

### TIPS FOR TRAFFICKING SURVIVORS'

## SELF-EMPOWERMENT DURING LEGAL REPRESENTATION - PART I

### USE YOUR VOICE WITH YOUR LEGAL TEAM

You know your case better than anyone. Your attorney will do their very best for you but may not always be able to identify your unique needs. Use your voice to let your attorney know what you need. For example, request an interpreter or victim's advocate. Your attorney is there to make your voice be heard in the legal setting.

### ASK QUESTIONS

The legal process can be complex and daunting. Just as your attorney will be asking many questions, give yourself permission to ask questions until you have a better understanding of what is going on (e.g., "What are my legal options and why?" and "What is the best/worst case scenario to expect from pursuing your recommendation?"). Realize that while the attorney may not be able to tell you exactly what the resolution will be in a particular situation, it can be very empowering for you to gather all the information you need in order to support yourself during the process and reduce the feeling of unpredictability.

### MAINTAIN COMMUNICATION

Stay in contact with your attorney. There will likely be a lot of touch points with your attorney during the legal process. Inform your attorney if you have a preferred method of communication (e.g., phone call, text, email, meeting), realizing that there may be times when you will need to communicate in ways that are not your preferred method.

### DON'T KEEP SECRETS FROM YOUR ATTORNEY

It may be very uncomfortable to disclose certain things when feeling raw vulnerability. If you can share the full details of your case with your attorney, including any remotely-related mistakes or indiscretions (e.g., something as small as a text message you sent to an ex-boyfriend or employer that could be potentially misinterpreted), this information will place your attorney in a better position to protect and help you. You do not want your attorney to find out your secrets from opposing counsel. A good attorney can mitigate potential damage up front, or at least advise you of your best options.

ALIGHT in collaboration with  
Dr. Kristy Eldredge, EdD, LPC, NCC, ACS  
BridgeHope, a survivor-led organization

### TIPS FOR TRAFFICKING SURVIVORS' SELF-EMPOWERMENT DURING LEGAL REPRESENTATION - PART II

#### UTILIZE A SUPPORT TEAM

The legal process can be grueling, triggering and overwhelming. It is crucial to utilize a team of supportive and safe allies who can be with you throughout the ups and downs of this process. Members of your support team should be able to support you regardless of how you decide to navigate the process or what the legal outcomes may be. If you need suggestions for advocates or mentors, ask the service provider who had referred you to legal services. Also, reach out to the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 888-373-7888 for organizations, including survivor-led organizations, near you. Also, be aware that there are organizations out there devoted to supporting various types of claimants financially in their legal battles.

#### SEEK MENTORSHIP FROM OTHER SURVIVORS

There are other survivors who have been where you are. They can be invaluable allies and advocates for you during the legal process and throughout your recovery. Mentors can help to make the unpredictable moments feel a little more manageable. Give yourself permission to reach out.

#### LEARN ABOUT THE TRAUMA RESPONSE

There are varied responses to traumatic experiences. Some trauma responses are likely and common to survivors. It is understandable to feel mistrust, suspicion and anger during the legal process, and even toward your own attorney and service provider. Learning about these responses can help normalize them and know what to anticipate so that you can feel a greater sense of control.

#### AVOID QUICK OR IMPULSIVE DECISIONS

Consult with your support team about decisions related to your legal process (e.g., whether or not to continue with the legal process). Emotions can run high, and knee-jerk reactions can leave us with regret. Talk things through with people of differing opinions and backgrounds. Commit to “sleep on it” when you feel pressed for a quick decision. Legal proceedings are normally rather slow. So, good news—many times they can wait for you, too!

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## THE ALIGHT LEGAL NEEDS MATCHING PROGRAM

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### TIPS FOR TRAFFICKING SURVIVORS'

#### SELF-EMPOWERMENT DURING LEGAL REPRESENTATION - PART III

#### REMEMBER THAT LEGAL OPTIONS DO NOT DEFINE YOUR EXPERIENCE

Remember that your legal options may have no reflection on the genuine veracity of your cause. For example, the prosecutor may have to charge an offender for a far lesser charge than the actual offense in order to convict them. The options you are presented with, as well as the resolution of your matter, may not be fair. They do not mean your experience does not warrant greater justice.

#### ACKNOWLEDGE ANY FEELINGS OF ISOLATION & SUPPORT YOURSELF

Feelings of isolation during legal proceedings can be hard to navigate. It can be re-traumatizing to have to remain silent about certain aspects of your case with people you trust on the one hand, and on the other hand asked to be vulnerably outspoken in other ways, especially with people you may not know well such as other members of the legal team. The key is determining what information to share, and how to share it, with your support team to reduce the feelings of isolation while still protecting your own legal rights. Ask your attorney for support with figuring that out.

#### BELIEVE IN YOUR OWN WISDOM

You know in your own heart what is most important to you about your legal needs. This understanding may become clearer as legal proceedings unfold. While you will want to consult with your support team and your legal team, at the end of the day, you are the one who gets to decide where you want your legal focus to be. You cannot control the outcome of each legal choice, but you can trust yourself and that inner wisdom is invaluable.

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