

The ALIGHT Mobilizing Justice Program

EMPOWERING SURVIVORS AT SCALE

TIPS FOR TRAFFICKING SURVIVORS' SELF-EMPOWERMENT DURING LEGAL REPRESENTATION



This resource was created for survivors of human trafficking by ALIGHT in collaboration with Dr. Kristy Eldredge, EdD, LPC, NCC, ACS and BridgeHope, a survivor-led organization. We hope that you find the suggestions below helpful on your legal journey.

1 Use Your Voice



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.

2 Ask Questions



The legal process can be complex and daunting. Just as your attorney will ask 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 to support yourself during the process and reduce the feeling of unpredictability.

3 Maintain Communication



Stay in contact with your attorney. There will likely be many touchpoints 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). However, also understand there may be times when you will need to communicate in ways that are not your preferred method.

4 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 from the start, this information will place your attorney in a better position to protect and help you. This information could include things that you feel were mistakes or slip-ups (e.g., something as small as a text message you sent to an ex-boyfriend or employer that could be potentially misinterpreted). 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.

5 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. You can 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.

6 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.

7 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, 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.

8 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!