

COURTROOM ENVIRONMENT (from SAMHSA et al, 2013).

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	REACTION OF TRAUMA SURVIVOR	TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH
The judge sits behind a desk (or “bench”), and participants sit at a table some distance from the bench.	Feeling separate; isolated; unworthy; afraid.	In some treatment courts, the judge comes out from behind the bench and sits at a table in front.
Participants are required to address the court from their place at the defendant’s table.	Fear of authority; inability to communicate clearly, especially if an abuser is in the courtroom.	When practical, ask the participant to come close; speak to them beside or right in front of the bench.
Multiple signs instruct participants about what they are not allowed to do.	Feeling intimidated; lack of respect; untrustworthy; treated like a child.	Eliminate all but the most necessary of signs; word those that remain to indicate respect for everyone who reads them.
A court officer jingles handcuffs while standing behind a participant.	Anxiety; inability to pay attention to what the judge is saying; fear.	Eliminate this type of nonverbal intimidation, especially if you have no intention of remanding the individual. Tell the court officers not to stand too close. Respect an individual’s personal space.
A judge asks a participant to explain her[/his] behavior or the impact of abuse without acknowledging the impact of others in the courtroom.	Intimidation or fear of abusers who may be in the courtroom; reluctance to share information in front of family members or others who do not believe them.	Save questions about sensitive issues for when the courtroom is empty or allow the participant to approach the bench. If ongoing abuse or intimidation is suspected, engage those people in activities outside the courtroom while the participant shares her[/his] story.