



TEXAS  
ADVOCACY  
PROJECT

# Navigating Power-Based Abuse

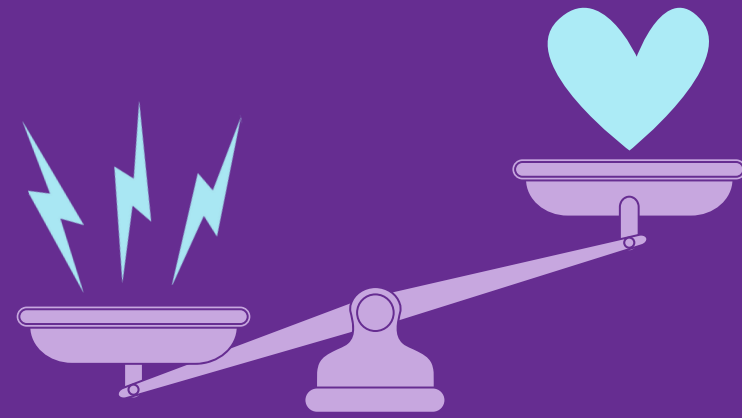
Empowerment & Trauma-Informed  
Legal Practice

# Learning Objectives

**At the end of this training, you will be able to:**

- Identify various forms of power-based abuse
- Recognize the psychological impact it has on survivors
- Understand the barriers to leaving abusive situations
- Implement empowerment-based advocacy techniques
- Apply trauma-informed legal practices (understand how trauma affects our work as lawyers)





# POWER-BASED ABUSE

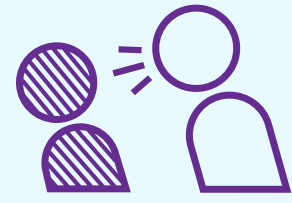


# What is Power-Based Abuse?

- **Power-based abuse** occurs when one person in a relationship uses various methods and tactics to **gain and maintain power and control** over the other person.
  - **It is about control**, not just violence or physical harm.
  - **Coercion is a tactic** used to maintain power and control, and can take many forms, including violence.



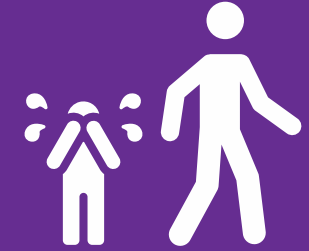
**Physical**



**Emotional /  
Psychological**



**Sexual**



**Child Abuse**

# Forms of Power-Based Abuse



**Human Trafficking**



**Economic Abuse**



**Stalking**

# Power & Control Wheel

Created by Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs in Duluth





## Regulation

Strategies and tactics employed to ensure compliance with abusers' demands like monitoring, interrogating, and stalking



## Exploitation

Intrusive oversight of victims' money, work, household related activities, and other resources

# Additional Coercive Control Tactics



## Degradation

Constantly criticizing and personally attacking, administering punishments and doling out privileges, undermining parenting or other meaningful roles and actions, "outing" or publicly disclosing something private, increasing trivial demands, and objectifying/dehumanizing their partner



## Deprivation of Freedoms

Micro-regulating or controlling everyday life, including depriving someone of personal privacy, dictating how they spend their time, depriving someone of making their own choices and acting on opportunities, deciding how someone can express themselves, and controlling access to basic resources

# Effects on the Survivor

- Low Self-Esteem
- Denial or Minimization of the Abuse
- Aggressiveness and Anger
- Apprehension, Fear or Helplessness
- Eating or Sleeping Disorders
- Substance and/or Alcohol Abuse
- Anxiety/Depression
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder



**WHY DON'T THEY  
JUST LEAVE?**





**Immigration  
Status**



**Financial  
security**



**Love and  
hope**



**Fear for their  
own safety**



**Nowhere to go  
(housing)**

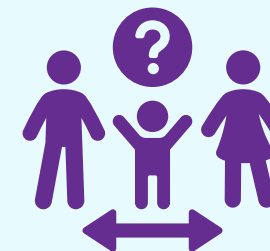
# Barriers to Leaving



**Religious or  
cultural values**



**Fear for the safety of  
their children**



**Fear that their violent  
partners will get custody of  
children**



**Not knowing where  
to seek help**

# The Decision to Leave Could Mean...

- An escalation of the partner's violence
- Increased risks for children
- Loss of home, income, job, health insurance, and immigration status
- Loss of faith community and even the support of family and friends



# TRAUMA-INFORMED LAWYERING



# What is Trauma?

Trauma is an **emotional, psychological or sometimes physical response to a deeply distressing event** or series of events that has a lasting impact on an individual's functioning and well-being.

Too much, too soon, too fast.

**Something that happens in you, not to you.**



# Trauma Responses



**Fight**



**Flight**



**Freeze**



**Fawn**

# Trauma Response Triggers

- Describing past abuse
- Seeing or hearing the abuser
- Evidence of the abuse (photos, text messages, voicemails)
- Significant dates
- Situational dynamics
- Sensory experiences
- Moving hearing dates or postponements



# Trauma-Informed Lawyering

Practice of law where **an attorney understands and considers the complex impact of trauma on their client** and integrates this knowledge into their legal approach to provide sensitive and effective representation.

**Safety • Trustworthiness & Transparency • Collaboration**  
**Cultural Competency • Understanding Trauma Impact • Flexibility**



# Impact on Legal Process

- **Fragmented Storytelling:** Trauma can disrupt memory and cause difficulty with cognitive processing.
- **Avoidance Behaviors:** Steering clear of anything that reminds them of the abuse.
- **Challenges in Decision-Making:** Victims may be reluctant to fully engage in the legal process.
- **Re-traumatization in Court:** Formal, intimidating settings make clients feel powerless.
- **Difficulty Interacting with Attorneys:** Fear, lack of trust, and avoidance behaviors can be challenging.



# EMPOWERMENT-BASED ADVOCACY



# Empowerment-Based Advocacy

Focuses on supporting clients in a way that **enhances their ability to make their own decisions** about their case and their lives.

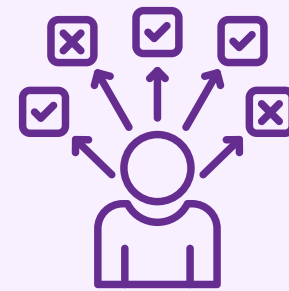
## KEY CONCEPTS



**Client  
Autonomy**



**Strengths-Based  
Approach**



**Agency  
& Choice**



**Self-  
Determination**

# Building Trust



## Build trust through honesty and compassion

- Put them at ease
- Be observant/ assess needs
- Let them tell their story at their own pace
- Allow client to control the narrative
- Be present/ active listening
- Validate their feelings
- Be reliable
- Do not make false promises

# Fostering Empowerment

- Identify their goals
- Encourage self-advocacy
- Provide resources
- Explain the legal process
- Offer options
- Facilitate informed decision-making

*What does justice look like for the survivor?*



# Ensuring Transparency



- Define your role
- Break down the law
- Show how the law fits their case
- Give context to why you are asking questions
- Outline the legal process

# Disempowering Interventions

- Forcing a solution that may have negative consequences for other parts of their lives
- Offering the “best” choice
- Being overly litigious
- Disregarding the insights and experience of your client
- Judging the survivor’s decisions





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**THANK YOU FOR  
JOINING US TODAY!**

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