

# For Victim-Survivors Attending Healthcare Appointments: 'How to Support Me' Request Template

Made by victim-survivors for victim-survivors

## Nau mai, haere mai

This request template was created by the [Backbone Collective](#) and [HELP Auckland](#). We hope it supports you in all your healthcare journeys.

This document is a guide only. It is for you to use, as you wish, to let health practitioners know how to best prioritise your personal, physical, psychological, social and cultural safety.

## How to use this template

This document contains a series of statements that you can adjust - edit, delete and/or add to as you wish - each time you have an appointment with a new healthcare practitioner, or for appointments for procedures which are new for you. Any of the wording can be changed to suit your voice or address your needs. You can:

- email or give your version to the healthcare practitioner several days before your appointment if possible, so they have time to read it properly and can prepare in advance
- give it to them at the appointment
- use it as a script to follow when you are talking with them
- ask whānau or your advocate to use it to communicate on your behalf.

Reading through this template may be distressing. You may wish to go through it with the support of someone you trust. There is a list of support agencies and some links to videos and/or support that might be helpful.

## Background

Healthcare appointments - whether with the dentist, doctor, hospital, nurse, pharmacist, allied professional such as physiotherapist or osteopath, traditional carers, alternative carers or others - may be empowering and restoring, but they can also risk creating additional trauma and distress. For example, healthcare procedures sometimes put patients in situations where they have less physical control than usual, or where they may feel exposed physically or psychologically, or where they do not know what is going to happen next.

We hope this document will help you communicate with healthcare professionals to enable them to support you and safeguard your autonomy and control in healthcare appointments; and that your healthcare practitioners will respond to the information you share with them by offering you tailored, mana-enhancing care which avoids creating additional trauma and distress. You may also wish to share our guide for health practitioners with them: [Centering Victim-Survivors in Healthcare Appointments](#).

## Feedback

We welcome any feedback via our short anonymous [questionnaire](#) to help us better assist other victim-survivors in the future.

### For crisis support

- 24/7 Shine Family Violence Helpline 0508 744 633
- 24/7 Refuge Crisisline 0800 REFUGE
- Sexual Violence HELPline 0800 623 1700 or [gethelp@ helpauckland.org.nz](mailto:gethelp@helpauckland.org.nz)
- Safe to Talk/Kōrero Mai Ka Ora for 24/7 sexual violence support 0800 044 334 [safetotalk.nz/](http://safetotalk.nz/)
- Shama Ethnic Women's Trust 07 843 3810/ 07 843 3811 9am-4:30pm weekdays [shama.org.nz](http://shama.org.nz)
- Hohou Te Rongo Kahukura offer resources and support by and for Takatāpui and Rainbow communities. [kahukura.co.nz](http://kahukura.co.nz)

### If you struggle to switch off once you have completed your request template, you could try:

- [Watching a short video on box breathing techniques](#) which can help reduce stress and anxiety, created by Anxiety New Zealand.
- [Listening to a brief Guided Visualisation](#) of a Forest Walk, created by Anxiety New Zealand that guides the listener through a forest scene. If possible, it is best listened to lying down in a quiet location, with eyes closed.
- [Watching a video on Hikitia te Hā - Breathing Practice](#) - This is a set of Te Ao Māori simple breathing exercises designed to help regulate state of mind. The video was developed by Rawiri Hindle and supported by Canterbury's All Right?.

### Your rights as a patient:

- to be treated with respect (mana)
- to fair treatment (manaakitanga)
- to dignity and independence (tū rangatira motuhake)
- to appropriate standards (tautikanga)
- to effective communication (whakawhitiwhitinga whakairo)
- to be informed (whakamōhio)
- to choice and consent (whakaritenga mōu ake)
- to support (tautoko)
- to rights during teaching and research (ako me te rangahau); and
- the right for your complaint to be taken seriously (amuamu).

You can find the [full Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights](#) on the Health & Disability Commissioner website.



## INFORMATION FOR MY HEALTH PRACTITIONER

### Personal details

*Only keep those statements you wish to use; you can delete everything else.*

Kia ora/ Hi My name is:

My pronouns are:

My NHI/case number is:

My NHI/case number *matches/ does not match* my name.

I am seeing you on [*date/today*] at [*where are you? which hospital or dentist or GP clinic etc.*] for [*name of procedure/type of appointment*].

**I need an interpreter/translation for [*language*].**

- I would like to know the name of the interpreter if possible so I can approve them first.
- I need the interpreter to be a woman.

**I need to know:**

- whether this service is free, given my visa/residency status which is [*type of visa/ residency here*].
- whether this service is covered by ACC.

[*optional disclosure*] **I would like you to know that medical/dental appointments and procedures are often difficult for me because I have experienced family violence/sexual violence**

[*you can add other reasons here if you wish*].

I experience ongoing distress/trauma responses due to past violence or abuse, which are sometimes unexpected, and I may not be able to communicate with you about what is happening. As a practitioner, there are actions you can take that will make my healthcare experience less distressing and traumatic for me.

## GENERAL SUPPORT

**You can help me by:** [*select those that feel right for you and/or add others that are missing and delete options that don't apply to you*]

- respecting my culture, religion and/or identity, and accommodating my requests around this [*if you have any particular concerns or requests, you may wish to describe them here*]
- remaining calm, warm and respectful to help create a connection and provide a safe and supportive experience, even if you have not seen/ treated someone like me before.

**Before the appointment/procedure:**

- ensuring I have enough information, so I have time to consider my needs and discuss with support people. This information includes:
  - o the type of appointment and the procedure and process
  - o if the procedure allows for a support person
  - o the role/s of the person/people I will be seeing and (if possible) their names
  - o a description of the waiting area, environment, and path from waiting area to consultation/procedure room, so I can plan for my mobility and safety needs
  - o a copy of any consent form that may be used.
- letting me have a woman healthcare practitioner, or allowing for a woman medical professional to also be in the room



- letting me have a healthcare practitioner who will understand my cultural needs [*you may wish to add more detail or specific requests here*]
- letting me have a healthcare practitioner that understands gender affirming healthcare practices
- if I have the option of a longer appointment to give me time to process information.

#### **At the start of the appointment/procedure:**

- greeting me using my correct name and pronouns, and ensuring these are used about me and to me throughout my appointment
- taking time to say hello, introduce yourself and check in with me to create connection, and build trust and respect (this includes my support person if they are attending)
- acknowledging the tapu or emotional weight of the procedure we're entering into, e.g. opening with a karakia, waiata or whakataukī, or giving me a moment to do so [*would you prefer the health practitioner to lead this, if they are confident to do so?*]
- asking me what accommodations and/or support I need during this meeting and in future.

#### **Enabling my physical preferences throughout:**

- asking me if the space is comfortable, and my preferences around lighting, chairs, sounds, music (if applicable), and background noise etc., and adjust as requested if possible. If you need to use bright lights for the procedure, for example, please explain why
- asking me if I would like to be spoken to throughout the procedure
- being open to me sitting or standing rather than lying down - if possible. If I need to be lying down, please explain why.

#### **Respecting privacy and confidentiality:**

- keeping my information confidential and private, and ensuring the space allows me privacy before asking me questions
- giving me privacy if I need to get undressed, and not expecting me to wait in a common waiting area in a gown.

#### **Ensuring my consent is fully informed and freely given:**

- explaining clearly and slowly the process of consent, what the consent form covers, and providing choices or options if possible
- explaining the procedure/process in detail to me **before** you begin and **before** you ask me for consent/to sign consent form
- offering to read me information as I might not be able to understand written material, or I might process it better when spoken
- informing me ahead of time if you will be taking any images or recordings of me, and why, and where/how long it will be stored
- not talking while I'm processing information
- being careful not to pressure or rush me into consenting or signing something. I need time and space to think, process and ask questions
- explaining each step of the procedure as you go and securing my clear consent at each step and stage e.g. "I need to lift your arm to test the strength. Is that OK?"
- giving me time to ask questions (as many as I need to feel safe)
- agreeing in advance to let me say 'stop' (or raise my hand to gesture 'stop') whenever I need to, and then stopping and giving me as much time as I need before continuing
- agreeing to stop if I seem distressed or absent, even if I don't say something
- giving me options/alternatives where possible, if there is something I am struggling with.



### **Considering the people who see me/engage with me:**

- letting me have my support person come into the appointment/ procedure and stay close to me so I can touch, hear or see them if that is what I want. Letting me know when and why if this is not possible (e.g radiation)
- if I don't have my own support person with me, offering me the support of another staff member to be in the room during the appointment
- always asking me if it is OK first before anyone else comes in the room
- keeping staff consistent and telling me in advance if a new person will be treating me.

### **Ending the appointment with:**

- an act of closure to help restore balance, for example karakia, waiata or whakataukī
- (then) taking a brief moment to share something uplifting or light
- inviting me to reconnect with the environment by stretching and breathing.

## **TRAUMA RESPONSES**

### **If I seem hesitant, concerned, anxious, disengaged or similar, please could you:**

- understand that I am doing my best to manage my distress and trauma responses
- empathise with me (e.g. "I understand you might be feeling really scared right now")
- reassure me e.g. "this is such a difficult thing to go through, you're doing well"
- remind me to take slow deep breaths
- remind me to stay in the moment (e.g. stand up, shake out my hands, wriggle my toes, tell you some things I can see, hear, smell, touch, taste)
- **[add anything else that is relevant to you]**.

### **If I am very overwhelmed and distressed (see list below for what this may look like), please could you:**

- use slow steady movements, not quick or jerky movements
- be calm
- use a quiet voice and try to reduce background noise
- try to establish eye contact (use my name, ask me to look at you). Ensure when you do this that you have a friendly expression on your face!
- ask me to verbally acknowledge if I can hear you
- if I can't speak, ask me to nod or shake my head or use hand signals to indicate I can hear you
- call my support person [add name and number here] or a helpline for me
- slow down, and offer me quiet, private space to ground and recover
- **[add anything else that is relevant to you]**.

### **The reasons the actions above can help is because I can be reminded of the violence and abuse (triggered) by:**

- feeling like I am not in control – including feeling unsure about what is going to happen – or being made to do things I don't want to
- certain voices, music, smells, colours or places
- feeling trapped/like I can't escape (either from a room, or because of what is happening to me, e.g. being connected to equipment or drips etc.)
- not feeling like your actions and the healthcare environment demonstrate respect for my needs, or treat my needs as valid and important
- not feeling like your actions and the healthcare environment demonstrate respect for who I am



- anything could be a trigger, as healthcare settings are overwhelming
- **[add anything else that is relevant to you]**.

When that happens, I feel like I am in danger right now, even though I am not. Therefore, I can behave in ways that might seem confusing to you but are actually just attempts to protect myself. My reactions and responses happen because my brain and nervous system have been 'wired' in response to violence and abuse, to protect me from being hurt again. I feel vulnerable in many healthcare situations, because they involve my body receiving treatment that is outside my control. I have had healthcare experiences where I have not been listened to, or treated with respect, so I find healthcare appointments particularly difficult.

**This means I can feel:**

- unsafe and frightened/terrified
- dizzy, or like I might faint or have a panic attack
- like I need to be on guard around others and stay very alert
- that I cannot relax
- that I can't trust other people
- **[add anything else that is relevant to you]**.

**I might be:**

- in pain or in a dissociated state
- in fight/flight/freeze/fawn mode
- unable to concentrate on directions or what you tell me
- unable to retain or understand information
- more likely to misinterpret you and what you do as likely to cause me hurt/harm
- **[add anything else that is relevant to you]**.

**When I get overwhelmed by these feelings you might notice that I:**

- am nervous, jumpy, or easily startled
- don't respond to what you say to me or stop being able to maintain eye contact
- withdraw or dissociate (like I'm numb, not in my body; or I'm isolated from my surroundings)
- cry, weep, scream or wail
- might seem 'difficult' (I may not cooperate with what you want me to do)
- **[add anything else that is relevant to you]**.

**Thanks for supporting me and other victim-survivors to have access to safe, supportive healthcare.**

This template has been created by [The Backbone Collective](#) and [HELP Auckland](#) with advice from Debbie Hager, [Hohou Te Rongo Kahukura](#), Dr Gareth Jones – [Tiaki Akoako](#), [Shama Ethnic Women's Trust](#) and our victim-survivor reviewers and healthcare professional reviewers.