

SART TOOLKIT

Sexual Assault Response Team Toolkit

Incorporating Cultural Responsiveness in Services

The following provides examples of incorporating cultural responsiveness in services.

Scenario: A client, who is a refugee and first-generation immigrant from Vietnam, seeks support from a service provider. The individual is worried that reporting a crime will affect their refugee status. They are worried about asking questions relative to their status. The victim reported a sexual assault and the service provider is working with the victim to set up follow-up appointments.

Traditional service provision: The service provider sets up several follow-up appointments for the client, based on availability of service providers. The client misses a number of appointments or is extremely tired at follow-up appointments with other service providers and appears to be experiencing increased symptoms of trauma.

Service provision with cultural responsiveness: The service provider interacts with the client to establish a relationship, recognizing a potential power dynamic. The service provider asks questions: “Do you want to set up a follow-up appointment?” The service provider explains the appointment and why follow-up is recommended: “You may ask questions and make suggestions at any time. You can always question me. Do not be afraid to tell me you need something. I may make mistakes. Tell me if I am doing something wrong. Let me know when my suggestions are helpful. I am accountable to you.” The service provider asks, “Do you have any questions for me? Is there something you are worried about you want me to know?”

The service provider outlines the process for responding to the sexual assault with the client before looking at the calendar or calling other service providers, asking: “What days and times work best for you? How will you get to the appointments? Do you have or need childcare? What might make it difficult or possible for you to get to an appointment? What will you do if you need to change the appointment or can’t show up?”

The service provider and client discuss what works best for the client and then the service provider sets up a number of follow-up appointments with the client. The service provider also connects the client with additional services, based on their conversation and the needs expressed by the client to enable the client to successfully show up for follow-up appointments.

Lessons Learned:

What happened in the traditional response? The client comes from a culture where voicing any disagreement, even one of logistics, is frowned upon, especially to those in authority or to service providers. The client most likely gave indirect cues that would be known in their community, but were lost to the service provider and resulted in limited conversation and the client’s ability to plan for change. The client felt afraid to share their schedule or disappoint the service provider in any way, including admitting they were unable to make an appointment. The

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client accepts the services being provided, as they are provided, even though making the appointments leaves an emotional and financial strain on the client. Both the client and service provider might be frustrated by the interaction or outcome.

What happened in the response with cultural responsiveness? The service provider worked with the client to develop a process that would lead to successful outcomes. The client is more likely to feel empowered to share their schedule and needs, even if they are still fearful to share their primary fear of losing their refugee status. When the service provider asks direct questions, the client may be open to sharing. These conversations aid in building a relationship of trust that empowers the client to be an active participant in their healing journey, enabling them to clearly state their needs.