



Office of Children and Family Services

Safe Harbour NY Fast Facts: Tips for Working with Law Enforcement

Collaboration between social service providers and law enforcement agencies can be tricky to navigate. The following tips come from both groups and are based on their years of experience in building these relationships:

- Understand that law enforcement and social service providers have the same overall goals: to eradicate trafficking and protect survivors.
 - Each party goes about meeting goals in different way but there is usually a common agenda.
 - There may be times when the groups' goals conflict; understand that this is normal and often temporary.
- Respect that each group has a different mission and mandate.
 - Both roles are necessary and equally important.
 - Neither group should try to do the other's job.
- Get to know each other before you share a case. Help each other understand what you can and cannot do, how long processes can take, and guidelines around confidentiality.
- Identify where conflict or tension may arise before a case comes. Sharing an understanding of these challenges from the beginning will make cases go smoother when they do arise.
 - Build relationships inside and out of the office. Meet for informal gatherings (such as lunch or happy hour) to build rapport and trust.
- Both groups need to trust the other – cases can come to your attention when you least expect them. Trust will enable you to call on each other, no matter the time or circumstance.
- Establish protocol or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) if necessary. These documents can formalize the roles and responsibilities of each group as you work together on a case. They can be referred to and revised should conflict arise.
- Both groups have different timelines and focuses. Generally, the law enforcement process is longer, while service providers may be able to respond more quickly. This is reality. Everyone needs to be patient with each other.
- Sharing information can be complicated and, in some cases, impossible. Each party has its own regulations to protect a survivor's confidentiality - these need to be respected. This is true even when it might hinder a case or prevent client engagement. When you can safely share information, do so.
- Seek out cross-training opportunities. Invite representatives from both groups to present information in trainings and invite people from both groups to be trained together. This will build mutual understanding and can strengthen partnerships.
- Understand that no one is perfect and everyone makes mistakes. You will get frustrated with each other at times, but tension is normal and it will pass.
- Do not take work challenges personally – everyone is learning together to benefit survivors.