender expression: This is how you show your gender to the world through clothing, behavior, and other forms of presentation.
- Sex assigned at birth: This is how you were assigned at birth based on the physical characteristics of your body.
- Sexual attraction: This refers to who you are physically or sexually attracted to.
- Romantic attraction: Refers to who you are romantically attracted to, which can, but does not always, align with sexual attraction.

Did this help clarify the differences and how they are related but distinct?

Pascual: Yes, I think so. So, if I feel like a boy, is that my gender? And if I... or if you like or are attracted to someone... Is that sexual orientation?

Advocate: *[Normalize Pascual's answer and reassure him.]* Exactly! It's totally okay to take your time to figure this out. Some people know right away, while others may feel unsure and need more time to explore. You don't need to have all the answers right away. Do you have any questions?

Pascual: I guess... I'm not quite sure how I feel or think about my gender identity or sexual orientation. I haven't thought much about it. Sometimes I think about girls, but I'm not sure how I feel about anything else.

Advocate: *[Reassure and offer support.]* It's completely fine, Pascual. It seems like you're still figuring things out, and that's perfectly normal. It's about what feels right for you. The most important thing is that you feel safe and supported as you explore these feelings. *[Pause briefly to allow it to process.]*



If it helps, I can share some resources, reading materials, or names of organizations that support people in exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity. Or if you prefer, we can talk more about how you're feeling right now.

Pascual: Perhaps... More information would help.

Attorney: Absolutely. Everyone's experience is unique, and the most important thing is what feels right to you. I'll share some resources that can help explain more about different identities. And remember, we can go as slow as you want and revisit any topic when you're ready. Thank you again for trusting me to have this conversation with you.

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

If Pascual 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.

G. Mental Health

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. Be mindful that only licensed clinicians and doctors should diagnose an individual.

Many times, in situations where clients have experienced past trauma, these prior experiences affect their mental health. For example, a client may experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after experiencing trauma or resulting depression or anxiety. 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. Children may also have a mental health condition unrelated to their prior experiences and traumas.

Regardless of how they came about, it is very common to work with a client with mental health condition(s). Keep in mind that some clients may already be engaged in mental health therapy. In other situations, you may wish to make that recommendation for a referral to a mental health counselor and/or for a psychological evaluation based on



information your client has provided and your observations when speaking with and working with your client.

Remember there may be stigma surrounding mental health in many communities and cultures. Therefore, it is important to be gentle with clients when addressing or discussing mental health conditions and the potential for treatment or a related evaluation. Additionally, there is often a lack of information related to mental health conditions generally and how to access services. Normalizing mental health needs and relating them to physical health issues—to discuss the issues as part of overall health and wellbeing can be helpful to try and overcome the stigma that is sometimes perceived.

Unfortunately, situations may also arise where the child expresses suicidal ideation or self-harm. More information on these topics is covered below in [Section VII.I](#).

Practical Tips: How to Approach the Issue with a 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 to 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/psychiatry 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/psychiatric evaluation or engage in mental health counseling. The decision is entirely up to them, and no one will force them to do anything that they are not comfortable doing.



- 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.

For additional information on mental health read CILA's [Working with Unaccompanied Children: Mental and Behavioral Health Toolkit](#) and CILA's [Emotional Wellness Workbook for Youth](#) that is available in both English and Spanish. Additionally, review "[Guidance for Mental Health Professionals Serving Unaccompanied Children Released from Government Custody](#)," created by the Stanford Early Life Stress and Resilience Program, National Center for Youth Law, and the Center for Trauma Recovery and Juvenile Justice.

H. Past and Current Abuse and Harm

Situations of abuse frequently come up in children's immigration cases, so be prepared for conversations on this topic. It can be clearly understood that these issues frequently come up in children's immigration cases by simply looking at the type of legal relief children typically seek including SIJS, asylum, U visas, and T visas—all forms of humanitarian protection with eligibility requirements that can relate to prior abuse and/or harm. The way issues of abuse are addressed by an advocate depends on many factors including the nature of the abuse, who the perpetrator is and their role in the child's life, and the timing of the abuse/harm—whether it is active or in the past.

Attorneys should keep in mind their ethical obligations when issues about harm or abuse come up. [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..."



Additionally, consider whether you are a mandatory reporter or not in your state, depending on state law. Also consider your organizational structure if you work on an interdisciplinary team (legal and social services) any other internal organizational rules or policies that may be relevant if you learn of any current or prior abuse that your client has suffered. Familiarizing yourself with the state law and your organizational policies at the beginning of your position is necessary so you are prepared to handle these situations as they arise and so you can clearly communicate your role and obligations early in the relationship.

Practical Tips: How to Approach the Issue with a Client

- 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.
- 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 III.B.](#) 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.](#)
- 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 to minimize any re-traumatization of the client. It may be impossible to avoid depending on the situation and client, but advocates can do their best to minimize any re-traumatization by the way they discuss these issues and trying to limit the number of times information is reviewed. See tips included in [Section III.D.](#)
- If the child is currently not safe, then 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 VII.B.](#)

For additional information review CILA resources including [Working with Unaccompanied Children: Mental and Behavioral Health Toolkit](#), [Pro Bono Guide: Working with Children and Youth in Immigration Cases](#), and [“Tips for Working with Migrant Youth and Trauma-Informed Lawyering.”](#) Additionally watch recording of the CILA webinar, [“Caring for Yourself While Advocating for Your Clients Working with Clients Living with Domestic or](#)



[Intimate Partner Violence](#)” and the CILA Symposium presentation, “[Vicarious Trauma: Best Practices for Serving and Honoring Sexual Abuse Victims.](#)”

Role Play: Carlos is experiencing bullying at his new school.

In this role play Carlos, a 14-year-old who recently immigrated from Venezuela with his family, is experiencing bullying at his new middle school where he is in 8th grade. The bullying has left him feeling isolated, vulnerable, and unsure of how to respond. The advocate's goal is to provide Carlos with emotional support, explore his feelings and experiences related to the bullying, and explore him with strategies to address the situation and regain his confidence.

Advocate: Hi Carlos, it's good to see you again. How have things been going for you at school? I know starting at a new place can be tough, especially after such a big move.

Carlos: It's okay, I guess. Just different. People here are... different.

Advocate: *[Use reflective listening to validate Carlos's feelings.]* Yeah, I can imagine it's a big change. Sounds like you're noticing some differences that might be hard to get used to. What's been the hardest part for you so far?

Carlos: I don't know... Some kids just aren't nice. They say stuff, make fun of my accent, or where I'm from.

Advocate: *[Use empathy and validation to encourage Carlos to share more.]* That sounds really tough, Carlos. It's not fair that you're being treated that way just because you're from somewhere else. Can you tell me more about what's been happening?

Carlos: They call me names, like “*mojado*” or “illegal.” Sometimes they push me in the hallways, or they laugh when I answer questions in class. I try to ignore them, but... it's hard.

Advocate: *[Use empathy and normalize Carlos's feelings.]* It sounds really painful, and it's completely understandable that it's hard to ignore. No one should have to deal with that kind of treatment. How do you feel when this happens? What do you usually do?

Carlos: I just try to get away from them or stay quiet. I don't want to cause any problems, but... it makes me feel like I don't belong here.

Advocate: *[Use reflective listening and validate Carlos's experience while exploring his emotions.]* It's really hurtful when people make you feel like you don't belong, especially when you're just trying to fit in and do your best. It sounds like you're doing your best to stay out of trouble, but it's getting harder to deal with the situation.

Carlos: Yeah... I just miss how things were back home. I didn't have to worry about this stuff.

Advocate: *[Use cultural humility and acknowledge the challenges of adjusting to a new environment.]* I can see how much you miss home, and it makes sense that it was easier when you didn't have to deal with this kind of behavior. Moving to a new place is already hard enough,



and having to face this on top of it is really unfair. What do you think would help you feel safer or more comfortable at school?

Carlos: I don't know... I just want them to stop bothering me. But I don't want to tell anyone because it might make things worse.

Advocate: *[Explore options with Carlos and use Motivational Interviewing skills to empower him.]* It's understandable to feel worried about speaking up—sometimes it can feel like that might just make things harder. But there are ways to address what's happening without putting you in a difficult spot. For example, there might be a trusted teacher or counselor who can help without making it obvious that you spoke up. Or we can talk about ways you can handle these situations, so you feel more confident. What do you think?

Carlos: Maybe... I don't know who I'd talk to. I just don't want to get anyone in trouble.

Advocate: *[Validating Carlos's feelings and gently encouraging action while ensuring his safety and comfort.]* I understand, Carlos. It's clear that you're thinking carefully about how to handle this, and I get that you don't want to cause any trouble for anyone. But your safety and feeling respected at school are really important. How about we think together about someone you might trust, even a little, to talk to? Or we can come up with some strategies you can use when those kids start bothering you.

Carlos: I guess there's one teacher who's nice. She's from Venezuela too, so she might understand.

Advocate: *[Affirm Carlos's idea and reinforce his autonomy in making decisions.]* That sounds like a great idea, Carlos. It's a good plan to reach out to someone who might understand where you're coming from. We can think about how you might start that conversation, if you want, or I can help you practice some things to say to those kids, so you feel more prepared. What do you think would help the most right now?

Carlos: Maybe I can try talking to the teacher... But I'd like to know what to say to those kids, too. I don't want them to keep thinking they can just push me around.

Advocate: *[Provide practical support and reinforce Carlos's confidence.]* Absolutely, Carlos. We can definitely work on that together. You deserve to feel strong and confident, and there are things you can say or do that can help set boundaries with those kids. We'll figure out what feels right for you, so you feel ready the next time they try to mess with you.

Carlos: Yeah, okay. I'd like that.

Advocate: I'm really proud of you, Carlos, for wanting to take steps to stand up for yourself. You're not alone in this, and I'm here to support you however you need. We'll keep working on this together until you feel safe and respected at school.

Carlos: Thanks. It helps to know someone's on my side.



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

I. Suicidal Ideation and Self-Harm

Legal and social service providers working with unaccompanied immigrant children must familiarize themselves with the signs that their clients are self-harming and/or at risk or committing suicide. Your organization may have policies in place for situations involving self-harm and suicidal ideation. If you can, familiarize yourself with these guidelines in advance. Planning for situations of increased 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. If your client is undergoing a mental health crisis or if they have recently experienced a major loss, they may be at an elevated risk of suicidal ideation. Please reference [Section VII.G.](#) for further context on mental health. Knowing the cues and signs are critical to knowing how to help in your role.

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..."

Self-harm may be an indicator that a client is feeling suicidal, but that is not always the case. Self-harm in itself may be a sign of severe emotional distress that requires outside intervention. Self-harm is not always obvious—it may involve cutting or other acts of self-inflicted physical acts of distress to one's body, including scratching, hair tugging or pulling, biting or gnawing, head banging, or burning. Eating disorders—such as bulimia, anorexia, and binge-eating disorder—are also self-harming.

Having a client express that they want to commit suicide is a heavy thing to grasp and navigate, but practitioners must act quickly to assess the signs, the urgency, and the next steps. 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](#).



Practical Tips: How to Approach the Issue with a Client

- 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. A client may also 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 de-escalate 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 make a safety plan with the youth. Ask them scaling questions, "On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not so much and 5 being all the time, how often have you thought about 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 be taken seriously, 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. 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.

For additional information, review CILA's [Working with Unaccompanied Children: Mental and Behavioral Health Toolkit](#), a comprehensive guide on collaborating with youth who are undergoing mental distress. Also check out the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's webpage [What to do when someone is at risk. The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) is an invaluable resource for those in crisis and needing help with self-harm. Individuals can 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, and advocates can also call if they need support or help. Additionally, [Crisis Text Line](#) (in [Spanish](#)) offers different ways to assist those engaging in self-harm to help ground them and cool down, where individuals can [Text HOME to 741741](#), [Chat](#), or [WhatsApp Message](#) to connect with volunteer Crisis Counselors from anywhere and at any time. Crisis Text Line also provides information and resources for those recovering from self-harm and for those supporting individuals who struggle with self-harm.

J. Grief and Loss

As you work with an immigrant youth, you will likely encounter that they have lost something that they are grieving in their own way. 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. Whatever the situation may be, you may inevitably have to talk to your client about grief or loss since it will likely impact your working relationship. In this section, we have narrowed the information to relate to a child's grief following the death of an individual close to the child rather than other kinds of loss. For more information regarding migratory grief and loss, you can refer to CILA's [Working with Unaccompanied Children: Mental and Behavioral Health Toolkit](#).

Death is a major event to process for anyone of any age. Understandably then, one may expect an intense display of grief from a child who witnessed death firsthand or suffered a great loss. Many children are aware of death as a phenomenon from an early age. Death appears in movies, religious teachings, books, videogames, and news—and of course it happens to everyone and everything that is living. Children may know what death is and likely perceive it to be negative, and they probably fear death. However, due to age and understanding, children may not realize that death is permanent and that the living carry on—at least until they experience a loss.

Some children may have intense and emotional reactions to talking about the loss of a loved one, or the discussion may bring up the child's own fears of death, survivor's guilt, or outright and blatant denial. A child survivor who grieves a loved one—who was also a past aggressor/abuser to the child—may have complicated and confusing feelings fluctuating from anger to sadness to relief. A child may have difficulty processing past events or may have feelings of being stuck in the past with difficulty being present and seeing the future. Youth may also have fears related to losing others in their life and/or to their own well-being and stability. All around, death evokes complicated feelings for everyone and especially children, and advocates working with immigrant youth can play a role in helping the youth process their grief healthily and with positive coping skills.

Your clients may have experiences or stories that involve the death of friends, loved ones, or community members. Sometimes, children will talk about family members who passed away from age or disease, but sometimes, a child may have an experience with a loved one who was persecuted, murdered, tortured, or who did not otherwise die of natural causes. Sometimes these deaths play a role in the child's claim for legal relief, and in some cases, the child may have witnessed or been somehow connected to the death. Some youth were surrounded by death in their home countries due to national conflict, natural disasters, poverty and lack of resources, and/or organized crime. For example, it is often the case that children who grew up surrounded by community violence or gang-motivated



crime witness gang-perpetrated deaths. While attorneys may want to talk with a child about a loss from the lens of determining if the death ties to legal relief, attorneys and other advocates should approach the topic sensitively, compassionately, and with great attention to the client's feelings and grief process.

Grief is an individualized experience, and many factors affect how one grieves. We all grieve in different ways, and there is no 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. Be patient in your work with the child as grief often lives with us and changes over time.

As said above, 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.

Practical Tips: How to Approach the Issue with a Client

- While child-friendly language is encouraged all throughout this resource, when it comes to talking to children about death, best practice is to avoid euphemisms when talking about the actual act of dying. Oftentimes, adults do not want to frighten or overwhelm children and opt to use more palatable words, but doing so will only confuse the child. For example, if someone likens "sleeping" to dying to comfort a child, the child may instead develop a fear of sleeping or believe that death isn't forever and will struggle to process. Avoid saying things like "he just went to sleep" or "she is just dreaming; you will see her again."
- You can still be a supportive presence while using more direct language. Mind your tone when you speak, and act as a calm presence for the child, and be direct and clear with your words.
- If the child witnessed a death, and this plays a role in the child's legal claim, broach the topic gently, informing them of the purpose of the conversation. "I know you witnessed your brother's death two years ago. That must have been very difficult and scary for you. I'd like to ask your permission to talk about that day so we can prepare the supporting documents for your case. Is that alright? We can take breaks, pauses, or divide this conversation into another meeting, too, if it's too much to talk about at once."



- Avoid forcing the client to talk about the loss or their grief if they exhibit reluctance or if they falter during the discussion. Also, avoid forcing them to talk to you if they do not want to—even if it is for the sake of their case. You may have to work up to that point. Try: “I’m here to support you if you want my support, and if you want to talk about it, I’m here to listen whenever you’re ready. If you need time—that’s okay. If you do not feel comfortable talking about it with me, I understand—grief is personal. Can I ask you if there is anything I can do to put you at ease or to help you feel more comfortable?”
- Provide support for your grieving client by being a listening ear, and express that you are sorry for what they have experienced. Pause throughout the conversation to establish your role as the listener. Express empathy. Try to normalize their experience and affirm that grief can be confusing. “Death is a major experience in our lives. I can see that experiencing that loss has been very difficult for you and your family. It is okay if you don’t know how to feel about it yet—or if you know but don’t want to talk about it. Grief is confusing, it can make us feel many things.”
- Sometimes, discussing the possibility of life after death may bring comfort to a grieving child. If they prompt the topic, you can ask the child if they would be comfortable sharing what they believe about the afterlife or their cultural understanding of death.
- 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. “Can you recall a time before in your life when you were very sad, but you did something that made you feel better? Would you like to tell me about it, and maybe we can try it now—with your permission?”
- See if the youth has support in their personal life. 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. “Do you have anyone to lean on or support you while you go through this time? Is your sponsor comforting you? Would you be interested in resources or professional support?”
- Being vulnerable and open with the youth about grief can make the youth feel less alone. However, tread carefully. There is a fine line between normalizing their grief and minimizing it. Since there are different types of grief, be mindful of dissimilar and out-of-touch comparisons. For example, comparing moving to a new state, a new school, or loss of identity is *never* appropriate to compare to the death of a loved one. Instead, consider why this is appropriate instead, “Leidy, I know how difficult it is when a parent dies, it is very hard to go through. I’m sorry you are experiencing that. You’re not alone. My dad died when I was



younger. If you want to ask me questions about coping with that loss or if you want to share your feelings, I understand.”

- o Some children were exposed to death semi-regularly and are hardened to it. Think, for instance, of a child who fled a war-torn country. Thus, you may work with a client who blankly or casually discusses deaths they have been tied to or are familiar with, along with the nitty gritty details. This may be jarring for you as the practitioner, or you may find yourself pleasantly surprised that things are “okay.” Know that just because things seem “okay” on the outside, this could be the child’s response to trauma.

For additional information on talking with child clients about grief and loss, you can check out The Hackett Center Trauma & Grief Center’s [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](#), a bereavement center which can provide support and information in [English](#) and [Spanish](#) to those who are grieving; and CILA’s [Working with Unaccompanied Children: Mental and Behavioral Health Toolkit](#).

Role Play: Delia’s mother passed away and she needs help navigating her grief.

In this role play, Delia, a 15-year-old youth from Honduras, is meeting with her advocate. Delia recently experienced the devastating loss of her mother during their migratory journey, leaving her to navigate her grief and trauma alone in a new country. The advocate, aware of Delia's painful experience, aims to provide a safe and supportive space for her to express her feelings. The goal is to connect her with appropriate resources, and help her begin the healing process, all while ensuring she feels understood and cared for during this difficult time.

Advocate: Hi, Delia, it’s nice to see you again. I want to start by saying how truly sorry I am for your loss. I can only imagine how hard it must be for you right now.

Delia: Thank you. It’s been really tough.

Advocate: *[Show empathy and validation.]* I understand. Losing someone important can be incredibly painful, and it's natural to feel overwhelmed. Remember, you don't have to go through this alone.

Delia: I feel like I don’t know what to do. Everything feels different and hard.

Advocate: *[Express compassion and offer practical support.]* It makes sense that everything feels different. It’s a huge adjustment, and it’s normal to feel lost. I want to help you find the



support you need to get through this. There are some resources and people who can offer you support during this time.

Delia: What kind of support?

Advocate: *[Provide information about available resources.]* There are counselors and therapists who specialize in grief and trauma. They can help you work through your feelings and provide you with strategies to cope with the pain. There are also support groups where you can talk to others who have experienced similar losses. Would you be interested in learning more about these options?

You can show and introduce resources for mental health professionals and support groups that could be of help to Delia. You can mention organizations like the [Dougy Center](#), which specializes in grief counseling for youth and provides resources in both English and Spanish. You can also help locate grief support near Delia's. For Delia's specific situation, you might also suggest contacting Latino mental health organizations that provide culturally sensitive care, such as Mental Health America's "[En Español](#)" resources. In addition, you can offer to follow up with a list of nearby counselors or organizations that offer Spanish-speaking grief counselors. You can recommend that Delia reach out to [Therapy for Latinx](#), a directory of therapists who provide culturally competent care for Latinx communities.

Delia: Maybe... I don't really know what to expect.

Advocate: *[Offer reassurance and explain the process.]* I understand. These professionals are there to listen and help you at your own pace. You can talk about your feelings, and they can help you find ways to manage them. It's a safe space where you can express yourself without any judgment. If you'd like, I can help connect you with someone who can explain things in more detail and answer any questions you might have. *[You can also offer to connect Delia with resources like the [Crisis Text Line](#) (text or call 988), which provides 24/7 emotional support in various languages.]*

Delia: That sounds like it might help.

Advocate: Great. I can connect you with a counselor who has experience working with young people who have gone through similar experiences. I'll give you their contact information and help set up an appointment if you'd like. You don't have to make any decisions right now, but it's good to have the information available.

Delia: Thank you. I think I'd like to have that information.

Advocate: Of course, Delia. I'm here to support you, and I want to make sure you have the resources you need. Please remember, it's okay to reach out for help.

Delia: Thank you for helping. It means a lot to me.



Advocate: Absolutely. Take your time with this and remember you're not alone. I'm here to help in any way I can.

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

K. Inconsistencies and Credibility

Ideally, advocates and clients can develop a professional relationship built on a foundation of mutual trust that can continue throughout the development of the life of the case. However, that is not always the situation. Instead, sometimes, an advocate may encounter a child who misremembers critical facts of their story, who tells a different story every time they see the advocate, or who gives the advocate reason for distrust. Addressing problem areas with the client's consistency and credibility may seem challenging or particularly sensitive for advocates working with adolescents. Keep in mind that honesty is imperative to the child's legal case, and advocates must be prepared to engage with clients about inconsistencies or credibility issues the moment they arise. Additionally, [attorneys must keep in mind Rule 3.3 of the ABA Model Rules regarding candor toward the tribunal.](#)

In general, if an inconsistency arises, it is helpful to contemplate whether a potential inconsistency is a misunderstanding rather than immediately assuming it is a lie. Remember that trauma can cause children to forget, omit, or change certain details out of fear, shame, or doubt. The pressures of court or talking with strangers may also induce confusion or fear for a child and cause them to say things that they do not particularly mean or intend to say. Take note of inconsistencies to follow-up and address as soon as possible, and remember factors in the child's personal history that may contribute to that inconsistency.

However, clients, including children, do not always tell the truth. It is the attorney's role to try to work through the issue—to try to get understanding to correct the issue, if needed, and to continue to maintain and build trust for a working relationship. The nature of the lie and what it is about will direct what actions the attorney needs to take because ethical issues may be raised in this situation. Depending on the case, the client, the falsehood itself, and/or the frequency of any lie(s), the attorney may have to consider the case plan, case strategy, foundation of the case and the client's eligibility for legal relief, and/or whether ethical representation can continue.



Practical Tips: How to Approach the Issue with a Client

- 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. People may get defensive if their credibility is called into question. Incorporating a grounding or centering exercise is particularly helpful if you know you are going to have a difficult conversation about credibility or if there is potential for the conversation to escalate.
- 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 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. For instance, you can explain that at the Asylum Office interview, the asylum officer may refer the case to EOIR after they determine the child to have negative credibility.
- Explain that inconsistencies, even the smallest ones, can have a larger effect on an agency's decision to grant or deny relief. You can try to explain with hypothetical examples with similar facts to the child's case to demonstrate and drive the point home. After you have explained the hypothetical, ask the child if they see the differences between the inconsistencies and how that would play out in real life, "Can you explain how that story is different from this one? What is the difference? What do you think the judge would say about the differences?"
- Sometimes, after determining that the child lied about something, it may help to say something like, "let's start this conversation again," to try to have a re-set or do-over on the conversation. Give them the opportunity for a fresh start to explain the issue without lying. Let them offer an explanation. Try to take your ego out of the conversation, and approach the situation with kindness and without judgment, even if you need to be direct or clear in what you say. Affirm



to the child that you are still on their side and that you need to understand the situation so you can give your best advice. Again, discuss the potential impacts, if any, this specific lie could have on their case and the adjudicator’s evaluation. If possible, work together to move forward.

For additional information, check out CILA’s [Pro Bono Guide: Working with Children and Youth in Immigration Cases](#), which has a section on ethical rules for attorneys and includes some explanation on the duty of candor to the tribunal. Additionally, CILA’s *Pro Bono Guide* overall provides a plethora of information on working with unaccompanied youth and building a working relationship to develop mutual trust and foment honesty and credibility for clients.

L. Timelines and Case Demands

Immigration court cases are complicated. Cases move at different paces, but typically there are important and strict deadlines to consider—whether that is a significant birthday, immigration court hearing date or related deadline, or a state court proceeding. Attorneys and legal staff work with clients to prepare cases and meet deadlines and to ensure that the case is progressing as it should. This is not only a professional responsibility, but it also an ethical matter. **Attorneys should keep in mind [Rule 1.3](#) regarding diligence and [Rule 1.4](#) of the ABA Model Rules about communications.**

While case timelines and case demands are very important, it is also necessary to remember that youth generally have many demands on their attention and time, and frequently, their legal case is not their top priority. Understanding your client’s goals and the competing interests driving their attention is helpful to know to have a fuller view of what they are going through, and what, if anything, you can do to help. Having these conversations and also reviewing expectations is imperative for attorneys and legal staff to develop an effective working relationship with clients.

Also, 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.

Practical Tips: How to Approach the Issue with a Client

- 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.



- 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.
- 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.

For more information on issues such as the legal process, client communication, organization, and case management, review the “[CILA Practice Toolkit](#)” and the companion resource “Checklists, Cheat Sheets, & Organizational Documents.”

M. No Relief and Removal Orders

Not every youth who enters the United States unaccompanied and seeks to remain here 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.

Those conducting initial intakes for unaccompanied children will encounter many children expressing that they are in the United States for a better education or to pursue better opportunities—and simultaneously, they may not be “checking the boxes” on intake forms for various forms of legal relief. If the government filed their Notice to Appear (NTA) with the immigration court, then the child is in removal proceedings, so then it is likely that their only remaining option for “relief” is to request voluntary departure.



Practical Tips: How to Approach the Issue with a Client

- 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. Advocates should use simple language and be child-friendly in their explanation.
- 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. Do this multiple times, if necessary.
- 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.



BOUNDARIES & PERSONAL SAFETY

Section VIII.



VIII. Boundaries & Personal Safety

A. Setting Professional Boundaries

As an advocate, it is critical to explore and define, first for yourself and then for others, what your professional boundaries are. Neglecting to do so can affect your ability to do the work long term. Many of the youth you serve will be facing very challenging times. It can be tempting to eliminate any boundaries for the sake of getting a client through a crisis or challenging time, but doing so for every client is not sustainable. In short, you cannot live well if you are in crisis mode continuously.

As you contemplate your personal and professional boundaries, you will inevitably need to weigh various factors, including organizational rules and the demands of your role as well as your life outside of work. Some stress is inevitable in most jobs and of course, in the work that we do. Stress cannot be avoided altogether, nor is all stress bad. However, too much stress all the time can take its toll on your mental and physical health, and the stress that comes from dealing with trauma material and individuals in crisis can be particularly hard to carry.

Below is a list of possible boundaries. You may find that there are some you would like to set for yourself, others you would modify slightly, and some you can do without. You may wish to add to this list additional boundaries that will help you do your job well while caring for yourself.

1. I will let clients know that I am available by phone and email from 9 am to 5 pm and that if they are unable to reach me, they can leave a message. I will let them know that I will return their call/email as soon as I am able, but that it may take me up to 48 hours to do so given my workload.
2. I will let clients know that I am unable to transport them to or from court or to and from other appointments. I will let them know that this is a rule that my office has set (if true) or a personal boundary, and that I am happy to review with them options for public transportation if needed.
3. I prefer that clients not be given my cell phone number. I will ask my colleagues not to give it out, and I will not give it out either.
4. I find it helpful to communicate with some of my clients utilizing Whatsapp. I will provide clients with my contact info. but let them know that I will not review or respond to messages except during my 9 am to 5 pm workday. I will let them know that it may take me up to 48 hours to respond to a message.
5. I prefer not to connect with clients on social media. I will let clients know so that they do not send me a request and think I am ignoring them or rejecting them when I do not accept it.



6. I prefer not to be contacted when I am taking Paid Time Off (PTO) unless there is an emergency. I will let my employer know. If there is an emergency, such as a client who has been arrested or apprehended, I prefer to be contacted by text message on my cell phone. I will not be at my computer or accessing email/Teams messages when taking PTO. I will communicate this boundary and my preferred communication method in case of an emergency. I will also set up a contact person for coverage for any other issues while I am out, if possible/needed.
7. I will let my employer know that when meeting with clients in person at the office, I prefer not to be the only staff person physically present there. I will ask my employer to support my efforts to plan meetings, perhaps via a shared calendar, when I can count on other staff being at the office as well.
8. I prefer not to meet with any clients in person after normal office hours. I will communicate this boundary to both my employer and clients to ensure everyone is on the same page.
9. I will communicate any security or safety concerns I have working in the office space or on certain matters with my supervisor and work to make a plan to address those issues as my personal safety and those of my colleagues is important.
10. I will let my employer know that I function best when I have one day a week of focus time that does not include new intakes or external meetings. I will communicate this day to colleagues and block the time on my calendar so I can focus on complex tasks that need to be completed without interruption, if possible.

Above are just some examples. Given the uniqueness of our realities, everyone's boundaries will look different. The key is to set some boundaries that work well for you and to communicate them to clients (and/or their caregivers), colleagues, and supervisors so that they do not simply live in your head. Additionally, as new situations and interactions arise, you may learn more about yourself and the boundaries you need. This is not static and is something to go back to and reflect upon over time.

B. Communicating Boundaries

Communicating your boundaries in a clear manner helps ensure that you are not constantly bombarded with questions that may lead you to ignore the limits you have set. It is helpful to communicate boundaries to everyone involved at the beginning of a relationship. Situations may arise that require you to act in a way that crosses your boundary, and that is okay if that is what you choose is needed in that moment. The idea is to not cross them regularly or consistently so that they disappear altogether, and you are limited in your ability to care for yourself.



With employers, it is key to communicate your boundaries early on. There may be some boundaries you would set no matter your employer or role. As you progress in a specific role, you may be given more responsibilities, and you may realize you need additional or different boundaries to function best. Communicating openly with supervisors and colleagues about your boundaries can help everyone plan and act in such a way that respects your needs. This may also encourage others to also plan for and to set healthy boundaries for themselves and to help create a culture that this is okay and good to do in your organization and role. Organizational leaders and managers can also model the need to set boundaries and show their care for their staff and supervisees in this way because it demonstrates a priority and care for team members—to care for what is important to them, what is safe for them, and what supports them.

With clients, it is also key to communicate your boundaries at the outset of the relationship. This can include letting them know the scope of your role, communication preferences, as well as when and how you will provide them with assistance. It may also include letting them know ways you cannot assist. The discussion offers your clients predictability and is key to establishing rapport. In proactively communicating your boundaries, when you act in a way that is consistent with those boundaries, it will not come as a surprise for your clients and their caregivers. Not having the conversation and then later saying “no” to a request may lead them to see you as unreliable or arbitrarily unwilling to assist them. You can demonstrate your care for them and how you can support them while also clearly communicating any boundaries. Even if you initially provide information on your boundary, you may have to remind them of this later in the course of your assistance when an issue arises. Do so in a gentle, neutral way that is non-judgmental. You can be firm while also kind in communicating your boundary. Generally, a detailed explanation is not needed—only clear communication on the issue.

C. Prioritizing Personal Safety

In your work with child clients and their families, your efforts will often be focused on ensuring their safety. It is important to not forget about your own safety, however, and to take measures to ensure that you are doing what you can to avoid unnecessary risks.

Your boundaries can be a useful tool in ensuring your own safety. You will have to decide what works best for you, but you may choose to limit how much information you share about your personal life with certain or all clients. This can help ensure you avoid contact with individuals outside of the office and outside of work time. You can also decide that you will not work at the office past a certain time, or to avoid a walk to your car or public transportation alone in the dark. Your office may set a rule that the last two people to leave the office should lock up and walk out together, or you can suggest one as a way of protecting you and your colleagues.



Certain clients, their caregivers, or other individuals you interact with in serving your clients may make you feel uncomfortable, including court staff and shelter staff. It is important to be professional, but it is also important to trust your intuition. You may have concerns about someone's unwanted advances, a lack of respect in how they speak to you, or about their tendency to lose their temper, for example. It can be important to understand an individual's background so that you can consider how best to proceed. If you have access to background checks including information about an individual's criminal history, it can be helpful to review this information. The individual may have a history of certain behavior that you should be aware of.

Sometimes you may also have information about someone's background or issues that cause concern based on records in their files or information that is shared with you. If there are red flags that are raised it is important to not ignore them. It may help to talk with a supervisor for advice on how to navigate the situation. For example, if you know a client is often volatile or has anger management issues, it may be important to address this with a supervisor if you know you will have a hard conversation with them during an upcoming meeting. You can then work to make a plan to communicate the issue effectively, determine options to try and prevent a volatile situation, and prepare for what to do if that occurs. This is important not only for your own safety, but it is also important for those around you and others in the office. Having your supervisor aware ahead of time is often helpful for the entire office.

It is also important to not be judgmental—to walk a fine line in how you perceive and take in any concerning information because there are many times when a person's behavior may not repeat, or it may be irrelevant to your role and involvement in their case. As legal staff, social services staff, and attorneys, by the nature of the job, we are often working with those who have some interaction with the justice system or who have past criminal records, or are undergoing severe stress that can be mis-managed, or there are close people in their lives who have these issues going on.

If you are feeling uncomfortable, there are steps you can take, including discussing with supervisors how you are feeling and making a plan for how to address issues if they arise. They can help you ensure that someone else is present in meetings or there to assist if needed, for example. They can also discuss with you any ethical obligations, safety risks, as well as if and how you need to discontinue your work on a particular case and/or withdraw as counsel. Human behavior can be unpredictable. You do not always know how people will behave, but if you are apprehensive, trust your feelings and advocate for yourself. Your safety is important.



SELF-CARE

Section IX.



IX. 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?”

Consider reflection through journaling, that way you can keep track of your reflections and lessons learned in writing. Journal how you felt discussing these issues, what you said and how you felt afterwards. It may also be helpful to reflect upon and journal about what was persuasive or what impacted you the most and regarding the outcome of the meeting, interview, or hearing as well. For example, you can journal:

- “What did I learn through this experience today?”
- “How did I respond to the situation that occurred today?”
- “What feelings or thoughts did I have during or after this interaction?”
- “What was the outcome of the meeting/interview/hearing today? Was it the outcome I expected or wanted, or not what my client or I hoped for? How does this outcome make me feel?”
- “What are the next steps?”
- “How can I prepare myself for the next steps?”
- “What were my strengths today?”



- “How could I have approached the situation differently? What can I do better in the future?”

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*. These same questions may be helpful to review after navigating an interview or hearing with a client. 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. Remember you are not alone in this work, and there are people you can reach out to for support either in your personal or professional spheres. Also, engage in mental health counseling if that would be beneficial to you for support and growth.



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.
 - Other options may include doing stretches, brief journaling, or using aromatherapy. Some options such as these can be used even if you only have a couple of minutes in between different meetings you are required to do.



- 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. Be mindful of the words you are telling yourself throughout these difficult situations and that you are kind to yourself in your internal thoughts and self-talk

C. Support through Collective or Community Care

Self-care is a personal, individualized journey in learning more about yourself and your needs, protecting and safeguarding your well-being, and promoting longevity for positive mental health. Yet, this inward reflection and care can be better supported by or go hand-in-hand with collective or community care. You can and should care for yourself, but you may be in a community where you can support others and have others support you, too. As human beings, we may yearn for connection and comfort in dark times, and we can lend a helping hand to others in similar situations and ask for help when we need it. Communities can only thrive and survive difficult times through community members practicing mutual care and responsibility to one another. There is no shame in asking for help or support when you experience distress, and you may have multiple groups through which you can seek support.

Larger communities often have smaller communities within, and in working with immigrant children, whether you realize it or not, you are a member of potentially several communities. For example, legal staff, social services staff, and attorneys at an immigration nonprofit may experience community through the organization as a whole, with colleagues at their office, with others in a similar role in the locale working on similar cases, and/or through the larger nationwide network of practitioners also doing this work. You can turn to colleagues at your office if you need support or guidance, and you can also provide that support to others.

Community care is often driven by individuals working together, but organizational leadership and other higher-position team members can provide the foundation for collective community, too. Some examples of organizations and firms that value a positive environment and community for staff include:

- Emphasizing the importance of creating a supportive community for all staff through actions, policies, and messaging.



- Having policies in place for the individual office or at the organization-wide level to promote positive mental health.
- Providing appropriate trainings and resources for managers and supervisors to engage in positive leadership, supervision, and dialogue with those they supervise or oversee.
- Providing trainings and resources for all staff on secondary trauma and self-care.
- Having mechanisms in place for staff to give feedback or evaluations of their supervisors or managers.
- Engaging in transparency and honesty as an organization and providing a space for staff to trust and feel safe in being honest as well, including regarding any challenges about their mental health or in their self-care journey.
- Fostering teamwork, rapport, positive morale, and team-building skills for staff and encouraging a supportive work environment where the team members truly care for each other.

Additionally, it is likely that you have your own self-created community of your loved ones and those you trust and feel safe with. Fostering these community circles can be personally enriching and valuable for a positive self-care walk.

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 X](#), below. Lastly, we hope that CILA can be a resource to you in your self-care journey, as you are likely in our network and community as well. 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 the need for self-care, too! You are not alone in the experience.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Section X.



X. 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 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, the *Pro Bono Guide* includes links to learn more about working with survivors of domestic violence and/or child abuse, including:
 - The National Domestic Violence Hotline’s website with various [resources](#) and information 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.
- CILA also has available a workbook for youth titled *Emotional Wellness Workbook for Youth* available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#). The workbook includes over 40 activities offering coping and grounding skills, as well as tips for navigating shelter fatigue, increasing self-esteem, building a support group, and more.
- 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 to 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.
- Watch CILA's 2024 Symposium presentation, "[Clients in Crisis: Taking Acon While Protecting the Immigration Case](#)," May 31, 2024.
- View CILA's webinar, "[Advocating with Empathy: Awareness and Practical Guidance for Working with Unaccompanied Minors with Disabilities](#)," April 24, 2024.
- Watch CILA's webinar, "[Introduction to Trauma-Informed Interviewing for Pro Bono Attorneys Working with Immigrant Children](#)," October 11, 2023.

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.
- View the ABA Commission on Immigration webinar, "[The Lifeguard is Drowning: Identifying and Combating Burnout and Secondary Trauma in Asylum Practitioners](#)," April 7, 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.



- Read the article from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN), [“Strengthening Your Resilience: Take Care of Yourself as You Care for Others,”](#) 2020.
- Review the DOJ’s webpage from the Office of Victims of Crime with [“The Vicarious Trauma Toolkit.”](#)
- 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.



CONCLUSION

Section XI.



XI. Conclusion

We hope this toolkit offered 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.

The [Appendices](#) include a handout for advocates with tips, considerations, and guidance for supporting clients before, during, and after a difficult conversation. Additionally, the Appendices contain 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. Though CILA has some public-facing resources to guide advocates in their practice with immigrant youth, you can make a [CILA account](#) to access and download the majority of CILA's resources. If you need the assistance requesting an account or accessing resources, please contact CILA at cila@abacila.org.



XII. Appendices



Appendix 1

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



AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION

CILA Children's Immigration Law Academy



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 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.
 - The approach to prepare for client meetings and challenging conversations 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 to address, information you want to share, and questions that you want to ask the client.
 - Write down talking points to help guide you or keep you on track during the meeting. This is particularly helpful if it will be a challenging 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. Consult the above resource as a starting point since the resource includes several specific scenarios and pointers.
 - 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 tasks or assignments when you meet with your client. Actively listen to the client and eliminate distractions. Center yourself for the meeting by focusing 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 a valuable skill 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 information above and in 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—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 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 do so something?”
 - Additionally, using a power and control wheel can be 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 re-traumatization 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 communications will help encourage them as you work on the case together and will likely positively impact them in other ways too.

- Using a strengths-based approach as discussed above in the toolkit in [Section III.B.](#) 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. After all, 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 y podría beneficiarse de nuevas estrategias.

En este juego de roles, Diego, un joven guatemalteco de 15 años, se reúne con su defensor. Se ha estado sintiendo ansioso. El defensor está tratando de involucrar a Diego en el trabajo a través de su ansiedad con técnicas de conexión a tierra. El defensor anima a Diego a considerar nuevas estrategias además de aquellas en las que ya confía.

Defensor: Hola Diego, me alegro de verte hoy. ¿Cómo te has sentido?

Diego: Más o menos, igual.

Defensor: *[Ofrece un espacio seguro y tiempo para explorar sus sentimientos y emociones.]*

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

Diego: Me siento igual, seis. Últimamente he estado muy ansioso. Es difícil concentrarme en algo.

Defensor: *[Se empático mientras valida sus sentimientos y emociones.]* ¡Parece que has estado lidiando con muchas cosas! La ansiedad puede ser muy difícil de manejar. Sé que has mencionado antes que oras cuando te sientes ansioso. ¿Te ha ayudado?

Diego: Sí, a veces ayuda, pero últimamente no parece ser suficiente.

Defensor: *[Comienza desde donde está el cliente.]* Sé que orar es especialmente importante para ti, y creo que es algo que no debes de 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 rezar 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. Quizás lo que está sucediendo es que es necesario agregar uno o más ingredientes para que haga efecto. ¿Qué te parece?

Diego: ¿Como qué?

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

Diego: Sí, así me siento.

Defensor: *[Reconoce el valor de las creencias del cliente e incorpóralas. Esto no es una limitación para el joven, sino una fortaleza y una oportunidad para expandir o mejorar sus habilidades de afrontamiento.]* A veces, puede ser útil combinar lo que ya sabemos con nuevas estrategias. ¿Estarías abierto a probar algunas técnicas de conexión a tierra (*grounding*) y respiración junto con tus oraciones?



Diego: (*indeciso*) Supongo que sí. ¿Qué tipo de técnicas?

Defensor: Hay algunos sencillos con los que podemos empezar. Por ejemplo, el “grounding” o la conexión a la tierra es una técnica en la que te enfocas en tus sentidos físicos para ayudar a calmar tu mente. También hay ejercicios de respiración profunda que pueden ayudar a disminuir el ritmo cardíaco y hacer que te sienta más relajado.

Diego: ¿Cómo funciona la conexión a la tierra?

Defensor: La conexión a la tierra implica prestar atención a las cosas que puedes ver, tocar, escuchar, oler o saborear en tu entorno inmediato. Puede ayudarte a estar presente y reducir los sentimientos de ansiedad. ¿Te gustaría intentarlo ahora? Tal vez te ayude a saber si esto es algo que podría servirte.

Diego: Está bien, lo intentaré.

Defensor: ¡Genial! Empecemos por algo sencillo. Mira alrededor de la habitación y encuentra cinco cosas que puedes ver. Tómame tu tiempo.

Diego: (*mirando a su alrededor*) Veo el reloj, la ventana, los libros en la mesita, la planta y el cuadro en la pared.

Defensor: Excelente. Ahora, enfócate en cuatro cosas que puedes tocar. Anímate a sentirlos y describe su textura.

Diego: (*tocando objetos a su alrededor*) La silla es lisa, la alfombra es suave, el libro es áspero y mi suéter es cálido.

Defensor: Perfecto. A continuación, escuchemos tres sonidos que puedes escuchar en este momento.

Diego: (*escuchando*) Escucho el tictac del reloj, el zumbido del aire acondicionado y la gente hablando afuera.

Defensor: Lo estás haciendo muy bien. Ahora, busca dos cosas que puedas oler. Pueden ser cualquier cosa a tu alrededor.

Diego: (*olfateando*) Huelo el aire fresco de la ventana y el aroma de la planta.

Defensor: Por último, una cosa que puedes saborear. Si no tienes nada que saborear en este momento, puedes imaginar un sabor que te guste.

Diego: (*pensando*) Me imagino el sabor de la comida que hace mi mamá.

Defensor: Maravilloso, Diego. ¿Cómo te sientes después de hacer ese ejercicio?

Diego: Me siento un poco más tranquilo porque evité que mi mente pensara en mis preocupaciones constantes. Era diferente, pero me gusto.



Defensor: Me alegra escuchar eso. Recuerda, puedes usar esta técnica de conexión a tierra en cualquier momento que comiences a sentirte ansioso. También funciona bien con tus oraciones. A veces, combinar diferentes métodos puede ser realmente efectivo. ¿Te gustaría aprender también un ejercicio de respiración profunda?

Diego: Sí, me gustaría.

Defensor: [*Practicar este ejercicio con tu cliente puede fomentar una sensación de normalidad, control y confianza mutua.*] Bien, probemos uno simple llamado "Respiración 4-7-8". Inhalas tranquilamente por la nariz contando hasta cuatro, aguantas la respiración contando hasta siete y exhalas completamente por la boca contando hasta ocho. Intentémoslo juntos unas cuantas veces. ¿Listo?

Diego: (confirmando) Listo.

Defensor: (*guiando a Diego*) Muy bien. Primero, encuentra una posición cómoda para sentarte. Cierra los ojos si te resulta cómodo. Inhalar... dos, tres, cuatro... sostener... dos, tres, cuatro, cinco, seis, siete... exhalar... dos, tres, cuatro, cinco, seis, siete, ocho. ¿Cómo estuvo eso?

Diego: Se sintió bien.

Defensor: Excelente. Probemos algunos más juntos. Inhalar... dos, tres, cuatro... sostener... dos, tres, cuatro, cinco, seis, siete... exhalar... dos, tres, cuatro, cinco, seis, siete, ocho. ¿Como te sentiste?

Diego: (*respirando hondo*) Bien.

Defensor: Es genial escuchar eso. Ahora, ¿te gustaría ver cómo puedes incorporar la respiración profunda con la oración?

Diego: Sí, me gustaría.

Defensor: De acuerdo. Cuando comiences a orar, comienza con una respiración profunda. Por ejemplo, antes de cada oración corta, inhala profundamente, mantén la respiración y luego exhala lentamente. De esta manera, estás combinando tu oración con una respiración profunda. ¿Te gustaría y te sientes cómodo practicando con una oración corta?

Diego: De acuerdo.

Defensor: (*guiando a Diego*) Probemos algunos más juntos. Inhalar... dos, tres, cuatro... sostener... dos, tres, cuatro, cinco, seis, siete... exhalar... dos, tres, cuatro, cinco, seis, siete, ocho. Ahora, haz una breve oración. (*Oración...*). De nuevo, inhala... dos, tres, cuatro... sostener... dos, tres, cuatro, cinco, seis, siete... exhalar... dos, tres, cuatro, cinco, seis, siete, ocho. Ahora, haz una breve oración. (*Oración...*).

Defensor: ¿Cómo te sentiste?



Diego: Relajado y tranquilo...

Defensor: Excelente. Trata de integrar esta respiración profunda en tu rutina de oración, incluso si no te sientes ansioso. Esto puede ayudarte a dominar estos ejercicios y hacer que sea más fácil y estés más dispuesto a usarlos durante los momentos de ansiedad. La próxima semana, podemos hablar sobre cómo esta combinación está funcionando para ti y hacer los ajustes necesarios. ¿Suena bien?

Diego: Sí, lo intentaré. Gracias.

Defensor: De nada, Diego. Estoy aquí para apoyarte. Practiquemos juntos unas cuantas respiraciones profundas más antes de terminar nuestra visita de hoy.

Diego: [Repite la oración con la respiración]

Defensor: *[Trata de terminar la reunión en una nota positiva. Si bien es posible que no se hayan resuelto todos los desafíos, se han identificado objetivos. Esto puede infundir un sentido de esperanza y tranquilizar a los demás de que las cosas mejorarán.]* Me alegro de que esto te haya resultado útil, Diego. Recuerde, se trata de encontrar lo que funciona mejor para ti. Combinar tus oraciones con estas técnicas puede darte un conjunto de herramientas más sólidas para manejar tu ansiedad. Sigue practicando y podremos comprobar cómo te sientes la próxima vez que nos veamos.

Diego: Gracias. Practicaré estas técnicas.

Defensor: De nada, Diego. Estás dando pasos importantes y yo estoy aquí para apoyarte. ¡Hasta la próxima!

Role Play: Felipe está nervioso en su primera reunión con un 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: Estoy bien.

Defensor: ¿Necesitas algo antes de que comencemos?

Felipe: No, no necesito nada.



Defensor: *[Usa la escucha reflexiva y las habilidades de observación para reconocer el lenguaje corporal y las emociones de Felipe.]* Noto que estás mirando a tu alrededor y parece estar incómodo. ¿Hay algo que pueda hacer por tí?

Felipe: Estoy un poco nervioso...

Defensor: *[Valida los sentimientos de Felipe y normaliza su nerviosismo para que se sienta a gusto.]* Puedo entender que te sientas nervioso. Están pasando muchas cosas. ¿Hay algo que yo pueda hacer para que esto sea más fácil?

Felipe: No, estoy bien. Podemos empezar.

Defensor: Genial. Me alegra escucharlo. Si comienzas a sentirte incómodo en algún momento, me avisas y podemos hacer una pausa. ¿Estás de acuerdo?

Felipe: Lo puedo intentar.

Defensor: ¿Te gustaría practicar decirlo?

Felipe: Esta bien.

Defensor: ¿Te gustaría que yo fuera primero?

Felipe: Sí.

Defensor: *[Demuestra el lenguaje para asegurar que Felipe se sienta cómodo hablando cuando sea necesario.]* "Necesito un descanso, ¿podemos parar, por favor?" Ahora te toca a ti decirlo...

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

Defensor: *[Proporciona refuerzo positivo para construir la confianza de Felipe.]* ¡Eso sonó genial! ¿Cómo te sentiste?

Felipe: No mal, me sentí bien.

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

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

Defensor: ¡Sí, genial!

Defensor: *[Reconoce el estrés potencial y ofrece un descanso físico y mental para apoyar la comodidad de Felipe.]* Lo has estado haciendo muy bien hasta ahora, Felipe. ¿Te gustaría hacer una pausa para estirar las piernas o tomar un poco de agua antes de continuar? Podemos hacer una pausa en cualquier momento.

Felipe: Sí, tal vez un breve descanso sería bueno.

Defensor: *[Valida la importancia del autocuidado durante situaciones estresantes.]* Esa es una gran idea. Pongámonos de pie, estirémonos y tomemos un poco de agua. Tomar pequeños descansos puede ayudarnos a sentirnos más renovados.

Felipe: Está bien, gracias.

Role Play: Eduardo se siente agobiado por la escuela y dejó de asistir.

Eduardo es un joven nicaragüense de 16 años. Se mudó a Houston, Texas hace siete meses. Como nuevo estudiante, se siente agobiado por la escuela, especialmente en las clases que no le interesan. Tiene problemas con la asistencia, pero encuentra alegría en su clase de arte. Como su defensor, te reúnes con Eduardo para explorar la mejor manera de apoyarlo. Usando habilidades de la Entrevista Motivacional (MI), tu objetivo es comprender su ambivalencia sobre la escuela y ayudar a guiarlo hacia un cambio positivo.

Defensor: *[Forma de la Entrevista Motivacional (Motivational Interviewing - MI) - Preguntas abiertas: Usa una pregunta abierta para invitar a Eduardo a compartir sus sentimientos y perspectiva, animándolo a explorar sus razones para faltar a la escuela con sus propias palabras. Este enfoque ayuda a construir una buena relación y permite que Eduardo tome la iniciativa en la conversación.]* Eduardo, me he dado cuenta de que últimamente has faltado mucho a la escuela. ¿Puedes contarme un poco sobre lo que ha estado pasando?

Eduardo: Es que no le veo el sentido. Siento que no soy bueno para nada, y es muy estresante.

Defensor: *[Habilidad de MI - Escucha Reflexiva: Utiliza la escucha reflexiva resumiendo y reflexionando sobre lo que Eduardo está sintiendo. Esto demuestra tu estas escuchando atentamente y ayuda a Eduardo a sentirse comprendido. Esta estrategia también le permite a Eduardo aclarar o ampliar sus sentimientos.]* Parece que la escuela se siente angustiante y no te parece que valga la pena en este momento. ¿Es así?

Eduardo: Sí, exactamente. Pero una parte de mí sabe que debería ir; pero no consigo hacerlo.

Defensor: *[Habilidad de MI - Desarrollo de la discrepancia: Desarrollar la discrepancia, destacando el conflicto entre el deseo de Eduardo de evitar la escuela y su reconocimiento de que asistir a la escuela es importante. Esto ayuda a Eduardo a ver la brecha entre donde está ahora y donde quiere estar, lo que puede aumentar la motivación para el cambio.]* Te escucho. Por un lado, la escuela se siente muy difícil y estresante, pero, por otro lado, sabes que es importante. Eso suena como un lugar difícil para estar. ¿Hay algo de la escuela que te guste o te parezca interesante?

Eduardo: Bueno, yo sí disfruto de mi clase de arte. Es lo único que realmente espero con ansias.



Defensor: *[Habilidad de MI – Afirmación: Utiliza la afirmación, destacando las fortalezas y experiencias positivas de Eduardo. Al enfocarse en el disfrute del arte de Eduardo, el defensor ayuda a Eduardo a ver que hay aspectos de la escuela que valora y que pueden motivarlo a asistir con más regularidad.]* Es genial que tengas algo que disfrutes y te sientas bien. ¿Cómo crees que te sentirías si tuvieras más días en los que pudieras participar en la clase de arte?

Eduardo: Creo que me gustaría, pero no estoy seguro de cómo pasar las otras clases.

Defensor: *[Habilidad de MI - Evocar la comunicación de cambio: Utiliza la pregunta que induce el cambio para animar a Eduardo a pensar en soluciones y pequeños pasos que podría tomar para mejorar su situación. Esto ayuda a Eduardo a comenzar a asumir la responsabilidad del proceso de cambio al considerar qué acciones podría intentar.]* Es comprensible. ¿Qué pequeños pasos crees que podrías dar para que sea un poco más fácil asistir a tus otras clases, para que puedas disfrutar del arte con más regularidad?

Eduardo: Tal vez si empiezo por enfocarme solo en pasar una clase a la vez, podría ser menos estresante. Pero todavía me preocupa que eso no cambie nada.

Defensor: *[Habilidad de MI - Normalización y Establecimiento de Metas: Normaliza para validar las preocupaciones y dudas de Eduardo, lo que ayuda a reducir su ansiedad. Luego cambia a establecer metas, alentando a Eduardo a comenzar con pasos pequeños y manejables, lo que puede aumentar su confianza y sentido de progreso.]* Es normal tener esas dudas, especialmente cuando las cosas se han sentido tan desafiantes. Empezar poco a poco e ir aumentando podría hacer una gran diferencia. ¿Qué tal si establecemos una meta para la próxima semana y vemos cómo va? Podría ser útil tener un plan y ver algún progreso, incluso si es solo un poco a la vez.

Eduardo: Sí, supongo que vale la pena intentarlo. ¡Al menos quiero estar ahí para el arte!

Defensor: *[Habilidad de MI - Planificación Colaborativa: Participa en la planificación colaborativa, trabajando junto con Eduardo para desarrollar un plan que lo ayude a alcanzar sus metas. Al involucrar a Eduardo en el proceso de toma de decisiones, puede fomentar un sentido de empoderamiento y responsabilidad sobre sus acciones.]* Eso es un buen comienzo. Trabajemos juntos en un plan para que te sea más fácil asistir a las otras clases y disfrutar de las partes de la escuela que te gustan.

Consideraciones Adicionales:

El cambio generalmente ocurre cuando alguien está dispuesto y se siente capaz y listo para cambiar, lo que significa que no solo reconoce la necesidad de cambiar (dispuesto), sino que también cree que tiene la capacidad o los recursos para hacerlo realidad (capaz) y se siente mental y emocionalmente preparado para tomar acción (listo). Esta alineación de motivación, confianza y disposición crea las condiciones ideales para un cambio significativo y sostenible.



Si un joven aún no está listo para el cambio, es importante encontrarlo donde está con la empatía y la escucha reflexiva, ayudándolo a explorar sus sentimientos sin presionarlo, y aumentando su conciencia de los beneficios potenciales del cambio.

A medida que continúes trabajando con Eduardo, permítele expresar cualquier ambivalencia restante mediante el uso de la escucha reflexiva, como: "Parece que todavía te sientes inseguro sobre si estos pequeños pasos harán la diferencia, ¿puedes contarme más sobre eso?". Esto anima a Eduardo a procesar sus dudas abiertamente. Además, fomenta el sentido de autonomía de Eduardo reforzando su capacidad para tomar decisiones sobre su progreso, diciéndole algo como: "Es genial que estés dispuesto a intentar concentrarte en una clase a la vez, ¿cómo quieres hacer un seguimiento de tu progreso durante la próxima semana?".

Role Play: Sara se pone ansiosa mientras habla de un evento traumático.

Sara es una venezolana de 19 años. Recientemente emigró a los Estados Unidos y vive con su madre. Vivió una situación difícil antes de salir de Venezuela. Se siente agobiada y ansiosa mientras habla de ello con su defensor. Utilizando habilidades informadas sobre el trauma, el objetivo del defensor es ayudar a Sara a procesar sus experiencias y emociones y minimizar el riesgo de la retraumatización.

Defensor: *[Habilidad de Atención Informada de Trauma (Trauma-Informed Care - TIC)- Reconoce la dificultad emocional de Sara, utilizando la validación empática para asegurarse de que Sara se sienta escuchada y apoyada.]* Gracias por compartir lo que pasó, Sara. Puedo ver que esto ha sido muy difícil para ti. ¿Cómo te sientes ahora mismo mientras hablamos de esto?

Sara: No estoy segura. Me siento tan angustiada y ansiosa al pensar en ello.

Defensor: *[Habilidad TIC - Escucha reflexiva y regulación emocional: Utiliza la escucha reflexiva para validar las emociones de Sara y normalizar su sensación de angustia. Esta habilidad ayuda a reducir la ansiedad al darle a Sara espacio para explorar sus sentimientos, promoviendo una sensación de control y seguridad durante la conversación.]* Parece que esto te está provocando muchas emociones fuertes. ¿Puedes contarme más sobre lo que te hace sentir angustiada y ansiosa?

Sara: Es sólo... todo. Recordar lo que pasó, cómo reaccionó la gente, y ahora volver a hablar de ello es muy difícil para mí.

Defensor: *[Habilidad TIC - Desglosar las experiencias abrumadoras: Ayuda a de-escalar las emociones angustiosas de Sara dividiendo la situación en partes más pequeñas y manejables.]* Te escucho. Parece que esto te está afectando de varias maneras, más allá del evento en sí. ¿Qué parte específica crees que es la más difícil para ti en este momento?



Sara: Creo que más que nada es el miedo a ser juzgada. Cada vez que hablo de ello, me preocupo por lo que la gente piense de mí o si pensarán que hice algo mal.

Defensor: *[Habilidad TIC - Validación de respuestas emocionales: Valida el miedo de Sara a ser juzgada y usa palabras empáticas para reconocer que los sentimientos de Sara son legítimos e importantes.]* Esa es una preocupación muy real y comprensible. Sentirse juzgada puede agregar mucho estrés a una situación ya difícil. ¿Ha habido momentos en los que compartir te ha servido de apoyo, o ha sido sobre todo así de difícil hacerlo?

Sara: Ha habido algunas veces que hablar ha ayudado, pero sobre todo ha sido difícil por el miedo.

Defensor: *[Habilidad TIC - Ofrecer opciones y empoderamiento: Ofrece opciones, asegurándose de que Sara sienta que tiene el control de la conversación. Este enfoque ayuda a reducir el riesgo de retraumatización al darle a Sara la capacidad de decidir cómo y cuándo está lista para abrirse, promoviendo su sentido de seguridad.]* Es importante para mí entender cuándo y cómo este proceso puede ser uno de apoyo para ti. Quiero asegurarme de que este espacio se sienta seguro para ti. ¿Qué podemos hacer ahora mismo para que esta conversación sea más cómoda?

Sara: ¿Quizás podríamos tomarnos un descanso? Y luego, si continuamos, ayudaría si pudiéramos concentrarnos en una pequeña parte en lugar de todo a la vez.

Defensor: Absolutamente, tomemos un descanso. Cuando estés lista, podemos abordar las cosas pieza por pieza. Tú tienes el control de este proceso y yo estoy aquí para apoyarte en lo que necesites.

Sara: Gracias. Eso ayuda mucho.

Consideraciones Adicionales:

A medida que avance en la conversación con Sara, continúa comunicándote con ella con preguntas como "¿Cómo te sientes ahora?" para asegurarse de que se sienta cómoda durante toda la conversación. Esto evita la escalada de la angustia y ayuda a Sara a sentirse segura. Al hablar de eventos traumáticos, permite que Sara aborde un pequeño aspecto a la vez, centrándose en piezas manejables. Este enfoque ayuda a evitar ajustarla y promueve la sanación de una manera que se siente menos desalentadora.

Puedes explorar e introducir estrategias de afrontamiento con Sara que podrían resultarle útiles durante los momentos angustiosos, como ejercicios de respiración profunda o técnicas de atención plena. Puedes preguntar: "¿Has probado alguna actividad o práctica que te ayude a sentirte tranquila cuando las cosas se vuelven angustiosas? ¿Estarías dispuesta a explorar algunas opciones juntas?"

Puedes explorar o practicar técnicas de conexión a tierra como el método 5-4-3-2-1 (nombrar cinco cosas que puede ver, cuatro que puede tocar, etc.) que pueden ayudarla a concentrarse



en el presente. Sugiere: "Cuando comiences a sentirte agobiada, las técnicas de conexión a tierra pueden ayudarte a permanecer en el momento. ¿Te gustaría probar una conmigo ahora, para que puedas ver cómo se siente?" Ver el juego de roles en [Section II.E. arriba](#), para más información sobre las técnicas de conexión a tierra.

Role Play: Pedro está en conflicto por estar en los Estados Unidos.

En este juego de roles, el defensor se reúne con Pedro, un joven hondureño de 14 años. Pedro se siente conflictuado 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. El defensor utiliza la reflexión de los sentimientos y el resumen en este juego de roles.

Defensor: Me alegro de verte, Pedro. Sé que dijiste que querías hablar conmigo. Y quería asegurarme de que no tuvieras ninguna pregunta antes de que vayamos a la corte. ¿Tienes algo en mente?

Pedro: No estoy seguro de todo esto.

Defensor: Cuéntame más sobre eso, Pedro.

Pedro: No lo sé. Es difícil para mí estar lejos de mis abuelos. *(Pedro está conteniendo las lágrimas y tratando de mantener la compostura).* ¡Es solo que ya no estoy seguro de querer quedarme aquí en los Estados Unidos!

Defensor: *[Evita preguntar "qué" y en su lugar usa la escucha reflexiva repitiendo las palabras de Pedro, una habilidad de la Entrevista Motivacional.]* No estás seguro de querer quedarte aquí en los Estados Unidos.

Pedro: 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.

Defensor: *[Continúa usando la escucha reflexiva repitiendo las palabras de Pedro sin juzgar ni tener tono interrogativo, ayudándolo a sentirse escuchado y validado.]* Pedro, últimamente has estado preocupado por muchas cosas. Eso debe ser difícil. Tienes tantas cosas en tu mente.

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

Defensor: *[Valida las emociones de Pedro, reconociendo la complejidad de su situación. Esto demuestra una escucha compasiva y le asegura a Pedro que sus sentimientos son importantes.]* Estás cansado y solo quieres volver a tu país.

Pedro: No lo sé, tal vez.



Defensor: *[Al repetir el sentimiento de Pedro, lo estás alentando a aclarar aún más sus pensamientos. Este es un enfoque no directivo que fomenta la autorreflexión.]* Escuché que no sabes lo que quieres hacer en este momento, ¿es así?

(Pedro se vuelve a alterar.)

Defensor: Son emociones difíciles, y veo que te están afectando. Pedro, no estás solo, tal vez tú y yo juntos podemos ordenar tus pensamientos y sentimientos para ayudarte a darles sentido. De esa manera, no sentirás que todo está sobre tus hombros, ¡por fuertes que sean! ¿Qué te parece? ¿Hay algo que pueda hacer para ayudarte en este momento?

Pedro: No lo sé.

Defensor: *[Expresa empatía y apoyo, ofreciendo compartir la carga emocional de Pedro. Enmarca el problema como algo que pueden resolver juntos.]* ¿Puedo hacerte una pregunta? ... Si tuvieras una varita mágica en este momento y pudieras tener un deseo, ¿Qué desearías?

Pedro: Que mis abuelos vivieran conmigo aquí, y yo no estaría solo.

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

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

Defensor: Es difícil dejar atrás a nuestros seres queridos. Puedo ver que te sientes responsable. Tal vez podamos encontrar una tarjeta telefónica para que puedas llamarlos una vez a la semana, de esa manera no parecerán tan lejanos.

Pedro: Eso me gustaría.

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

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

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

Pedro: No, no quiero preocuparla, ya tiene muchas preocupaciones, no quisiera agregarle más.

Defensor: Escucho lo que estás diciendo. ¿Qué tal si te haces una pregunta diferente - cómo te ha demostrado tu hermana que le importas?

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

Defensor: ¡Sí! Ella quería ayudarte y te esperó cuando estabas en el refugio.

(Pedro confirma.)



Defensor: Y ella hizo una cita con el abogado también.

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

Defensor: *[Cierra la conversación sobre la hermana de Pedro en una nota positiva antes de cambiar la conversación para hablar sobre la corte.]* ¡Correcto! Por lo tanto, me parece que hay muchas pruebas de que ella se preocupa y te apoya mucho y creo que le importaría y le gustaría que le hablaras sobre tus preocupaciones. ¿Crees que puedes hacer tiempo para hablar con ella?

Pedro: Sí, creo que sería una buena idea. ¡Gracias por animarme!

Defensor: Me alegro de haber podido ayudar. ¿Quieres hablar ahora de la corte?

Pedro: Sí, estoy listo...

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 alegra volver a verte. Gracias por darme la oportunidad de hablar contigo.

Ana: ¡Buenos días!

Defensor: *[Presenta el propósito de la sesión y establece expectativas claramente.]* 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 tu caso de asilo?

Ana: Sí, me acuerdo de eso.

Defensor: *[Fomenta la autonomía de Ana ofreciéndole opciones sobre cómo abordar la declaración.]* Bueno, pude escribir la declaración, y ahora me gustaría compartirla contigo para asegurarme de que escribí correctamente lo que compartiste conmigo. Es importante para mí que la declaración refleje y respete tus recuerdos. Podemos leerla juntas si quieres. O si quieres, puedes leerla tú misma en silencio. De cualquier manera, puedo aclarar cualquier duda o pregunta que tengas.

Ana: Ok, me gustaría leerla yo misma en silencio.

Defensor: *[Recuérdale gentilmente a Ana sobre las estrategias de afrontamiento y prepárala para posibles reacciones emocionales.]* ¡Claro! Pero antes de eso, me gustaría hablar de algo importante contigo. La semana pasada, cuando me estabas contando tu historia, te causó dolor,



tristeza y agitación. ¿Y recuerdas que hablamos de esas técnicas de respiración profunda y afrontamiento para ayudarnos cuando tenemos esos sentimientos? ¿Te acuerdas de la que tú y yo practicamos juntas? ¿Te ayudó ese ejercicio?

Ana: Sí, me acuerdo, y me ayudó mucho.

Defensor: *[Prepara proactivamente a Ana para la posibilidad de angustia emocional. Ofrece una atención informada sobre el trauma al anticipar los desencadenantes y ofrecer un plan para manejarlos.]* ¡Me alegra oír 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 hoy, y me gustaría que estuviéramos preparadas para eso. ¿Qué te parece si hacemos un plan en caso de que esto suceda?

Ana: Ok.

Defensor: *[Enfatiza la importancia de la autoconciencia y enséñale a Ana cómo reconocer los primeros signos de angustia emocional.]* Como hablamos anteriormente, es importante que sepas reconocer en ti misma que algo te está afectando. Esto significa que sabes o aprendes a leer tus sentimientos, emociones y la forma en que tu cuerpo reacciona. Me mencionaste que tu corazón comenzó a latir más rápido y realmente querías llorar la última vez. Esas eran señales que tu cuerpo te enviaba que algo te estaba afectando. Es importante que, si eso vuelve a suceder, que te digas a ti mismo y a mí que es tiempo para una pausa. ¿Estás de acuerdo?

Ana: Sí.

Defensor: *[Refuerza las técnicas de conexión a tierra y recordarle a Ana sus herramientas de afrontamiento.]* Lo siguiente es recordar que a veces nuestra mente puede engañarnos, y puede parecer que estás 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, al 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 con la técnica en ese momento o prefieres hacerlo sola?

Ana: Sí, me gustaría que me ayudaras.



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

Ana: Sí.

(Ana lee su declaración y se altera visualmente. Empieza a llorar, a temblar, y recuesta su cabeza en la mesa).

Defensor: *[Reconoce la angustia de Ana y ofrécele una pausa.]* Puedo ver que leer la declaración está sacando a relucir emociones que son difíciles para ti. ¿Quieres que hagamos una pausa?

Ana: Sí... Eso creo.

Defensor: *[Permite a Ana todo el tiempo que necesite para sentirse mejor. No la apresures a ella ni a la situación.]* ¿Cómo puedo ayudarte ahora mismo? ¿Te puedo conseguir algo?

Ana: (Llorando) Es que, ¡amo a mi papá! ¡Realmente no quería lastimarme!

Defensor: *[Aborda con delicadeza los sentimientos contradictorios de Ana y ofrécele tranquilidad.]* 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: ¿Cuánto tiempo hace que te sientes así? Cuéntame más sobre eso....

Ana: Un rato. Siento que todo esto sucedió por mi culpa. ¡Que es mi culpa...!

Defensor: *[Tranquiliza a Ana y ayúdala a cambiar su sentido de culpa.]* Lo 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 ahora mismo es que estés sana y que te sientas segura. Estoy aquí para apoyarte y escucharte.

Ana: Ok, gracias. Voy a pensar en eso.

Defensor: *[Sugiere un descanso para una redirección saludable.]* ¿Qué tal si tomamos un descanso para estirar nuestros cuerpos y respirar profundamente varias veces?"

Ana: Sí, está bien.

Ana se toma un descanso, se estira, bebe agua y practica respiración profunda. Una vez que vuelve a leer la declaración, se vuelve a molestar de nuevo).

Defensor: *[Reconoce la angustia de Ana y activa el plan.]* Ana, puedo ver que al seguir leyendo esto, está provocando muchas emociones fuertes en ti. ¿Qué tal si activamos el plan que comentamos?



Ana: (asiente)

Defensor: Dite a ti misma: "Hoy es (insertar fecha) y estoy en un lugar seguro, estoy con personas seguras y estoy a salvo".

Ana: Hoy es (insertar fecha), y estoy en un lugar seguro, estoy con personas seguras y estoy a salvo.

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

Ana: Hoy es (insertar fecha), y estoy en un lugar seguro, estoy con personas seguras y estoy a salvo.

Role Play: Luisa está saliendo con un hombre mayor y su madre ha expresado su preocupación.

En este juego de roles, Luisa es una joven peruana de 18 años, se reúne con su defensor. Luisa se reunió recientemente con su madre en Texas. La madre de Luisa está preocupada por el secretismo de su hija con respecto a una relación romántica, que Luisa finalmente revela que involucra a un hombre de 24 años. Su madre le ha expresado su preocupación a usted, el defensor, sobre la relación. El propósito de este juego de roles no es entrar en las ramificaciones de una situación que involucra el delito de relaciones sexuales con una menor que puede involucrar obligaciones éticas, informes obligatorios, aplicación de la ley y más. Como contexto para el juego de roles a continuación, suponga que el defensor ha revisado las leyes estatales para asegurarse de que las leyes sobre las relaciones sexuales con una menor no estén implicadas porque Luisa comenzó una relación romántica después de cumplir los 18 años y la edad de consentimiento sexual es de 17 años. Debido a esto, las protecciones legales para los jóvenes no son el foco de la discusión con Luisa. En cambio, el objetivo del defensor es discutir las relaciones saludables, las dinámicas de poder, las normas culturales y el consentimiento sexual, mientras utiliza la Entrevista Motivacional y la humildad cultural para garantizar que Luisa se sienta apoyada y empoderada para tomar decisiones informadas.

Defensor: Hola Luisa, es un placer verte de nuevo. ¿Cómo te has ido adaptando a la vida aquí con tu mamá? Sé que puede ser un gran cambio, especialmente después de estar separadas por un tiempo.

Luisa: Sí, va bien. Un poco diferente, pero me estoy acostumbrando. Mi mamá está feliz de que esté aquí.

Defensor: [Usa la escucha reflexiva para validar los sentimientos de Luisa y animarla a compartir más.] Parece que ha sido un poco de ajuste, pero lo estás manejando bien. Debe ser agradable estar de vuelta con tu mamá, incluso si es un poco diferente.



Luisa: Sí, lo es. Pero ella se preocupa mucho, ¿sabes? A veces parece que no confía en mí.

Defensor: *[Usa empatía y valida sus sentimientos para generar confianza y fomentar la apertura.]*

Me imagino que eso puede ser frustrante, especialmente si sientes que has crecido mucho durante el tiempo que estuvieron separadas. Es natural que las mamás se preocupen, pero eso no hace que sea más fácil para ti.

Luisa: Sí, exactamente. Ella no entiende que ya no soy una niña pequeña.

Defensor: *[Introduce suavemente el tema de las relaciones, con una pregunta abierta para explorar los pensamientos de Luisa.]* Parece que realmente estás tratando de demostrarle que eres madura y responsable. Parte de crecer también es descubrir las relaciones. ¿Cómo han ido las cosas con eso? ¿Alguna nueva amistad o algo más que te haya entusiasmado?

Luisa: Bueno... Tengo un novio, pero realmente no hablo con mi mamá de él. Ella no lo entendería.

Defensor: *[Usa la escucha reflexiva para validar los sentimientos de Luisa y explorar más suavemente.]* Parece que te importa él, pero te preocupa cómo podría reaccionar tu mamá si lo supiera. Es una situación difícil.

Luisa: Sí, es anticuada. Ella piensa que soy demasiado joven para salir con alguien. Pero ya no soy una niña.

Defensor: *[Afirma la autonomía de Luisa mientras comienza a explorar la relación.]* Tienes razón, estás creciendo y descubriendo lo que es importante para ti. Es genial que te sientas segura de tus decisiones. ¿Puedes contarme un poco más sobre tu novio? ¿Cómo se conocieron?

Luisa: Tiene 24 años. Nos conocimos a través de unos amigos. Es muy amable conmigo y me entiende más que la gente de mi edad.

Defensor: *[Usa la humildad cultural mientras explora el contexto cultural y evita juzgar.]* Parece que es alguien con quien realmente te sientes conectada, lo cual es importante. En algunas culturas, las relaciones con las personas mayores pueden verse de manera diferente. ¿Qué opinas de la diferencia de edad entre ustedes dos?

Luisa: La verdad es que no le doy mucha importancia. Es maduro y eso me gusta. La gente de mi edad parece tan inmadura.

Defensor: *[Explora la perspectiva de Luisa y comienza a introducir consideraciones sobre las diferencias de edad.]* Tiene sentido que aprecies su madurez y la forma como te trata. A veces, sin embargo, puede ser útil pensar en cómo esas diferencias podrían afectar la relación. Por ejemplo, ¿alguna vez han hablado sobre su futuro juntos o lo que cada uno de ustedes quiere de la relación?



Luisa: La verdad es que no. Simplemente pasamos el rato y nos divertimos. No sé... a veces siento que él toma las decisiones, pero eso es porque es mayor y sabe más, ¿verdad?

Defensor: *[Explora las dinámicas de poder y los límites emocionales.]* Tiene sentido que aprecies su madurez. Pero a veces, con una diferencia de edad como esta, es importante pensar en cómo podría afectar tu relación. ¿Te escucha cuando hablas de lo que quieres o de cómo te sientes?

Luisa: Sí, quiero decir... Creo que sí. Él tiene más experiencia, así que a veces simplemente sigo su ejemplo.

Defensor: Es comprensible. Pero ¿sientes que respeta tus límites? Por ejemplo, si dices que te sientes incómoda con algo o que quieres hacer algo diferente, ¿te escucha y lo respeta?

Luisa: A veces... Supongo que realmente no digo nada porque no quiero discutir.

Defensor: *[Sé directo con tus preguntas sobre el respeto y los límites, especialmente si se trata de relaciones sexuales.]* Te escucho. Es muy importante que, en cualquier relación, especialmente en una con una diferencia de edad, se respeten los límites, ya sean emocionales o físicos. ¿Ustedes dos están teniendo relaciones físicas o relaciones sexuales? Y si es así, ¿sientes que te escucha cuando dices que no o pones límites?

Luisa: Si estamos, sí... Quiero decir, siempre es amable, pero a veces siento que es un poco insistente, ¿sabes? Como si no estoy de humor, él sigue intentando hasta que yo ceda.

Defensor: *[Enfatiza el consentimiento sexual y el desequilibrio de poder.]* Es muy importante que él te escuche cuando digas que no o no estés de "humor". Tienes todo el derecho de decir que no en cualquier momento, y él tiene que respetarlo. Aunque estés en una relación, el consentimiento sexual sigue siendo importante. No se trata solo de decir sí o no una vez; se trata de asegurarte de estar siempre cómoda y no sentirte presionada. ¿Sientes que él respeta eso?

Luisa: Supongo... a veces siento que realmente él no cree que sea un problema, pero no quiero hacerlo enojar.

Defensor: *[Fomenta la reflexión sobre la dinámica de relaciones saludables y la seguridad emocional.]* Es muy importante hablar de eso, Luisa. En una relación saludable, ambas personas respetan los límites y sentimientos del otro, ya sea sobre el sexo, pasar tiempo juntos o tomar decisiones. No debe tratarse de que una persona empuje a la otra, y mereces sentirte cómoda diciendo que no en cualquier momento sin sentirte culpable.

Defensor: *[Ayuda a Luisa a sentirse empoderada evaluando la relación y el consentimiento sexual.]* Cuando piensas en tu relación, ¿sientes que puedes hablar por ti misma y ser escuchada, o sientes que él tiene más control?

Luisa: No sé... Siento que él toma las decisiones la mayor parte del tiempo porque sabe más, pero ahora que lo pienso, tal vez necesite decir más sobre lo que yo quiero.



Defensor: *[Reafirma la autonomía y los límites de Luisa.]* Eso es muy importante, Luisa. Tienes todo el derecho de hablar por ti misma y establecer límites que te hagan sentir segura y cómoda, sin importar tu edad o experiencia. Estoy aquí para ayudarte a pensar en lo que es mejor para ti y para ayudarte a descubrir cómo comunicarlo.

Luisa: O sea, no me siento presionada ni nada, pero supongo que a veces me dejo llevar por lo que él quiere.

Defensor: *[Empodera a Luisa proporcionando información sobre el consentimiento sexual y información legal sin juzgar.]* Mereces sentirte como un igual en cualquier relación, sin importar la diferencia de edad. Es muy importante que ambas personas respeten los límites del otro y que se sientan seguros y cómodos tomando decisiones juntos. Aquí en los Estados Unidos, hay leyes que protegen a los jóvenes en relaciones con personas mayores, y hay diferentes normas culturales relacionadas con las diferencias de edad cuando una persona es menor de edad. Por ejemplo, si tuvieras 16 años, esta podría ser una conversación muy diferente porque la ley prohibiría las relaciones sexuales entre tú y tu novio, y él podría ser declarado culpable de un delito.

Luisa: No sabía eso.

Defensor: Sí, las leyes están destinadas a proteger a los jóvenes en las relaciones. Estas leyes reconocen que una persona mayor puede tener más influencia o control y buscan garantizar que los jóvenes estén protegidos.

Luisa: Pero él no está tratando de controlarme. Solo que es mayor.

Defensor: *[Afirma sus sentimientos mientras la anima suavemente a reflexionar más.]* Te escucho, Luisa. Parece que realmente te preocupas por él y no sientes que está tratando de controlarte intencionalmente. Al mismo tiempo, es bueno pensar en lo que quieres y necesitas en una relación. Mereces estar con alguien que valore tu opinión y se asegure de que te sientas tan importante como ellos.

Luisa: Sí, lo entiendo. Simplemente no sé qué hacer.

Defensor: *[Ofrece apoyo y refuerza la autonomía de Luisa en la toma de decisiones.]* Está bien sentirse insegura. Lo más importante es que te tomes tu tiempo para pensar en lo que es adecuado para ti. Estoy aquí para ayudarte a explorar tus opciones y descubrir qué te hace sentir mejor. Ya sea hablando más sobre cómo se ve una relación saludable, o discutiendo cómo comunicarte con tu novio, o incluso pensando en cómo hablar con tu mamá, estoy aquí para ti.

Luisa: Gracias... Creo que me gustaría hablar más sobre ello, tal vez averiguar cómo asegurarme de que las cosas estén bien entre nosotros.

Defensor: Me parece una gran idea. Definitivamente podemos hablar más y trabajar en esto juntas.



Role Play: Dora está embarazada y necesita ayuda para entender sus opciones.

En este juego de roles, Dora, una joven mexicana de 15 años, se reúne con su defensor. Dora recientemente se reunió con su tía y acaba de descubrir que quedó embarazada después de una breve relación durante su viaje a los Estados Unidos. Agobiada e insegura sobre sus opciones, Dora busca orientación. El objetivo de la defensora es proporcionar a Dora información clara y compasiva sobre sus opciones de embarazo, apoyarla para que tome una decisión informada y asegurarse de que se sienta cuidada y no sola durante este momento difícil.

Defensor: Hola, Dora. Me da gusto que nos hemos reunido hoy. Tu tía me compartió que recibiste una noticia inesperada de que estás embarazada. Quiero que sepas que estoy aquí para apoyarte en todo lo que necesites. Este es un espacio seguro, podemos hablar de ello y procesar esta noticia a tu ritmo. ¿Cómo te sientes en este momento?

Dora: Tengo miedo. No me lo esperaba en absoluto. Ni siquiera sé qué hacer. Solo tuve una relación corta con un chico que conocí en el viaje. Me siento tan sola.

Defensor: *[Usa la escucha reflexiva para validar los sentimientos de Dora y animarla a compartir más.]* Parece que te sientes realmente angustiada e insegura sobre lo que vendrá. Es completamente normal sentirse así, especialmente con todo lo que has pasado. ¿Puedes contarme un poco más sobre lo que estás pensando o sintiendo en este momento?

Dora: No sé cuáles son mis opciones. Es que no quiero cometer un error o elegir algo y arrepentirme más tarde.

Defensor: Entiendo. Esta es una gran decisión, y es importante que tomes tu tiempo para pensar en tus opciones. Hablemos de lo que estás considerando para que puedas sentirte más informada y segura de las posibilidades que existen. ¿Tienes alguna idea sobre lo que te gustaría hacer?

Dora: La verdad es que no lo he pensado mucho. Ni siquiera sé cuáles son mis opciones o qué significan. Estoy muy preocupada.

Defensor: *[Proporciona información clara y compasiva sobre las opciones disponibles, asegurando que Dora se sienta apoyada.]* Está bien, Dora. Es importante ir por esto paso a paso. Hay varias opciones que puedes considerar:

- **Crianza de los hijos:** Si decides quedarte con el bebé, estarías haciendo un plan sobre cómo cuidar al bebé, incluido el lugar donde vivirán y cómo administrarías cosas como la escuela y la atención médica. Hay recursos y sistemas de apoyo disponibles para ayudar a los padres jóvenes.
- **Adopción:** Esto significa elegir una familia que pueda criar y proporcionar un hogar permanente para el bebé. Esta puede ser una opción si sientes que no puedes cuidar al



bebé en este momento. Hay agencias y consejeros que pueden ayudarte con este proceso.

- **Interrupción del embarazo:** Esta opción consiste en abortar el embarazo. Es importante conocer los procedimientos y las posibles implicaciones para que puedas tomar una decisión informada. Hay profesionales médicos que te pueden proporcionar información y apoyo.

Podemos hablar más sobre cada una de estas opciones, y puedo ayudar a conectarte con recursos y personas que pueden proporcionar información más detallada.

Dora: No sé qué es lo mejor para mí. No tengo a nadie con quien hablar sobre esto y tengo miedo de tomar la decisión equivocada.

Defensor: Es normal sentirte insegura y preocupada. Esta es una gran decisión y es importante que te tomes el tiempo que necesitas. No tienes que tomar esta decisión sola. Puedes hablar con profesionales médicos, consejeros y grupos de apoyo para obtener más información que te ayudará a pensar en lo que es lo mejor para ti.

También tienes derecho a buscar el apoyo de personas que se preocupan por ti y que pueden ayudarte a evaluar tus opciones. Estoy aquí para apoyarte a través de esto, ya sea que necesites a alguien con quien hablar, ayuda para acceder a los recursos o simplemente un oído atento.

Dora: Creo que me gustaría aprender más sobre cada opción antes de decidirme. Quiero asegurarme de que entiendo todo.

Defensor: *[Afirma la elección de Dora y proporciona los próximos pasos.]* Parece un buen plan. Puedo ayudar conectándote con profesionales que pueden brindarte más detalles sobre cada opción y responder cualquier pregunta que puedas tener. También podemos hablar sobre cualquier preocupación o miedo que tengas en el camino. Recuerda, se trata de encontrar lo que es mejor para ti, y es importante tomar una decisión con calma.

Dora: Gracias. Me siento un poco mejor sabiendo que puedo hablar con alguien sobre esto.

Defensor: Me alegra oír eso, Dora. No tienes que pasar por esto sola. Para empezar, tengo aquí un par de folletos de [Planned Parenthood](#) que cubren la crianza de los hijos, la adopción y el aborto del embarazo con más profundidad. Puedes revisarlos cuando sea conveniente para ti, y podemos hablar sobre cualquier cosa en ellos si deseas obtener más información.

Dora: Lo pensaré más y leeré estos folletos. Te avisaré cuando esté lista para hablar más.

Defensor: Eso suena bien. Solo recuerda que puedes comunicarte conmigo o con tu trabajador social si tienes alguna pregunta o necesitas apoyo. Te apoyaremos durante este proceso, y estamos aquí para ayudarte.



Role Play: Pascual 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: Hola Pascual, gracias por estar hoy aquí conmigo. Sé que hemos tenido muchas conversaciones sobre diferentes partes de tu vida y tu viaje. Antes de comenzar, pensé que sería bueno escuchar algo divertido o interesante sobre tu día. ¿Hay algo que hayas hecho recientemente que te haya llamado la atención o te haya hecho sentir bien?

Pascual: Mmm... bueno, supongo que dibujar. Intenté dibujar por primera vez en mucho tiempo. No salió perfecto, pero me gustó.

Defensor: ¡Eso es genial! Dibujar puede ser una buena manera de relajarse y expresarse. ¿Qué dibujaste?

Pascual: Dibuje mi perro, Nacho. Lo extraño mucho. Solo no me salió bien su nariz. En lo demás si se parece.

Defensor: Si, me imagino que extrañas mucho a Nacho. Sabes, yo también tengo dos perritas. Una se llama Camila y la otra Luna. ¡Dan mucha lata, pero las quiera mucho!

Pascual: ¿Son grandes?

Defensor: No, son pequeñas las dos, pero comelonas.

Pascual: Nacho come de todo, hasta los zapatos.

Defensor: Si, Camila y Luna se meten en todo. Bueno, cambiando de tema un poco, hoy me toca a mi ser un poco metiche. Me gustaría platicar contigo de un tema que puede parecer bastante personal: cosas como el género y la sexualidad. Tenemos estas conversaciones con todos los jóvenes con los que trabajamos porque nos ayuda a entender las necesidades de cada persona y nos da la oportunidad de ofrecer el mejor apoyo posible. Sé que estas preguntas a veces pueden parecer incómodas y entiendo completamente si ese es el caso.

Pascual: ¿Porque tiene que hablar conmigo sobre esto?

Defensor: *[Agrega contexto de por qué se hacen estas preguntas.]* La razón por la que hago estas preguntas es para ayudar a identificar cualquier necesidad o desafío que pueda surgir para ti. Incluso podría ser relevante para tu caso de inmigración. Por ejemplo, si has enfrentado dificultades debido a tu identidad de género o sexualidad, sabiendo eso puede ayudarnos a abogar por ti de la mejor manera posible.



En los Estados Unidos las personas que se identifican como lesbianas, gays, bisexuales, transgénero o de otra manera tienen ciertas protecciones bajo la ley. A veces, las personas enfrentan desafíos o discriminación basada en su identidad, y si esa es tu situación, quiero asegurarme de que conozcas las protecciones, los derechos y el apoyo disponibles para ti. ¿Tiene sentido?

Pascual: Creo que sí. Pero, mmm, no estoy muy seguro de lo que quieres decir con... género y sexualidad. ¿No son lo mismo?

Defensor: *[Proporciona una explicación clara y breve y verifica la comprensión.]* Excelente pregunta. Muchas personas se preguntan lo mismo. La identidad de género y la orientación sexual están conectadas, pero no son lo mismo. La identidad de género es cómo te sientes contigo mismo, ya sea que te sientas como un niño, una niña, algo intermedio o algo más. Se trata de cómo te entiendes a ti mismo en términos de ser hombre, mujer u otra identidad. *(Haz una breve pausa para que absorba esto.)*

Luego, está la orientación sexual, que tiene que ver con quién te atrae románticamente o físicamente, es decir, si te sientes así por los chicos, las chicas, ambos o ninguno. ¿Tiene sentido hasta ahora?

También puedes optar por usar una imagen como el "Unicornio de género", ya que esto podría ayudar a los jóvenes a comprender mejor este tema.

Pascual: Sí, entiendo.

Defensor: Para ayudar a explicarlo un poco más, tengo un gráfico del [Unicornio de Género](#) que te puedo mostrar. Esta imagen puede ayudar para comprender las diferencias entre la identidad de género, la expresión de género, el sexo asignado al nacer, la atracción sexual y la atracción romántica.

Entonces, piensa en esto: *[Señala mientras lees sobre cada parte del cuerpo del unicornio.]*

- Identidad de género: Esto es tu sentido interno de ser hombre, mujer, ninguno de estos, ambos u otro(s) género(s).
- Expresión de género: Así es como muestras tu género al mundo a través de la ropa, el comportamiento y otras formas de presentación.
- Sexo asignado al nacer: Esto es como te asignaron al nacer en función de las características físicas de tu cuerpo.
- Atracción sexual: Se refiere a hacia quién te sientes atraído físicamente o sexualmente.
- Atracción romántica: Se refiere a hacia quién te sientes atraído románticamente, lo que puede, pero no siempre, alinearse con la atracción sexual.

¿Esto ayudo a aclarar las diferencias y cómo están relacionadas pero distintas?



Pascual: Sí, creo que sí. Entonces, si me siento como un niño, ¿ese es mi género? Y si yo... o si te gusta o te sientes atraído por alguien... ¿Esa es orientación sexual?

Defensor: ¡Exactamente! Está totalmente bien tomarse su tiempo para averiguar esto. Algunas personas lo saben de inmediato, mientras que otras pueden sentirse inseguras y necesitan más tiempo para explorar. No es necesario que tengas todas las respuestas de inmediato. ¿Tienes alguna duda?

Pascual: Supongo... No estoy muy seguro de cómo me siento o pienso sobre mi identidad de género u orientación sexual. No he pensado mucho en ello. A veces pienso en las chicas, pero no estoy seguro de cómo me siento con respecto a cualquier otra cosa.

Defensor: *[Reasegura y ofrece apoyo.]* Está completamente bien, Pascual. Parece que todavía estás descubriendo las cosas, y eso es perfectamente normal. Se trata de lo que se sienta bien para ti. Lo más importante es que te sientas seguro y apoyado mientras exploras estos sentimientos. *[Haz una breve pausa para permitirle procesar.]*

Si te ayuda, puedo compartir algunos recursos, materiales de lectura o nombres de organizaciones que apoyan a las personas a explorar su orientación sexual o identidad de género. O si lo prefieres, podemos hablar más sobre cómo te sientes en este momento.

Pascual: Quizás... Más información ayudaría.

Defensor: Por supuesto. La experiencia de cada persona es única, y lo más importante es lo que te parezca correcto. Compartiré algunos recursos que pueden ayudar a explicar más sobre las diferentes identidades. Y recuerda, podemos ir tan despacio como quieras y volver a visitar cualquier tema cuando estés listo. Gracias de nuevo por confiar en mí para tener esta conversación contigo.

Pascual: Supongo... Realmente no sé cómo me siento o pienso sobre mi identidad de género u orientación sexual. Creo que nunca he pensado mucho en ello. A veces pienso en las chicas, pero no estoy muy seguro de cómo me siento con respecto a todo lo demás.

Defensor: *[Asegura a Pascual que la incertidumbre es normal y enfatiza la importancia de la seguridad y el apoyo.]* No hay ningún problema con eso, Pascual. Parece que todavía estás descubriendo cosas, y eso es normal. Está bien no tener todas las respuestas de inmediato. Lo más importante es que te sientas seguro y apoyado mientras exploras estos sentimientos, y que te sientas cómodo con quién eres. *[Haz una pausa por un momento para permitir que Pascual pueda procesar esta información.]*

Si quieres, puedo compartir algunos recursos, materiales de lectura u organizaciones que apoyen a las personas a explorar su orientación sexual o identidad de género. O, si lo prefieres, podemos seguir hablando de cómo te sientes en este momento.

Pascual: Quizás... Más información ayudaría.



Defensor: Por supuesto. Claro. La experiencia de cada persona es única, y lo importante es lo que te haga sentir bien a ti. Puedo compartir algunos recursos que podrían ayudarte a entender más sobre diferentes identidades de género y orientaciones sexuales, si quieres. Y recuerda, está bien tomar tu tiempo.

Role Play: Carlos está sufriendo acoso escolar/*bullying* en su nueva escuela.

En este juego de roles Carlos, un joven de 14 años que recientemente emigró de Venezuela con su familia, está sufriendo acoso escolar o “bullying” en su nueva escuela secundaria donde cursa el 8° grado. El acoso lo ha dejado sintiéndose aislado, vulnerable e inseguro de cómo responder. El objetivo del defensor es brindarle a Carlos apoyo emocional, explorar sus sentimientos y experiencias relacionadas con el acoso, y explorarlo con estrategias para abordar la situación y recuperar su confianza.

Defensor: Hola Carlos, me alegro de verte de nuevo. ¿Cómo han ido las cosas en la escuela? Sé que comenzar en un lugar nuevo puede ser difícil, especialmente después de una mudanza tan grande.

Carlos: Todo está bien, supongo. Simplemente diferente. La gente aquí es... diferente.

Defensor: *[Usa la escucha reflexiva para validar los sentimientos de Carlos.]* Sí, me imagino que es un gran cambio. Parece que estás notando algunas diferencias a las que puede ser difícil acostumbrarte. ¿Qué ha sido lo más difícil para ti hasta ahora?

Carlos: No sé... Algunos niños simplemente no son agradables. Dicen cosas, se burlan de mi acento o de dónde soy.

Defensor: *[Usa empatía y validez para animar a Carlos a compartir más.]* Eso suena muy duro, Carlos. No es justo que te traten de esa manera solo porque eres de otro lugar. ¿Puedes contarme más sobre lo que ha estado pasando?

Carlos: Me ponen apodos, como "mojado" o "ilegal". A veces me empujan en los pasillos o se ríen cuando respondo preguntas en clase. Trato de ignorarlos, pero... Es difícil.

Defensor: *[Usa empatía y normaliza los sentimientos de Carlos.]* Suena realmente doloroso, y es completamente comprensible que sea difícil de ignorar. Nadie debería tener que lidiar con ese tipo de tratamiento. ¿Cómo te sientes cuando esto sucede? ¿Qué sueles hacer?

Carlos: Solo trato de alejarme de ellos o quedarme callado. No quiero causar ningún problema, pero... me hace sentir que no pertenezco aquí.

Defensor: *[Usa la escucha reflexiva y valida la experiencia de Carlos mientras explora sus emociones.]* Es realmente doloroso cuando las personas te hacen sentir que no perteneces,



especialmente cuando solo estás tratando de encajar y hacer lo mejor que puedes. Parece que estás haciendo lo posible por evitar problemas, pero cada vez es más difícil lidiar con la situación.

Carlos: Sí... Echo de menos cómo eran las cosas en casa. No tenía que preocuparme por estas cosas.

Defensor: *[Usa la humildad cultural y reconoce los desafíos de adaptarse a un nuevo entorno.]* Puedo ver cuánto extrañas tu hogar, y tiene sentido que era más fácil cuando no tenías que lidiar con este tipo de comportamiento. Mudarte a un nuevo lugar ya es bastante difícil, y tener que enfrentar esto encima es realmente injusto. ¿Qué crees que te ayudaría a sentirte más seguro o cómodo en la escuela?

Carlos: No sé... Solo quiero que dejen de molestarme. Pero no quiero decírselo a nadie porque podría empeorar las cosas.

Defensor: *[Explora opciones con Carlos y usa las habilidades de la Entrevista Motivacional para empoderarlo.]* Es comprensible sentirse preocupado por tener que decir algo de lo que está pasando, a veces puede parecer que eso podría hacer las cosas más difíciles. Pero hay maneras de abordar lo que está sucediendo sin ponerte en una situación difícil. Por ejemplo, puede haber un maestro o consejero de confianza que pueda ayudar sin que sea obvio que tu dijiste algo. O podemos hablar sobre las formas en que puedes manejar estas situaciones, para que te sientas más seguro. ¿Qué te parece?

Carlos: Quizás... No sé con quién hablaría. Simplemente no quiero meter a nadie en problemas.

Defensor: *[Afirma la idea de Carlos y refuerza su autonomía en la toma de decisiones.]* Entiendo, Carlos. Está claro que estás pensando cuidadosamente en cómo manejar esto, y entiendo que no quieres causar problemas a nadie. Pero tu seguridad y sentirte respetado en la escuela son realmente importantes. ¿Qué te parece si pensamos juntos en alguien en quien puedas confiar, aunque sea un poco, para hablar? O podemos idear algunas estrategias que puedas usar cuando esos niños te molesten.

Carlos: Supongo que hay una profesora que es amable. Ella también es de Venezuela, así que podría entenderme.

Defensor: *[Afirma la idea de Carlos y refuerza su autonomía en la toma de decisiones.]* Eso suena como una gran idea, Carlos. Es buen plan ponerte en contacto con alguien que pueda entender de dónde vienes. Podemos pensar en cómo podrías iniciar esa conversación, si quieres, o puedo ayudarte a practicar algunas cosas que decirles a esos jóvenes para que te sientas más preparado. ¿Qué crees que ayudaría más en este momento?

Carlos: Tal vez pueda intentar hablar con la profesora... Pero también me gustaría saber qué decirles a esos jóvenes. No quiero que sigan pensando que pueden simplemente tratarme mal.

Defensor: *[Proporciona apoyo práctico y refuerza la confianza de Carlos.]* Absolutamente, Carlos. Definitivamente podemos trabajar en eso juntos. Mereces sentirte fuerte y seguro de ti mismo, y



hay cosas que puedes decir o hacer que puedan ayudar a establecer límites con esos niños. Averiguaremos qué es lo que te parece correcto, para que te sientas listo la próxima vez que intenten meterse contigo.

Carlos: Sí, está bien. A mí me gustaría.

Defensor: Estoy muy orgulloso de ti, Carlos, por querer tomar medidas para defenderte. No estás solo en esto, y estoy aquí para apoyarte en lo que necesites. Seguiremos trabajando en esto juntos hasta que te sientas seguro y respetado en la escuela.

Carlos: Gracias. Me ayuda saber que alguien está de mi lado.

Role Play: La madre de Delia falleció y necesita ayuda para superar su duelo.

En este juego de roles, Delia, una joven hondureña de 15 años, se reúne con su defensor. Delia vivió recientemente la devastadora pérdida de su madre durante su viaje migratorio, dejándola sola para navegar su dolor y trauma en un nuevo país. El defensor, consciente de la dolorosa experiencia de Delia, tiene como objetivo proporcionar un espacio seguro y de apoyo para que ella exprese sus sentimientos. El objetivo es conectarla con los recursos apropiados y ayudarla a comenzar el proceso de sanación, al mismo tiempo que se asegura de que se sienta comprendida y cuidada durante este momento difícil.

Defensor: Hola Delia, me alegro de volver a verte. Quiero empezar diciendo lo mucho que lamento tu pérdida. Solo puedo imaginar lo difícil que debe ser para ti en este momento.

Delia: Gracias. Ha sido muy duro.

Defensor: *[Muestra empatía y validación.]* Entiendo. Perder a alguien importante puede ser increíblemente doloroso, y es normal sentirse agobiada. Recuerda que no tienes que pasar por esto sola.

Delia: Siento que no sé qué hacer, todo se siente diferente y difícil.

Defensor: *[Expresa compasión y ofrece apoyo práctico.]* Tiene sentido que todo se sienta diferente. Es un gran ajuste y es normal sentirse perdida. Quiero ayudarte a encontrar el apoyo que necesitas para superar esto. Hay algunos recursos y personas que pueden ofrecerte apoyo durante este tiempo.

Delia: ¿Qué tipo de apoyo?

Defensor: *[Proporciona información sobre los recursos disponibles.]* Hay consejeros y terapeutas que se especializan en el duelo y el trauma. Pueden ayudarte a navegar tus sentimientos y brindarte estrategias para sobrellevar el dolor. También hay grupos de apoyo donde puedes



hablar con otras personas que han vivido pérdidas similares. ¿Te interesaría saber más sobre estas opciones?

Puedes mostrar e introducir recursos para profesionales de la salud mental y grupos de apoyo que podrían ser útiles para Delia. Podrías mencionar organizaciones como el [Dougy Center](#), que se especializa en consejería de duelo para jóvenes y proporciona recursos tanto en inglés como en español. El centro también puede ayudar a localizar apoyo para el duelo cerca del área de Delia. Para la situación específica de Delia, podrías sugerir que se comunique con organizaciones de salud mental que brindan atención culturalmente sensible, como los recursos en español de [Mental Health America](#). También podrías ofrecer hacer un seguimiento con una lista de consejeros cercanos u organizaciones que ofrecen consejeros de duelo que hablan español. También puedes comunicarte con [Therapy for Latinx](#), un directorio de terapeutas que pueden ofrecer atención culturalmente competente para las comunidades latinas.

Delia: Quizás... Realmente no sé qué esperar.

Defensor: *[Ofrece tranquilidad y explicación del proceso.]* Entiendo. Estos profesionales están allí para escucharte y ayudarte a tu propio ritmo. Pueden hablar sobre tus sentimientos y ellos pueden ayudarte a encontrar maneras de manejarlos. Es un espacio seguro donde puedes expresarte sin ningún juicio. Si lo deseas, puedo ayudarte a conectar con alguien que pueda explicar las cosas con más detalle y responder cualquier pregunta que puedas tener.

Puedes ofrecer conectar a Delia con recursos como la [Línea 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) (línea de crisis a la cual se puede mandar mensaje de texto o llamar al 988), que brinda apoyo emocional las 24 horas del día, los 7 días de la semana en varios idiomas.

Delia: Parece que podría ayudar.

Defensor: Genial. Puedo conectarte con un consejero que tenga experiencia trabajando con jóvenes que han pasado por experiencias similares. Te daré la información de contacto y te ayudaré a programar una cita si lo deseas. No tienes que tomar ninguna decisión en este momento, pero es bueno tener la información disponible.

Delia: Gracias. Creo que me gustaría tener esa información.

Defensor: Por supuesto, Delia. Estoy aquí para apoyarte y quiero asegurarme de que tengas los recursos que necesitas. Recuerda que está bien buscar ayuda.

Delia: Gracias por ayudar. Significa mucho para mí.

Defensor: Absolutamente. Tómate tu tiempo con esto y recuerda que no estás sola. Estoy aquí para ayudar en todo lo que pueda.

