



STRATEGIES & PRACTICE TIPS

ASSUME TRAUMA
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assume trauma may be in the parent's history.
CREATE A WELCOMING ATMOSPHERE
<i>Judges:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use expressions of welcome at the start of a hearing and thank all parties for coming.• Encourage courteous interactions among all parties.• Discourage badgering or intimidation.
TAKE A HEALING APPROACH
<i>Judges:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Apologize for a late start, acknowledging that waiting is difficult and anxiety-producing.• Provide assurance that disclosure of past life events will be used to connect the parent to services and will <u>not</u> be used against him or her in court. <i>Attorneys:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid aggressive cross-examination.
ADDRESS PARENTS DIRECTLY
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Address parents directly and respectfully.
ASSURE PARENTS UNDERSTAND COURT PROCEEDINGS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use plain and simple language and avoid professional jargon (e.g., adjudication, stipulation).• Repeat, repeat, repeat. Use repetition to help parents understand what is being said and what is being asked of them to do.• Ask the parent, "What does this mean to you?" to ascertain the degree of his or her understanding.• Identify who will be available immediately following the hearing to debrief and answer the parent's questions.• Make plenty of room in the court proceedings for parents to speak and ask questions. <i>Attorneys:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explain how the hearing will "go" using simple language, so the parent fully knows what to expect.• Make sure to ask if the parent has questions and that they feel comfortable asking their questions.
LISTEN CLOSELY TO PARENTS' WANTS AND NEEDS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Offer available options for service providers and ask parents to choose where they would like to go.• Ask parents what issues or needs they would like help with.• Ask parents whether their current services are helpful.• Ask parents in what ways a service has been helpful.
BE HONEST AND TRANSPARENT, WITH COMPASSION
<i>Judges:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Close each hearing by summarizing decisions and plans.• Schedule the permanency hearing at the adjudication hearing, so that parents see the "deadline" in every court order. <i>Attorneys:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explain the timelines and expectations for reunification clearly and give frequent, regular reminders.



CAREFULLY OBSERVE PARENTS' BEHAVIOR

Trauma 'Red Flags':

- Is the parent on edge?
- Is there no eye contact?
- Is the parent hunched over, or exhausted?
- Does she show any affect or emotions when you talk with her, or does she seem "checked out"?

SPECIFY TRAUMA ASSESSMENT

Judges:

- Require that the family history information from case workers or mental health clinicians includes a trauma evaluation using a trauma-specific assessment tool.
- It's preferable to have a mental health provider who is trauma-informed conduct a full mental health evaluation, including trauma exposure and symptom assessment.
- Recognize that disclosing trauma comes in the context of a trusting relationship, so it's important to allow time for the parent to reveal their past.

OUT-OF-COURT ADVOCACY: SUPPORTING TRAUMA DISCLOSURE

Attorneys:

- Build rapport and an authentic relationship with your client before addressing trauma.
- To prepare your client for a trauma evaluation, let them know that it may feel like an invasion of privacy but that it's important to answer the questions as completely and honestly as possible so that they receive the services they need to be successful.

MONITOR TRAUMA NEEDS AND SERVICES

- Regularly ask parents and service providers about needed services to identify and address problems right away.

SCHEDULE FREQUENT COURT HEARINGS

Judges:

- Schedule a shelter hearing for 24 hours after the child's removal.
- Schedule monthly (or more frequent) hearings.