

## Connection Protocol

This protocol is designed to be used with youth and families who have experienced victimization and trauma and their families. Utilizing a trauma-informed, youth-centered approach, the steps outlined within this protocol can be followed to ensure that support and services are offered and provided, and appropriate referrals are made.

1. Connect youth and families with services through intentional information and reassurance
  - a. Assess and attend to their safety concerns. Be mindful of your posture, mannerisms, tone of voice, and the words you use. Aim to remain calm, show warmth and empathy, and be attentive.
  - b. Offer information and psychoeducation to reassure them there is no one way or “right” way to respond to victimization and trauma. Normalize their reactions and responses to their experience.
  - c. Provide information and psychoeducation to assure the client that they are not alone and that you are there to help.
  - d. Reassure them that you are there to help them and that they are not alone. For example, phrases such as, “I am here for you;” “Our program/agency has services that can help you/your family;” or “There are many community resources that can assist you and I will help to get you connected.”
  - e. Assess the strengths and needs of the youth and their family using [family voice](#) (e.g. [Strengths Discovery](#)).
  - f. Help the youth/family envision what the youth/family will be like and feel like once they’ve received the support and resources they need.
  - g. Allow the youth/family to prioritize the needs that they would like to address.
    - i. Connect the youth/family with the services your program or agency offers.
    - ii. Provide immediate resources and offer to assist them with imminent threats or emergency needs.
    - iii. Help the family identify current connections: natural and professional supports and resources they can tap into for assistance and support.
    - iv. Give the youth/family information about community resources, including the IL HEALS roster for treatment services. Provide specific information, if possible, including contact people, names of specific programs, etc...
    - v. Support the family to make connections with community resources with your support; or with their consent, make the connection and schedule appointments on behalf of the family, if needed.
  - h. Making referrals or scheduling services:
    - i. Utilize referral systems such as IRIS or NowPow, if appropriate.
    - ii. Make phone calls with the family present and utilize your connections to access help to meet the youth’s/family’s needs.
    - iii. Provide the family with written information about the appointment or referral made. Include contact information, time of appointments, what they need to bring with them, other relevant information they may need. Explain to them what they can expect to happen and who they can expect to meet during the appointment.

2. Additional support to engage youth and families
  - a. Offer to follow up with them to check in on how they are doing and/or to remind them of upcoming appointments. Ask which contact methods are best and safest for you to use to reach out to them.
  - b. Help them identify coping and self-care strategies.
    - i. Identify natural supports they can reach out to if they are struggling or need help.
    - ii. Inquire about coping strategies that have worked for them in the past and help them brainstorm additional ideas to use when they are feeling stressed or sad.
    - iii. Provide relevant emergency hotline information, including the Lifeline, CARES hotline, DV hotline, etc...
    - iv. If needed, develop a safety plan.
    - v. Provide the youth/family your contact information – in writing, via text, or over email - and encourage them to reach out if they have questions or need your help.

Adapted from the following resources:

[https://www.ncjrs.gov/ovc\\_archives/reports/firstrep/bgavoc.html](https://www.ncjrs.gov/ovc_archives/reports/firstrep/bgavoc.html)

IL HEALS Action Plan

Youth Mental Health First Aid