

Guidelines for Spiritual Direction With Traumatized Persons

Establish Trust and Safety

- Be clear and consistent about appropriate boundaries in the direction relationship
- Meet in a reliable place. Establish meeting days, times and lengths ahead and stick to them.
- Meet in the same place and avoid changes to the environment when possible (e.g. redecorating often)
- Be patient with the process of establishing a structure to build trust. Once a safe relationship is established, the directee will be more open to experiencing the movements of the holy in direction.
- Do not touch directees. This includes what may seem to be innocuous touches like a pat on the shoulder in greeting, as well as more intimate greetings like hugs, kisses, or briefly holding hands (e.g. “passing the peace”) regardless of tradition or cultural expectations. If a directee initiates physical contact (such as a hug in greeting or farewell), use that to discuss what the boundaries will be in your relationship.

Be Part of a Community of Healing Agents

- **For Directors:**
- Directors should be part of a supervision community that can help them process their own experience and how they are opening to or resisting what the directee’s experience brings up in them. These issues may include but are not limited to:



- Discomfort surrounding one's own knowledge or understanding of trauma and abuse.
- Discomfort with one's own unprocessed trauma or personal issues.
- Discomfort around issues of sexuality.
- Discomfort related to the hearing of the horrific experiences of others.
- Directors need to be involved in good self care to help maintain boundaries and personal health.
- Have a referral network ready to offer to your directee as needs arise (therapist, lawyer, medical, 12-step programs, other directors who may be better equipped, trauma informed yoga instructor/physical therapist, social worker, etc.)

For Directees:

- Directees who are just beginning to process through their trauma experience most likely also need the support of a trained therapist and perhaps a support group. Both religious and secular 12-step programs can be helpful for those who are stuck in harmful behavioral patterns.
- Who does the directee turn to for support in daily life? Do they have trustworthy friends, family, clergy, or others in their life?

Seek Whole Person Healing

- Many survivors of trauma need healing of their bodies as well as their spirits. Help them to create rituals that allow their body to participate in the process. These may include:
 - Candle lighting



- Guided meditations or imagery
- Engaging in prayer with eyes open, standing, or walking
- Using different postures in prayer to express openness or a felt need for protection
- Reading scriptures aloud or singing

Be Aware of the Psychological Processes Involved

- Know that your every move is being evaluated for content, be explicit about intentions and clarify misunderstandings as needed.
- Acknowledge fear or pain elicited in the directee, which may be pointed at the director, as well as God's willingness to hear the distress.
- Directees who are just beginning to heal from their trauma usually need to integrate shame, anger, rage, and terror into their affective lives. Be prepared to sit in these places with them.
- Survivors of chronic childhood traumas are often overwhelmed by a sense of worthlessness that makes it difficult to recognize their own needs, much less articulate them. They may not have access to the deeper movements of their interior experience.
- Look for patterns where the person may be reenacting their trauma in their present life. Either by being re-victimized or becoming a perpetrator (even against themselves).

**Adapted from the essay, "Spiritual Direction with Traumatized Persons" by Joseph D. Driskill in "Still Listening: New Horizons in Spiritual Direction," ed. Norvene Vest, (2000).*