

Ethical Practices and Responsibilities in the Advocacy World

Transcript: Directorate of Prevention, Resilience and Readiness Outreach Webinar

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Presenter:

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- Lytaria Walker: [00:04](#) Good morning, and welcome to the Directorate of Prevention, Resilience and Readiness Outreach Webinar for July. At this time, all participants are in listen-only mode. However, you may ask questions at any time by placing them in the Q&A box. There will be several opportunities for questions throughout the webinar, and we should have some time at the very end as well. Today's webinar has been approved for one hour of live continuing education units. Participants must obtain CEU certification through their local commanders by downloading the webinar presentation slides as attendance verification. The slides will be posted in the chat box at the end of the webinar, and also emailed to registered participants as well. Please note that the views of DPRR Outreach Webinar presenters are their very own and are not endorsed by the Department of the Army or the Department of Defense.
- Lytaria Walker: [01:05](#) This month our guest is Mr. Alejandro Palacios. Mr. Palacios is a Victim Advocacy Training Manager at the National Organization for Victim Assistance, also known as NOVA. He is formerly a victim advocate at the Office of Victim Services at the Arizona Department of Corrections. Mr. Palacios was the lead advocate of the Victim Offender Dialogue program, facilitating victim-initiated and victim-driven conversations between survivors and their offenders. He has also been a technology safety specialist at the National Network to End Domestic Violence, a trainer at the Arizona Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence, and a provider of late legal advocacy services to victims of domestic and sexual violence at a domestic violence shelter in Phoenix, Arizona. Mr. Palacios, thank you for joining us this morning, sir. Take it away.
- Alejandro Palac...: [02:11](#) Good morning. I appreciate the introduction and the invitation, and I'm happy to be here with you all today. Good morning from sunny Phoenix, Arizona. Right now, I believe we're already over 105 degrees. I'm glad to be here with you all today to have

this important conversation about ethical practices and our responsibilities as advocates in the advocacy world. For the purpose of this conversation, I'm going to be referring to all of us here present as advocates and this is an important conversation. When we talk about victim advocacy as we will be doing throughout this presentation, we'll be talking about and defining not only ethics, but also ethical practices and our responsibility as professionals in the advocacy world. Also, as it relates to being culturally competent, which is a specific topic that throughout the presentation we're going to be discussing, among other important subjects that directly relate to our ethical practices and our responsibilities as advocates of those individuals who have experienced trauma adversity and had been victimized.

Alejandro Palac...:

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What do we mean by "practical"? What we know is that in regard to ethics, many of us have an understanding that what we know in practice can somehow or directly relate to the theory. Now, throughout this presentation, we're going to talk about how, from experience, we apply those theories of ethics. So before we jump on into the content, I want to make sure that we understand that ethics can and thus positively impact the quality of the work and the quality of our service to those who have experienced crime, victimization, or adversity, who we may come into contact also when they are experiencing a crisis due to the nature of their experiences. Also, it is important to mention that since the 1960s, the field of victim advocacy has been slowly but surely evolving into becoming a profession. There is the professionalization of being a victim advocate, which of course includes setting specific standards and training requirements for those professionals and individuals who are in direct contact with victims and survivors. And this applies to systems-based advocacy and non-systems-based advocates, such as for those who work in the nonprofit world, per se.

Alejandro Palac...:

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In regards to advocacy, before we dive into talking about ethics, I believe it is of much importance that first and foremost, we talk a bit about what advocacy is and how it relates to the work that we do as being directly involved as advocates for victim survivors, either with the systems-based agency, such as those who may be advocates within the Department of Defense as well, and those who have done this work through non-system-based, such as a nonprofit organization, as well as those individuals who advocate specifically for systems change. Now, advocacy refers to the act of supporting or promoting a particular cause, issue, and/or policy, which is often undertaken by organizations or groups, and also individuals. When we talk about advocacy, I always like to present this as an advocate.

Alejandro Palac...: [06:29](#) We walk alongside victims and survivors through their experience of trauma. We don't walk behind them. We don't walk in front of them. We walk with them through their experience of victimization, adversity, and trauma. Also, as advocates, we accompany victims and survivors through their healing process, which is not an event. Healing is a process, and healing takes time. As advocates, sometimes we are present, and we may still be working with them to see their healing, but occasionally, and for the most part, we don't. On occasion we as advocates hear back months or even years after we work with someone and get to see their change and be part of their healing. And we need to be physically and emotionally present for when those changes occur. Now, something that we also do, and it is of utmost importance, is share our knowledge and resources on how different systems may work, how different processes may work, as well as sharing to the very best of our abilities and resources to those who are in need.

Alejandro Palac...: [08:00](#) We, as advocates hold power because we know the resources and processes. We've had specific training and know how systems work. Our duties as advocates is to share, educate, and inform those that we serve about those resources, processes, and systems. And even though there is no single agency or individual that can do it all, we must do what's available to us in order to make sure that they fully or to the best of their ability comprehend or understand what processes they're about to start, what resources are available to them. Resources such as specific services that we as individuals or agencies may not be equipped to provide to them, but we know certain advocates, certain counselors, certain individual, different agencies who may be able to provide those services that they may need. So be mindful of that.

Alejandro Palac...: [09:12](#) So as it relates to ethics, what are they and why are they important? Why are we having these conversations? And basically, why are we having a conversation around ethical practices? Because practices and responsibilities are critical to advocates in the advocacy world. We know that the study of ethics is the intellectual side of things without much practical application to it. There is a lot of research behind it, but we don't tend to think that there's much actual hands-on practical application to it, but we need to consider it. Therefore, it is important to have these conversations and translate this into actual situations such as potential ethical dilemmas that we may come across when being frontline advocates and working with someone in crisis who is going through adversity. We may come in contact with different situations that may present an ethical dilemma, and we need to understand what the process is.

- Alejandro Palac...: [10:23](#) How do I go about the situation? Who do I talk to? We always take confidentiality of course into account about a potential ethical dilemma. It's a challenge, and we know that advocates face several challenges in our day-to-day operations or other potential situations that we may encounter in the field of advocacy. Now we need to get to professional standards that establish core values that guide our practices, because something that we need to always keep in mind is to avoid harming and retraumatizing those as we serve and also ourselves. Since many individuals who are in the advocacy world have experienced a traumatic situation, a crisis situation, and or adversity, we always need to keep in mind that first and foremost, we should do no harm.
- Alejandro Palac...: [11:30](#) Let's talk about ethics. So ethics is a system of moral values or principles that govern our behavior as individuals and professionals. Ethics, in the advocacy world, provide us a framework for us to make decisions and to guide our actions that we need to consider what's right from wrong, from what's just, from what may be potentially unjust and good or bad. So basically going back to the framework that ethics provides us, it's basically a manual handbook, if you will, of what actions we can take in order to be the best advocates that we can without causing any potential harm to those that we are serving.
- Alejandro Palac...: [12:45](#) Now, something that is important to mention is the fact that ethics can vary depending on the cultural, the social, possibly even the historical context of a situation, and can definitely be influenced by factors such as religion, philosophy, politics, or others. You have to understand that yes, they may vary. However, that being said, ethics with without a doubt also play a very important role in many areas of our lives, such as healthcare, business, education, and government, and of course, advocates for victims, survivors, and those who are experiencing a crisis. So this is all important because adhering to ethical practices is essential, first and foremost to build trust. We know that when we are communicating, when we are working with those victims, survivors, individuals who are experiencing crisis, they trust us, and they share with us a lot of very personal information on occasions.
- Alejandro Palac...: [14:13](#) Those we work with, share with us family secrets or situations that they have not shared with anyone. And it is very important for us to understand that, to value that, and to understand the fact that they are trusting us is one of the most important steps for us to be the best advocates that we can. We also have to promote social responsibility and maintain the integrity of ourselves as professionals, the institutions, and the

organizations that we work for. So this is all relevant because by knowing this, we can get better and better as professionals. Remember that there's always room for progress. There is no single agency, no single individual that knows or can do it all, so we must always strive to be the most knowledgeable organizations or individuals and have the most resources possible, because this way as professionals, we can be better at identifying, analyzing, and even solving potential ethical dilemmas that may arise from doing this work. Through the next few slides, we're going to have a conversation about a resource that can assist you or solve potential ethical dilemmas and obtain a professional opinion in regard to those situations that that may arise.

Alejandro Palac...: [15:53](#)

A continuation of defining ethics: one of the things that I like to talk a bit about is what do we have in common as members of the advocacy world? Our personal values may vary. We might vary in our values or our beliefs in regard to potentially accepting gifts from those whom we serve, attending special events that we might be invited to while we are serving those individuals or even after. And I have a couple stories to share from my time providing direct services, in which as a lay legal advocate at a domestic violence shelter in Phoenix. On occasion, I got a thank you note or was presented with gifts or invited to graduations. Different people may have varying personal beliefs or values about accepting a gift or an invite to an event such as a high school graduation of an individual you worked with. And in an agency or organization, that may not be accepted on our personal values. However, we need to have a clear understanding our professional values may trump our personal values. And it is important to understand that yes, this individual may be presenting us with an invitation, a gift, but we need to be very mindful about how that situation could potentially affect the services that we provide to those that we serve.

Alejandro Palac...: [17:52](#)

Of the professional values that I'm thinking about, and I'm talking about, I believe first and foremost is competence. We are competent, which means that we as individuals are able to act in a way that is fair and there is balance to those as we serve, that we have our own integrity, which is to be honest and to be fair, and to respect those as we serve. We avoid treating them in a way that could be detrimental to them, that could have a negative effect on them emotionally, but also to respect their decision and the agency that they have as individuals. This is important because on occasion we may be assisting someone in need and we may present them with different options, and

we may want to guide a conversation, or we may want this individual to decide that we think that's the best for them.

Alejandro Palac...: [19:04](#)

However, we don't know because those that we serve are experts in their own lives and we need to respect the decisions that they make. We may not agree with those decisions. However, we should respect the agency, their agency to make the decisions that are best for them and for their family. Now, we all share professional responsibility to protect, serve, and not cause harm to those that we serve. We respect their rights and dignity. And I think that in doing this work, we get involved in the advocacy world because we have concerns for those who have experienced victimization, trauma, their welfare, especially those who work or have worked with minors. And we have that sense of social responsibility to do everything possible for us to assist them. Now when we have and are mindful about that sense of social responsibility, our personal values may come into play.

Alejandro Palac...: [20:17](#)

And it's important for us to understand how we may make judgment based on our personal values, but also always keep in mind that our professional values are shared by all of us that serve those in need. And there are set expectations for us to act in certain ways according to our professional values. So ethics are a system of moral principles derived from the shared values that we have. So knowing about ethics and having defined them, we need to talk about ethical practice, and first and foremost, I always like to talk about being honest and transparent as advocates in our communication with those that we serve. We must be truthful about what we could potentially do for them, how we could potentially assist them in reaching their goals and their objectives. We need to have honest and real, and which are on occasion, difficult conversations with those that we serve.

Alejandro Palac...: [21:37](#)

We need to be honest about how we are mandated reporters for certain occasions or how we operate about certain guidelines such as confidentiality. And we do this by having those honest and transparent conversations and letting them know what they can expect from us as advocates and also from our agencies. What services can our agencies provide to them and what are our limitations? And if there are limitations for us as individuals or for agencies, who do we know or who we can reach out to that could potentially assist them? Sharing information and educating them is part of our ethical practices and being honest and transparent with those that we serve. Because they've been through crisis, they've been through adversity, they've been through trauma, and they deserve to

receive that honesty or transparency from us as service providers, followed by respect for human rights.

Alejandro Palac...: [22:45](#)

As advocates, we must respect their human rights, or their human rights to make individual decisions. And those rights include situations that we may disagree with. And we should not engage at all in discriminatory practices of any sort. Always respect the dignity and the rights of those individuals that we serve. Third, conflict of interest. This is a very important part of our conversations. As advocates, we must do everything that we can to avoid any potential conflict of interest that may arise from the work that we do. We should not engage in activities that may benefit us personally or the organizations at the expense of advocating for someone else. And I know this can be easier said than done, but we need to be very mindful of this. And when it comes to conflict of interest, we need to know, and this will be discussed further in later slides, what actions can we take?

Alejandro Palac...: [24:00](#)

Because this is very real. It happens, and it probably happens more often than we talk about. We are human beings, we are social beings, we interact. It's very real. It's part of having this honest conversation. Now that being said, when those situations can't be avoided, what do we do? What actions do we take? Furthermore, how do we avoid being in those situations? That's a conversation that we'll continue with. Number four, responsibility for the impact. We need to be as advocates, conscious and aware that we should be accountable for the impact of our actions on others, and we want that to have a positive impact. We must ensure that our activities and our actions do not have unintended negative consequences such as the potential for re-traumatizing someone else, having someone re-experience a potential negative or traumatic situation. It happens; we need to be really honest about this, but we need to create that awareness and mindfulness about what our responsibilities are and how those actions that we take or even those comments that we make can have a potential negative impact on those we serve. But we should advocate while striving to have positive effects on those that we serve. We must hold ourselves accountable for our actions.

Alejandro Palac...: [25:54](#)

Confidentiality. This is a very important part of the conversation. As advocates, we must protect the confidentiality and the information of those that we serve. Remember that we are trusted with very sensitive information. Victims and survivors and those who have experienced adversity share with us a lot of confidential information, especially the information that is personally identifying. Have a conversation with them

about confidentiality. Let them know the guidelines, which we're going to discuss in a bit. But I believe one of the most important ethical practices is protecting the confidentiality of those that we serve, especially for those who are in situations that engage and collaborate with different agencies. We are all about collaborating, supporting each other, however, we must always protect the confidentiality of those that we serve. Because informed consent is of extreme importance.

Alejandro Palac...: [27:03](#)

As advocates, we must obtain informed consent from individuals before using or sharing their personal information or even sharing their stories. Through my experience as a trainer on occasion, I do share specifics about cases that I've been involved with. Some of you may have been at my technology safety trainings, and I do share specific cases in which victims have been tracked through GPS devices and such. I ask for informed consent from that victim and survivor in order to be able to share that information because it's a way of respecting their story, their trauma, and also it's ethical to have informed consent. I share their stories, obviously without disclosing their names. When we are trusted with very sensitive and personal information, we need to have a conversation about providing education and information with those that that we serve.

Alejandro Palac...: [28:08](#)

I may need to collaborate with different agencies. Different agencies and individuals could provide services that someone that we are serving needs, and we need to do a warm handoff or share some information about the case or some specifics even about the individual. Again, depending on the agency that's collaborating, we need to have a conversation about informed consent with them. Maybe part of your policies is to have a signed release of information. We should know that, and they should be advised of that too. What information will be shared, who will be shared with, and what's the period of time that I can talk about and share this information? Also a respect for diversity. And by this I mean that advocates must respect the diversity of perspective and the experiences of those that we serve, the communities that we work with, because they may change, and they may vary, and that is okay.

Alejandro Palac...: [29:16](#)

And if someone that we're working with due to their experiences, their communities may not see a certain situation from our perspective, we need to acknowledge and respect that. In regard to collaboration and partnerships, they are always valued and of extreme importance, but as advocates, we should always strive to continue and expand those collaborations and those partnerships with not only organizations, governmental or not governmental, but also with

individuals that are also seeking to assist those in need to achieve common goals. Right on the top of my head, I can think about an example of a great system that works in most states which is the Address Confidentiality Program, which is run by the secretary of State and the state in which you may be in. This might be something for you to research and give them a call and establish a collaboration or a partnership if that has not been done yet.

Alejandro Palac...: [30:25](#)

The Address Confidentiality Program is a great program that I found throughout the country that supports victims of stalking, harassment, and domestic and sexual violence. And it's important to establish and have those trusted collaborations with those because we may need to contact them. You never know when it's a Friday afternoon, three o'clock, and you are working with someone who needs information, and it's important to know who to talk to. Have the business card, the direct phone number, cell, or email of an individual who can assist those in need at that specific day and time. So advocates, we should always be open to learning from others, and once we have the information and knowledge to share with those that we serve. I see a comment, "Always on a Friday afternoon," for sure. I'm saying that based off my experience on Friday afternoons when a victim and survivor comes in. They need specific services that cannot be provided by ourselves as individuals or organizations. Who do we talk to? Not only knowing an agency, but knowing a specific advocate, counselor, or individual who can assist at that specific time or even know someone who does provide those services after hours is very helpful.

Alejandro Palac...: [32:00](#)

Professionalism: this is of outmost importance to you as it relates to ethics and advocacy. Professionalism is an important aspect of advocating within the ethical framework. It refers to the conduct, attitude, and qualities that reflect our values and standards. Professionalism in the applications as it relates to ethics should not be taken for granted, and I'm going to share a couple examples of this. Not every single victim service provider is subject to the same ethical standards. An example of this is that being an advocate at a nonprofit agency such as a domestic violence shelter as I was, does not have the same ethical standards as I did as an advocate within the Department of Corrections, but the professionalism should always be the same. We need to be well-trained and informed on appropriate resources. Let's remember this, and if you're going to take something from this training, let it be this:

Alejandro Palac...: [33:17](#)

There is no single individual or agency that can do it all. We must always strive to attain, absorb, and share as much knowledge and as many resources as we can because as advocates we have to maintain high ethical standards and a specific code of ethics. I know that many of you may be under the NACP, the National Advocacy Credentialing Program, and that's a specific set of standards. For those serving the military, there are other specific codes of ethics, but the professionalism should be the same. Professionalism requires advocates to continuously develop their knowledge, not only knowledge, but also the set of skills that we have in our advocate toolbox. Professionalism requires us as advocates to always be respectful, to be collaborative, and to be responsive to the needs and the concerns of others. We are always seeking and pursuing excellence. Systems and non-systems-based organizations, again, have different ethical priorities, but we should always strive for the best outcome possible, and that is something that we should always be mindful about. Also, we should be compassionate in our actions. We may not fully grasp or fully understand someone's experiences as it relates to their victimization. We may think we know, but we may never know exactly what they're going through. However we can comprehend and be empathic and compassionate about the situation they're going through. That we can certainly do.

Alejandro Palac...: [35:13](#)

Cultural competencies, that's important because it's the ability of individuals and organizations to understand, to respect, and to effectively communicate with people from diverse cultures and backgrounds. Now, in the culture of advocacy and the services that we provide to them, cultural competency requires us as advocates to understand the diversities of the communities that we serve. We may serve individuals from different backgrounds, and that is okay, and we need to strive to attain as much knowledge and understanding as possible. I have a quick example, and this relates again to my direct service experience. When I was the lead legal advocate at the shelter, I remember working with a family, and in the context of their culture, punishment towards minors was accepted. That was the first time that I remember having a situation as it relates directly to cultural competency because I was in the position of having a conversation with the adult around the fact that corporal punishment for minors even as correctional behavior, was something that in my specific role as a professional and an advocate, was bounded to report to a Child Protective Services agency.

Alejandro Palac...: [36:50](#)

And it was a very interesting conversation around where this family came from, their backgrounds, their culture, but how

under the specific sort of circumstances I was under operating a certain ethical and professional guidelines. So it was the first time. This happened eight years ago, and I can remember having a conversation about it, and I've never forgotten it. And I think it's of utmost importance for us to understand how sensitive and important this is. We need to strive to be as culturally competent as possible because we may work with individuals from different backgrounds, languages, beliefs, and also sets of personal values. As advocates, we must respect the diversity of the communities that those that we work with come from. We use and strive to use the most appropriate language, considering different cultural norms, ensuring that the information that we are sharing is accessible to everyone, potentially someone who does not read or is able to fully comprehend English, just as an example.

Alejandro Palac...: [38:11](#)

What can we do about it? How can we assist? Or what actions can we take to make sure that this individual has access to that information or the community of individuals who may be hard of hearing or may have other limitations. How can we strive to be as accessible as possible and culturally competent? Because we will be required to work with communities and assist them potentially to identify their needs and their priorities as we walk alongside them through the advocacy work that we do. And it's a matter of always doing continuous learning because it's critical to improving our agencies and ourselves as individuals and our cultural competence as it relates specifically to the work that we do as advocates.

Alejandro Palac...: [39:07](#)

Now there are common barriers to ethical decision making. Ethical decision making becomes a skill, but it becomes a skill with time and with practice. It's not always straightforward. That's why I mentioned in the beginning that we're having real and honest conversations about situations that we may come across. In a lack of knowledge or understanding of ethical principles or relevant specific laws and or regulations can make it difficult, to make those ethical decisions. That's why without this knowledge, individuals and organizations may make decisions that are not consistent with those ethical principles. Individuals, advocates, and organizations or agencies may hold conflicting values, making it difficult to decide which value may have priority on any given potential situations. Many situations can lead to the creation of ethical dilemmas where there is not a clear right or wrong answer.

Alejandro Palac...: [40:20](#)

That's when a resource that I'm going to present to you in a bit comes into play because we do come across as individuals or agencies with ethical dilemmas due to conflicting interest due

to different cultural elements. So emotions such as fear, anger, and even anxiety can cloud our judgments as individuals. We know that. Now we need to be mindful and understanding that it can make it very difficult to make a rational decision when we are experiencing those feelings and those emotions, which when we are going through those can lead to individuals or agencies and organizations to make choices that are not consistent with ethical principles. Therefore, it is important to be conscious and aware when there's a judgment factor, and we should strive to remove that judgment factor because we are aiming for progress versus perfection. Perfection is very hard to attain. We need to be better and get better at what we do. As this quote from John Maxwell says, "If we are growing, we're always going to be out of our comfort zone." And being an advocate keeps us potentially always and consistently out of our comfort zone. But that's where growth is. However, we always have to keep in mind our ethics and our professionalism.

Alejandro Palac...:

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Levels of confidentiality: there's privacy. There's confidentiality, which is very important to the work that we do, which is the professional ethical promise that requires consent in order to share information. But there's also privileged communications and we need to talk about those. What is privacy? Privacy refers to the constitutional right of individuals that are outlined in the federal and state constitutions against specifically unnecessary intrusion or disclosure of their information and the right of individuals to have control over their disclosure of personal matters. That is their privacy. Confidentiality refers to a professional promise based upon ethics. That's very important. It's the professional promise based upon ethics to reveal nothing about an individual without their consent. Remember the informed consent portion of the ethical practices? Privileged communication is basically conferred by state statute. It may refer to the legal right that exempts patients or clients or those that we serve from having confidential disclosure revealed by those that provide services to them. That's very important. Some advocates in certain states have privileged communications. Know that and understand that and educate those that are reserved on not only that the ethical confident, the confidentiality that we must keep as it relates to ethics, but also privileged communications. I know for a fact, from my experiences as an advocate in Arizona, that when I have a conversation with a victim or survivor, it's a privilege, and it's a protected communication. The Army has both types of confidentiality. Think about this. How would you define confidentiality as a victim assistance provider?

- Alejandro Palac...: [44:14](#) As it relates to confidentiality, it can be simply defined as the advocate's duty not to disclose information about the client, about the individual that we're serving or their families, but also protecting confidentiality that establishes the foundation of trust in the advocate relationship. This is of outmost importance because confidentiality to those that we serve is of much importance to protect, to establish the foundation of trust by making sure they understand how that information will be protected from disclosure. Now, protecting confidentiality and potential exceptions informed consent.
- Alejandro Palac...: [45:22](#) Yes, trust is what we need to give unconditionally. That's what our services should be based on: trust, informed consent. It's fully explaining to the client the process, the benefits, and the potential risks of the professional connection between the agency, the advocate, and the individual receiving those services. Informed consent should also include potential possible consequences of disclosure and also our non-disclosure for the individuals' and their families' wellbeing and life circumstances. That's where it comes into play. I let them know I am mandated to report under these three very specific situations. I say, "If we're going to have a conversation, you must know that I am a mandated report If I hear any of the following situations." This way, they can fully understand and grasp the importance of the conversations that are they're having with us.
- Alejandro Palac...: [46:39](#) So what does all mean? There will be times in our system of values that will defer from the survivors who we are working with. Yes, there are differences, and we need to be mindful and acknowledge those. One of the most significant ethical tasks is to avoid placing our own values and judgments on others, especially when we are trying to help. Remove that judgment factor. Always. We're humans, we're individuals. We may tend to judge, but when we are mindful about it, we do a better job at removing that judgment factor and focusing our services that we can provide to those in need. We are more vigilant that we are not lifting our own voices and values over those that we serve. They may contradict, we may not be on the same page in regard to those values, but we need to respect, acknowledge, and encourage them to make the decisions that are best for them. Now this requires constant self-assessment in checking in not only with ourselves, but also about certain situations. Have a conversation with a colleague; it doesn't have to be a supervisor. If you have a trusting relationship with a supervisor, have those conversations. Say, "Hey, I'm going through this situation, I may need some guidance. What are your thoughts in

regard to this?" Seek guidance from those that lead your program and or your agency.

Alejandro Palac...:

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Next, boundaries in our victim services provisions. Remember that we are bound by different ethics and professional sets of boundaries. We need to understand that boundaries are where we stop, and another person begins in victim services. Boundaries refer to guidelines and limits that must be respected by U.S. service providers in order to maintain a professional and ethical relationship with those that we serve by ensuring that they're receiving ethical, safe, and effective services. What are some of the potential consequences of violating those boundaries? Potential re-traumatization to those that we serve or misleading the survivors or the victims by allowing them to believe their relationship is personal rather than professional. If you ever come across that situation, make it very clear to them that this is a professional relationship. I've been in those situations. It is of the utmost importance to have those conversations always to reinforce unhealthy relationships learned as a result of the victimization. We need to let them know that this is a result of their victimization, and they should not be expected. If they're talking about domestic violence situations in which power and control was the base of their relationship, and we as advocates hold power, we are not going to enforce that against them. We're not going to tell them what to do. We're going to give them options, and they decide what's best for them.

Alejandro Palac...:

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Some consequences of violating boundaries is that they may discredit the agency and again, may enable power and control over the victim survivor rather than empower them. What is self-disclosure? It's when I share a bit of what I went through so this person can understand that I may relate to it or not think about this at the end of a session. At the end of the conversation, those that we serve should not know more about us than we know about them. There are potential pros and cons to self-disclosure, but there's nothing wrong in just letting someone know, "I went through something similar; I can relate." As opposed to just trauma dumping on them with our whole story. That's not what this is about.

Alejandro Palac...:

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Next, ethical boundaries in regards to dual relationships. Dual relationships can be complicated and create ethical dilemmas because they can compromise the objectivity, the neutrality, and the effectiveness of our role as victim advocates. So always keep on the side of the relationship being professional because dual relationships may lead to the advocate trying to rescue a client or over-help someone. And that's not what we do. We do

the best that we can to the very best of our abilities, but we do not rescue those that we serve.

- Alejandro Palac...: [51:50](#) Next, the Office for Victim Advocacy Ethics. At NOVA, I lead this project, and we at the Office for Victim Advocacy Ethics have a specific form, and it's actually confidential, where an ethical dilemma inquiry can be submitted. I and a committee of professionals review the ethical dilemma inquiry and then provide a professional opinion in regard to that. So this is a resource for you to use, if you ever come across an ethical dilemma, we could potentially assist you with this.
- Alejandro Palac...: [52:34](#) A new resource is our resource center at the Office for Victim Advocacy Ethics. We are creating a resource library that not only includes direct links to information for all to read, but also videos, short videos with information, and we are doing them in Spanish and English. So just want to share that with you as a new resource. Please keep this in mind. Always put victims first. We must prioritize the public interest over any personal interest that we may have or the interest of an organization. We need to be professional. Remember, we are required to act in the best interest of those that we serve.
- Alejandro Palac...: [53:31](#) Here are some resources for you all. If you have not followed us on social media yet, if you want to do it, those are our social media direct links. And this is a SHARP code of ethics. Yes, I'll be at the conference next week. Please, if you see me, introduce yourself, I would love to put faces to the names of those individuals that I see who are part of the training. So please, if you see me walking around, please come and introduce yourself. It'd be my pleasure to meet you,
- Lytaria Walker: [54:26](#) Mr. Palacios. Thank you.
- Alejandro Palac...: [54:28](#) You are welcome there. Any questions, comments, please let me know.
- Lytaria Walker: [54:35](#) We will now take a few questions from the audience. If you would like to ask a question, please type your question in the Q&A box, and we will read them aloud. There will be a short delay before the first question is announced.
- Alejandro Palac...: [54:51](#) You are most welcome everyone. It's my pleasure. Thank you.
- Lytaria Walker: [54:59](#) At this time you may drop your question in the Q&A box or even in the webinar chat box. We do have time for about one question. Okay, I see something here. "Can you please give us

an example of how you initially establish rapport with a new client?"

- Alejandro Palac...: [55:23](#) Yes, and that is a great question. Thank you so much for asking it, and I'll share that when having a conversation with a new client to establish that rapport. The most important tool that we can use is our listening skills, asking open-ended questions to listen, to attain as much information as we can because in that initial conversation we'll get a sense of how we can best assist these individuals. My first suggestion would be to listen, to sit back, be open in your body language to receiving what's being shared with you. Maybe this person has hesitation about trusting, and it may take some time, but be open in your words, in your body language and listen to what they have to say.
- Lytaria Walker: [56:26](#) Thank you for that answer, sir.
- Alejandro Palac...: [56:29](#) I see a question. I see James Meredith is asking, "What are your basic recommended boundaries?" I'll say this is based on my professional experience, and the fact that I've twice in my career experienced burnout. Boundaries are easier said than done. I completely understand. As I mentioned, I've been through burnout myself, and I have very set boundaries to, first and foremost, my working hours, to responding to emails, to taking calls when I'm not supposed to be doing that, because that can have a detrimental impact with time and overtime to the nature of the work that we do. For starters, basic recommendation for boundaries: Take care of your time when you're working with someone, being fully present, and when you are not in your advocate role, take your time for yourself.
- Lytaria Walker: [57:39](#) Okay. It looks like we have time for maybe one more question here, and I'll get to that.
- Alejandro Palac...: [57:46](#) Okay. Maria says, "How do you balance the medical privacy conveying support without violating the medical burnout? It's exhausting. And how do you balance medical privacy to conveying support?" Okay, first and foremost, I will say you cannot pour from an empty cup. Self-care is of extreme importance. Again, I've been through a couple of episodes of burnout myself, and they were detrimental, but it comes with experience and practice that we understand when our body is talking to us about taking the foot of the pedal, if you will, for a bit and taking care of ourselves. Because if we are exhausted, if we are burned out, we are not at our best to advocate for someone else because when we are experiencing levels of burnout or we are getting tired, our skills are not at their best.

Our advocacy skills, our listening skills, and our empathy skills are not at their best when we are tired.

Lytaria Walker:

[59:00](#)

Okay. Thank you sir. Unfortunately, we have run out of time this morning, and we'll need to conclude this morning's webinar. I do want to extend a gracious thank you to Mr. Palacios for taking the time today to provide this great presentation for us. Thank you listeners for joining today's webinar as well. Once the webinar ends, you will be prompted to complete a survey. We appreciate your feedback as this helps us to improve upon future webinars. If you'd like to receive invitations for DPRR's webinars and receive the latest news and information from the Directorate of Prevention, Resilience and Readiness, please go to DPRR's website at armyresilience.army.mil and sign up for notifications there. Please also follow us on DPRR's newly launched LinkedIn and Instagram platforms. Thank you again for joining us today and have a wonderful rest of your day.