

# Pause Before You React: Justice-Involved Client Response Guide

## *TRANSFORM CHALLENGING MOMENTS INTO THERAPEUTIC OPPORTUNITIES*

**When to use:** Useful when a justice-involved client presents with concerning behavior.

### **Is this trauma-reactive or willful defiance?**

- Are they showing signs of fight/flight/freeze?
- Does their response seem proportional to the situation?
- What pressures might be contributing right now?

**STEP 1: PAUSE AND ASSESS**  
Before taking any action,  
ask yourself:

### **PATH A: TRAUMA-REACTIVE BEHAVIOR**

- Validate the stress: "This seems overwhelming right now"
- Pause session if needed; give time to regulate
- Look for underlying needs, not resistance
- Lower stimulation; reduce demands

### **PATH B: PRACTICAL BARRIERS**

- Investigate barriers: housing, transportation, work
- Problem-solve together; offer flexible options
- Connect to resources for survival needs
- Adjust treatment plan to meet them where they are

### **PATH C: TESTING BOUNDARIES**

- Set clear, consistent boundaries calmly
- Maintain therapeutic relationship despite behavior
- Explore what need the behavior is meeting
- Offer choices within structure

**STEP 2: CHOOSE  
YOUR PATHWAY**

**STEP 3: DOCUMENT  
THOUGHTFULLY**

Avoid biased language. Focus on observations and interventions.