

Environmental Triggers

- ❖ **Medical personnel, procedures, equipment, and rooms** - Horrific medical experimentation occurred in some concentration camps (by doctors & nurses)
- ❖ **Certain clothing such as lab coats, vertical stripes, boots** - Reminders of Holocaust - lab coats (medical experiments), striped clothing (prisoner uniforms), shiny boots (intimidating Nazi officers)
- ❖ **Institutional settings** - Life in labor and concentration camps – impersonal, corridors, tight security, bright lights, heavy doors and locks...
- ❖ **Strong Odors** - Urine & feces, body odor, harsh antiseptics, decaying bodies, burning flesh, rotting food - smells from the Holocaust... many common in LTC facilities and hospitals
- ❖ **Crowded, small spaces** – Evoke many Holocaust situations: hiding, sharing cramped living space in ghettos and camps, etc. Reminders of indignities
- ❖ **Dogs** - Often used to find people in hiding, and to control and terrorize prisoners in ghettos and camps. Primarily German shepherds and Doberman pinschers
- ❖ **Christian symbols** - Crosses (jewelry, on walls, etc.), art works, holiday decorations and music...Can evoke painful memories of Christian-based persecution of Jews, and those who carried out or allowed the Holocaust to happen.
- ❖ **Showers & Baths** –Concentration camp prisoners were forced into massive shower rooms – for actual showers, de-lousing, and poison gas (to kill them). Bath tubs sometimes used in medical and torture experiments in camps
- ❖ **Noises & Sounds** - Sirens, alarms, emergency sounds, Yelling, wailing, crying, moaning, Loud communications and PA systems
- ❖ **Foreign languages & strong accent** - All can be painful reminders of life in ghettos, camps, during deportations, etc.
- ❖ **Bright/Flashing Lights** – Frightening, often used to search for Jews in ghettos, during deportations, and in camps
- ❖ **Darkness/Night-time** - Often when terrible and terrifying things happened
- ❖ **Media stories** of current anti-Semitism—brings up possibility of a new holocaust
- ❖ **Potential reactions:** *anxiety, fear, anger, refusal to be in same room, etc.*

Communicating with Holocaust Survivors

Empathetic statements: Let clients feel they are understood, emotionally supported and safe. “I can see why you’d feel that way.”

Acknowledgment: Assure clients that they are being heard and confirm that their message is of value and being taken seriously. “You hate throwing out food, it seems like a waste to you.”

Open-ended questions: Invite and allow clients to share information rather than replying with “yes” or “no” answers. You will learn more about them this way, as they can share valuable information. “How do you feel about taking a shower?” rather than: “Do you have a problem taking a shower?”

Reflective statements and paraphrasing: Show clients your level of understanding by mirroring back what they said to you and clarifying information you think they gave you. “So what you’re saying is that you don’t want to take a shower because it brings back awful memories, right?”

Gentle probing: Suggest further discussion to gather additional essential information. “Can you tell me a little more about that to help me understand?”

Tone of voice: Speak calmly and with kindness, because how you communicate is often more powerful than what you say.

Body language: If your client says one thing, “I’m not angry,” but is pounding the chair with their fist, check it out with them.

Being honest: Acknowledge when you need them to clarify or explain things that you don’t understand.

Vocal empathy: Avoid phrases such as “I know how you feel.” Although often well-intentioned, such statements are often perceived as patronizing, and aren’t true. Most of us can’t imagine how holocaust survivors feel.