

# Tip Sheet for Trauma-Informed Victim-Centric Writing

**“What you write is as important as what you say.”**

(National Center for Domestic Violence)

OVC defines a victim-centric approach as having a systematic focus on the needs and concerns of a victim to ensure the compassionate delivery of services in a nonjudgmental manner.

SAMHSA’s adaptable six principles for a trauma-informed approach serve as vital underpinnings for trauma-informed, victim-centric, and person-centered writing.



**SAFETY**



**PEER SUPPORT**



**EMPOWERMENT,  
VOICE, AND CHOICE**



**TRUSTWORTHINESS  
AND TRANSPARENCY**



**COLLABORATION  
AND MUTUALITY**



**CULTURAL, HISTORICAL, AND  
GENDER CONSIDERATIONS**

## TIPS AND TRICKS FOR TRAUMA-INFORMED WRITING

- 1 Creating a “warm-up letter” explaining key terms that will appear in victim compensation correspondence and acknowledging the formal nature of correspondence may help establish safety and rapport.
- 2 An ideal denial or determination letter is essential to avoid re-victimization. Communicate safety and respect and that the person’s experience matters even if a claim does not fall within guidelines for compensation. For example, “The claim,” not “your claim,” does not fall within guidelines for compensation...
- 3 A one-page document accompanying the comp instruction packet that defines key terms and acknowledges that sensitive information will be required in the application may help increase transparency and establish trust.
- 4 Be person-centered whenever possible. “Being a person impacted by violent crime” vs. “a victim or survivor of violent crime. This phrasing keeps the person at the center of communication. What happened to them is an event, not a reflection of who they are. A feeling of shame often accompanies victimization, so acknowledging a person can promote safety.
- 5 Be short, clear, and concise- consider the structural elements of written correspondence. Consider how correspondence looks on a page. For example, bold important dates, avoid legal/technical terms when possible, and use plain language. Headings and lists can be helpful too!
- 6 Be aware of command language. Be aware of **COMMAND LANGUAGE** and how information is communicated; sometimes, a simple adjustment changes the entire message. “FAILURE to respond by ...” feels intimidating, but “You have the right to request or disagree with the determination...” Moreover, it can convey a sense of empowerment to a person impacted by crime.
- 7 Refer to the phrases that work document for additional suggestions on how to make correspondence more trauma-informed and victim-centric.
- 8 Consider an intro statement that improves transparency “you are receiving this letter because...sometimes revisiting stressful or traumatic events can be difficult.”
- 9 Sign all correspondence from a specific contact. Include all contact info, website address, and phone extension to improve accessibility. If possible, list local resources that are available for people impacted by crime in the closing of correspondence.
- 10 Take good care of yourself. This is difficult work that can lead to vicarious trauma and vicarious resilience. You make a positive impact and contribution thank you for all you do!