

Environment Checklist

How Can We Improve the Way Our Office Feels?

Waiting areas

√	Desired feature	Impact on persons affected by trauma
<input type="radio"/>	Colorful, culturally diverse artwork decorates the walls.	Keeping the scenery friendly and avoiding images of power, such as football triumphs, can lessen stress.
<input type="radio"/>	Posters invite people to talk about trauma or needs during the exam.	Posters can help remove personal inhibitions about discussing a difficult issue.
<input type="radio"/>	Living items—plants, fish tank—are incorporated into the décor.	Such things can be soothing.
<input type="radio"/>	Calming music is playing.	Music can soothe.
<input type="radio"/>	Neutral odors are as subtle as possible.	Antiseptic or perfume/air freshener may trigger painful memories.
<input type="radio"/>	Comfortable, soft seating is available.	Hard benches or folding chairs can feel unfriendly.
<input type="radio"/>	A variety of seating options is available.	Multiple seating options provide choice.
<input type="radio"/>	Exterior areas, common areas, and restrooms are well lit without glare.	Balanced lighting removes scary dark corners and prevents harsh brightness.
<input type="radio"/>	Restroom doors have locks.	Locks promote feelings of safety.
<input type="radio"/>	The reception area is always staffed when the facility is open for business.	Friendly, professional staff makes a reception area inviting.
<input type="radio"/>	Directional signs are clear and welcoming.	Complicated signage may seem like an indication to leave.
<input type="radio"/>	Exits are clear and unobstructed.	Maze-like traffic patterns feel confining.
<input type="radio"/>	Patient feedback is sought.	Processes and features that seem innocuous to the staff may seem threatening to some patients.
<input type="radio"/>	Printed materials about sexual violence, traumatic stress, and patient rights are available in the various languages spoken on campus.	Shame or terror can keep patients from requesting information. Assault-prevention materials focusing on avoidance can unintentionally blame the victim. ¹
<input type="radio"/>	Private, locked spaces hold patient belongings.	Safety is essential for everything, including the patient's things.
<input type="radio"/>	The room is set up so that conversation at reception cannot be overheard.	Privacy reinforces a sense of safety.

¹ Carr, J. L. (2005). *Campus violence white paper*. Baltimore, MD: American College Health Association.

Reception staff

√	Desired feature	Impact on persons affected by trauma
<input type="radio"/>	Greet in a friendly, discrete way everyone who enters.	Kindness and discretion are essential to feeling safe.
<input type="radio"/>	Ask all patients if the appointment is to talk or have an exam with a health care provider.	To some, it sounds accusatory to ask, “Why do you want to see the nurse/doctor?”
<input type="radio"/>	As part of the welcome, point out the location of restrooms, water, and other amenities.	Assumptions as to what patients perceive may feel as if they are being disregarded.
<input type="radio"/>	Provide a realistic wait time.	Waiting for an open-ended period of time reinforces a sense of no control.
<input type="radio"/>	Remain unruffled and even-tempered with all patients.	The feelings of a distressed patient can range from extreme timidity to rage.
<input type="radio"/>	Repeat information patiently.	Memory fails and information may not stick.
<input type="radio"/>	Know where to reach a translator on short notice.	Effective communication is vital, and struggling for words can be overwhelming to a distressed person for whom English is not the primary language.
<input type="radio"/>	Maintain a deliberate, unhurried pace even when the office is crowded.	Hurrying can seem confusing, upsetting, or disrespectful.
<input type="radio"/>	Respond to hesitation by asking if the patient wishes to see a nurse privately.	Fear and shame about their reason for coming in can make patients falter once inside the door.
<input type="radio"/>	Accept without comment a request for a male or female clinician.	A person who has been abused or assaulted may need the clinician to be a particular gender.
<input type="radio"/>	Follow a defined protocol when a patient discloses assault or trauma of any kind.	Safety is the priority for all parties, necessitating clear procedures to deal with patients affected by trauma.

Examination rooms

√	Desired feature	Impact on persons affected by trauma
<input type="radio"/>	Examination rooms are as soundproof as possible.	Speaking openly may be impossible if conversation could be overheard.
<input type="radio"/>	Room has a chair or two, besides the exam table.	Choices give some much-needed control.
<input type="radio"/>	Room temperature is comfortable.	Being cold/hot may feel excessively vulnerable.
<input type="radio"/>	Medical graphics are optional, perhaps as pull-downs.	Images of reproductive systems or even nude outlines can act as a trigger.
<input type="radio"/>	Soothing images are on the ceiling over the examination table.	Friendly, nonverbal reminders to relax can help.
<input type="radio"/>	Lighting is balanced.	Glare is unfriendly and gloom is scary.

Adapted from the National Sexual Violence Resource Center & National Sexual Assault Coalition Resource Sharing Project. (2013). *Building cultures of care*. Enola, PA: Author; Schachter, C. L., Stalker, C. A., Teram, E., Lasiuk, G. C., & Danilkewich, A. (2008). *Handbook on sensitive practice for health care practitioners*. Ottawa, Ontario: Public Health Agency of Canada.