

INTAKE GUIDELINES FOR ANTI-TRAFFICKING HOUSING PROGRAMS

After screening for program eligibility, an intake is often the next step for survivors accessing a housing program. At this point, the survivor has met eligibility criteria for the program, and you are meeting to get information to help fulfill the housing needs of the survivor and build rapport with the survivor. Where and how the intake takes place may vary based on the individual circumstances and comfort level of each survivor. Offering options whenever possible is important in continuing rapport building.

It is recommended that intakes take place in an agreed upon location between the survivor and the program. The housing program should be transparent about which staff person(s) is completing the intake and scheduling the intake appointment with the survivor, giving the survivor options about their preference for the meeting. It is also important to assess any special needs the survivor may have, such as an interpreter or written materials in another language.

Information Gathering

Intakes may be planned days in advance or may come quickly without much notice due to a survivor's critical need of housing. With this in mind, it is best to keep the intake meeting short while gathering only minimal information for meeting the specific housing needs for a survivor. Identify the information your program will need to know to provide housing to an individual, which is generally the definition of human trafficking and any specific program or funder criteria. Remember, collecting minimal data protects survivors and their information, especially if there is potential of your records being subpoenaed by a trafficker's attorney for any legal or court proceedings. The questions and information should be limited to critical "must know" areas collected for the purpose of housing the survivor.

For example, some programs may want to know survivors' birthdays and social security numbers, which could be used to easily identify survivors' entry into your housing program. With this example, if the program has these requirements in place, it's crucial to consider how survivors who are undocumented would be able to access housing services without providing a social security number. At times providers may have other funding or services offered to survivors that require both of these items. If this is the case, it is important that providers are prepared to explain why these items are required, how personal information will be protected/secured, and survivors be provided with the agency confidentiality policy.

When thinking through important information to gather during intake, more pertinent questions would be, “Do you have any accessibility preferences or requirements for your room/unit? (example: A unit with an elevator, handicap accessibility bathrooms, etc.)”, “What housing or food resources would you like to be connected with?” or “What is your ideal living environment?” It is also important to discuss any safety concerns the survivor may have in a proposed living environment. A survivor may feel the need to recount their trafficking experience or traumatic lived experiences during the intake meeting, and this is okay. In this instance, staff are able to remind survivors that they do not have to share any information that they aren’t comfortable with, and that the staff person will be willing to listen and support as desired. Yet, staff must keep in mind what information needs to be documented for the purpose of securing housing and what information is needed to be retained by staff for the purpose of building rapport and trust with survivors.

Duration of Intake Meetings

Allowing for the intake meeting to be a relatively short meeting allows for the survivor to have space and time to adjust to their new surroundings and to process any trauma they may have experienced. If possible, allot 30 minutes or less for intakes. Information about program guidelines, goal setting, and more in-depth conversations may be better suited for case management appointments rather than the initial intake appointment.

Remember, the intake may be a case manager’s or advocate’s first opportunity to build rapport and establish a foundation of trust. Commonly used practices during an intake such as having a survivor recount their full history and/or trafficking experience could potentially be overwhelming and re-traumatizing to the survivor. This would be a lot for any person to take in, comprehend, and remember. However, if there is relationship building occurring, feel free to extend the time together so that rapport-building is not interrupted.

Meeting Immediate Needs

As survivors enter into the housing program, they may be making this transition during a chaotic or unsafe time. While entering an emergency shelter program, survivors may come in late at night or need to leave their previous living situation quickly. This transition into the program could increase stress due to the environment being new or sharing space with others in a communal setting.

Additionally, survivors may be coming to your program with little or no resources, be new to the area, still experience homelessness, and likely experienced a great deal of stress and trauma. It is vital to be prepared to meet a survivor’s immediate needs. During your intake meeting, it may be useful to ask:

- Is there anything that you need (food, clothing, to phone a safe person, etc.) within the next day or two?
- What support or resources would you like to receive that will help you with your transition into the housing program? Or while you are searching for housing?
- How can we, as a staff, support you in your first few days within the housing program?

- How can we, as staff, support you while you are living with friends or family and looking for alternative housing options?

Making sure that survivors have access to food, clothing, hygiene items, and other basic necessities, including culturally appropriate and gender affirming clothing and hygiene products, will help them to feel comfortable and support their transition into housing services. For example, some programs have chosen to have readily available welcome or move-in kits that could include personal hygiene items, household supplies for their rental unit and food. Another example of meeting immediate needs is having the survivor create a “needs” list of specific items they would like during their intake so these can be purchased or provided to the survivors within a 24-48 timeframe. Alternatively, the program could provide community-based referrals to help meet these needs.

Space and Settings

As a provider, you will want to consider the space in which you are conducting intakes and who is present for the intake. You may want to ask the survivor directly what they need in the space to feel supported and safe. You may also want to ask a survivor about whether they have a preferred location to meet.

Items to consider:

- Does the space allow for confidentiality and privacy for the survivor to speak freely?
- What staff are available to complete the intake? Does your staff represent the population you are serving, allowing for diversity of who is doing intakes?
- Is it just the case manager and the survivor, or are more staff needed? Are there individuals that the survivor would like to present? Is an interpreter needed?

Survivor choice should be honored whenever possible. If a survivor indicates that they'd like to meet in a public space, support their preference and consider sharing or reviewing the following information with them: has the staff person highlighted the lack of confidentiality that may occur in a public space? If so, is the survivor still comfortable meeting in the public space, or would they prefer somewhere more private?

If meeting in an organizational space, consider if the space feels open and welcoming. Temperature and tidiness of the space as well as colors within the room can create a calming or chaotic atmosphere of any space. Keep this in mind when setting up office spaces or consider designating a space to hold intake meetings. You may want to have drinks and snacks available to the survivor along with any sensory tools used for decreasing anxiety and producing a therapeutic environment. For example, having textured objects such as kinetic sand or fidget spinners within reach of survivors may provide an added benefit for survivors during intake meetings.

There may be times when more than one staff person may be present for intake meetings. Situations that may prompt multiple staff members in an intake room may

include moments when new staff members need extra support to complete an intake, if a survivor is recently fleeing or leaving their abuser or trafficker and needs extra support, or if the survivor is in emotional distress and having more than one staff person will allow for additional support of staff and the survivor. In these situations, ask the survivor's permission to have more than one person present. If it raises concern or creates anxiety, share with them why an additional person is necessary or may be helpful. If the survivor still does not feel comfortable having other people in the room, brainstorm how to create a safe space with two people present or look into having a more experienced staff person do the intake instead.

Remember that working with a survivor and honoring their autonomy is of the utmost importance: identifying what helps them to feel safe is key. Avoiding asking unnecessary questions and providing a comfortable space for the intake can help to build rapport with the survivor and create a better relationship in the future.