

Trauma-Informed Phrases for Children During Parenting Time

Use these calming, supportive phrases to engage with children in supervised visits without disrupting the parent-child relationship.

When Observing or Staying Nearby

- “I’m right here if you need anything.”
- “You’re doing a great job playing with your parent.”
- “It’s okay to just be together.”

When Responding to Emotional Cues

- “That looked like a big feeling.”
- “You’re safe here.”
- “It’s okay to feel sad/mad/quiet — all feelings are allowed.”

When Offering Reassurance or Redirection

- “Let’s take a little pause and try again.”
- “Would you like to sit with your parent or take a breath with me?”
- “Let’s check in with each other and get back to our play.”

When Preserving the Flow of Connection

- “Sounds like you and your parent are working through something together — I’m just here to help it feel safe.”
- “You can always ask for a break or let me know if something feels too big.”

Empathic Language Cheat Sheet for Trauma-Informed Services

Use these trauma-informed phrases to validate emotion, maintain boundaries, and support parents navigating Child Protection and Parenting Time Services.

When a Parent is Upset or Angry

- “I can see this is really upsetting for you. Let’s take a minute together.”
- “This situation feels really hard right now — and it makes sense you’d be frustrated.”
- “I hear how strongly you feel about this. Let’s figure out what we **can** control right now.”

When a Parent Feels Judged or Misunderstood

- “I know it can feel like people are making decisions **about** you instead of **with** you.”
- “This process can feel unfair. I want you to know my role is to support you and your child as best I can.”
- “It’s okay to feel angry. I want to understand where you’re coming from.”

When a Parent Expresses Hopelessness or Shame

- “That sounds really heavy. You’ve been carrying a lot.”
- “You’re not alone in this — it’s okay to talk about what’s feeling impossible right now.”
- “Sometimes things don’t go how we hoped. That doesn’t mean you aren’t trying or don’t care.”

When Setting Limits or Holding Boundaries

- “I want to support you in having a positive visit, and part of that is following the expectations we agreed on.”
- “I hear that you’re upset, and it’s still important that we keep the visit safe for your child.”
- “We can take a break and come back when things feel more manageable. I’m here to work with you, not against you.”

To Reinforce Dignity and Hope

- “You’re the expert on your child. Your relationship matters so much.”
- “Change is hard — and showing up today took courage.”
- “I see the effort you’re making, even when it’s not easy.”

Trauma-Informed ≠ Excusing Harm

Use this guide to help staff walk the line between compassion and accountability in Parenting Time services.

Key Reminders:

- Trauma history explains behavior — it does NOT excuse harmful behavior.
- You can be both compassionate and firm.
- Harmful language, threats, or disrespect is never acceptable.
- Stay calm, clear, and professional. Hold boundaries without shame or power struggles.

Phrases to Use:

- “I know this has been hard. It’s still not okay to speak to me that way.”
- “You can be upset — at the same time, yelling and insults are not allowed here.”
- “Let’s take a short break and come back when we’re calm.”
- “My job is to keep this space safe — that includes how we treat each other.”
- “I will treat you with respect, and I expect the same in return.”

The 4 R’s of Trauma-Informed Care (SAMHSA Framework)

Realize

Recognize the widespread impact of trauma and understand paths to recovery

Recognize

Identify signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, and staff

Respond

Integrate knowledge into policies, procedures, and practices

Resist Re-Traumatization

Actively avoid triggering or reactivating trauma