



JOURNEY TO

BETHANY

RESPONDING TO SURVIVORS

CARING IN A TRAUMA-INFORMED WAY

 816-683-8999

 www.journeytobethany.org

THANK YOU

The guidance provided here comes directly from local survivors who helped us prepare for a trauma-informed care and response workshop in the diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph.

This sheet is not meant to represent or to substitute for the advice or care of professional mental health providers.

RESOURCES

www.journeytobethany.org/trauma-informed

SURVIVORS FEEL



- Guilt
- Sadness
- Abandonment
- Physical pain
- Anxiety
- Loss of community
- Will it ever end?

SURVIVORS NEED



- To be heard
- To be accepted
- To be believed
- To understand that they did nothing wrong
- For you to say you are sorry it happened
- For you to say they didn't deserve what happened
- To know that you hurt for them
- That we want to help them carry the burden
- They want you to know that "I need help with this."

INCREASE YOUR KNOWLEDGE & UNDERSTANDING



- Read or listen to first-person accounts of clergy sexual abuse
- Families of survivors have different needs from survivors. Understand the difference between primary and secondary trauma.
- Realize that the brain doesn't process the two traumas differently.
- Often the pain a survivor feels may be as much about the response they have received as it is about the abuse itself.

WHEN LISTENING TO A SURVIVOR'S STORY

- It's ok to ask for clarification, but don't expect them to go into detail. Your conversation with them does not need to collect details; it should be centered on pastoral care.
- Survivors may only be able or willing to share a little at a time.
- The important part of their story is their feelings and the effects of the abuse, not the account of the abuse.
- If you are not a good fit for the person who has come to you, open the door to more resources.
- Respond in an empowering way. Give hope.
- Don't worry about "If I say the wrong thing." Survivors feel that way too.
- Let the Holy Spirit lead.
- You are going to be uncomfortable. It is very important to know this.
- Your meeting is not about fixing, although it might be about resources.
- There is not a script for responding, but it might be good to internalize and practice some good phrases. Rely on your empathy.
- Develop your sense of empathy and your listening skills – be confident in those so that survivors can be comfortable with you.
- Know how to report & what to do next so that the survivor feels like they've come to the right person.



TIPS FOR SPACE- AND SELF-AWARENESS

- There may be many triggers in your building and your office such as crucifixes, candles, religious art, or certain smells associated with a church. Try to rearrange your space to be neutral but know it's impossible to know what every trigger might be. Simply be aware that triggers exist and be willing to remove them or change the space in some way.
- Don't expect eye contact. When we recount traumatic events, we look around, so what is on your walls is important.
- It can be comforting for survivors to have something to do with their hands. Try keeping some soft "stress balls" around.
- Survivors need to feel safe. Place your chairs far apart. Let the survivor have a view out of a window and let them sit near the door.
- Have tissues available and offer water.
- Understand that they might need to leave the room for a little while. Let them know this is ok, where the restroom is, or even what other room they can go into if needed.
- Not every survivor will welcome prayer as part of this conversation, and this is ok. Use your best judgment about suggesting a prayer or not.
- When the conversation is coming to a close, encourage them to be aware of how they will feel and invite them to think about how they will practice self-care afterward. Give them time and space to decompress before they drive home.