



CHOICE, CONSENT, CONTROL

How mental health professionals can help lessen the trauma for survivors of Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM)



As mental health practitioners working with survivors of CSAM, how you interact with and support your clients is instrumental in setting them on the path to recovery by serving as an emotionally corrective experience.

Opportunities for Choices

Presenting “this or that” creates options that make a difference to survivors. Knowing their choice matters is part of empowerment. It is important to remind the client about these options throughout your work with them.



Meet your client where they are and **allow them to choose** how and when they share their experience as they may fear judgment about aspects of their abuse. Use phrases like “We set some goals of working on _____ or working on _____, where would you like to start today?”



Recognize that some intake questions may be triggering for this population. Allow the survivor a choice on which questions they answer at intake and **encourage breaks** during this session.



Provide choices when utilizing grounding techniques as some techniques can be triggering for survivors of CSAM. Use phrases like “I’ll make a few suggestions and you can tell me what feels best to you.”



Survivors may need different modalities of therapeutic interventions throughout the course of their life. **Be open** to exploring the best modality for each client and providing a choice of connecting them with another provider if you are not trained in that practice.

Opportunities for Consent

Asking permission gives deference and respect to the survivor which they are entitled to after enduring their victimization. Seeking consent shows you are mindful and sensitive to the experiences and possible triggers.



Be transparent with sharing information with other professionals involved with the case. Remember part of the healing journey is the restoration of safety and being transparent offers your client the opportunity to exercise agency over their bodies.



Work with your clients to understand risks and rewards of social media use and where their information goes. You can **help create self-care plans** and a safety net for your client.



Educate yourself on the criminal justice notification process that applies to this survivor’s abuse imagery and the emotional impact of this process. The notification process allows survivors to opt-in and opt-out of information related to future cases. Notifications may either empower or trigger/revictimize the survivor.



After describing an intervention, **ask the survivor** “How does that sound to you? Would you like to try it?”



After an intervention, **ask the survivor** “How did that feel? Is that something you would like to do more of in session?”

Opportunities for Control

Survivors of CSAM are often experiencing ongoing victimization due to the presence and distribution of images and feel a loss of control over the distribution of those images; which often follows them into adulthood.



Help your client **navigate feelings of helplessness** over the distribution of CSAM online. Respect the fear, but properly frame it.



Educate yourself and clients about the ongoing global initiatives to remove content and the legal remedies available.



Help survivors **identify and manage triggers**, which may include cameras, medical settings and personnel, room arrangements, body development and compliments.



Use phrases like “I won’t make you do anything you are not comfortable with, so if anything I suggest or want you to try in session makes you uncomfortable, you can tell me and I will change to find something that does feel comfortable” and “It’s your session and I want to honor what you want.”



Help survivors **identify and manage milestones** related to the victimization. Milestones for survivors of CSAM can include body development and aging, embarking on romantic relationships, or parenthood, as examples.

Choice, Consent, Control

These are victims’ major liberties that are violated or denied by their perpetrators. Restoring these rights is part of the healing process.

Choice, consent, and control in the therapeutic relationship:



Make survivors feel safer



Model healthy relationships and boundaries



May set the victim on course for a more positive and hopeful long-term recovery



Help victims transition to survivors

For more resources:

MissingKids.org/CSAM

SurvivorServices@ncmec.org