

Case Closure: When to close a case

How do you know when to close a case?

The length of time a case may be open will vary greatly depending on the survivor's needs and the context in which you are working. Because of these variables, it is important to have criteria for case closure so that you know when it is time to close a case. You can close a case as follows:

- When the survivor's needs are met and/or their (pre-existing or new) support systems are functioning (this would only be done in circumstances in which the survivor is not still experiencing violence). In that case:
 - Follow up with the survivor and discuss their situation.
 - Review the final action plan and the status of each goal together.
 - Explain that it is time to close the case, but reassure the survivor that they can always return if they encounter new issues or experience GBV again.
- When the survivor wants to close the case. Sometimes survivors may feel that they do not want to continue with you even if they haven't had all their needs met. Our goal is to respect the survivor's wishes, and thus the case is closed at their request.
- When the survivor leaves the area or is relocated to another place.
- When you have not been able to reach the person for a minimum of 30 days.

Setting Boundaries

It is important to set boundaries regarding the relationship between the case worker and survivor during their initial meeting. The case worker should aim to empower the survivor to feel ownership over their own decisions so co-dependency is not established. This will help prepare the survivor for eventual case closure. To set yourself up for this eventual process, please read the guidance on dependency.

What to do in case closure?

- Document when the case is closed and the specific reasons for doing so:
 - Complete a Case Closure Form if your organization uses one.
 - Review the case with a supervisor and obtain approval to close it.

- Review all the forms in the survivor's file and make sure the file is complete
- Safely store the closed case file. Move the file to a "closed case" cabinet if your program has one. Do not include the consent form in the closed file for confidentiality purposes.
- Administer a client feedback survey. If you close the case in person and your organization uses client feedback surveys, the survey can be administered the survey to the survivor after closing the case.

Case closure should be incremental and the case worker should work with the survivor to determine a timeline assuming no new incidents or life events come up. The time elapsed between sessions should gradually increase over time but this is dependent on an individual's needs. Depending on the context, the case worker should inform their supervisor that they are thinking about closing the case.

It is possible that the survivor may experience difficult feelings around loss and change once the case closure process is mentioned, and may initially be reluctant or unsure. It is important to recognize that these feelings are normal and they should be discussed and validated. The case worker should provide an opportunity to reflect with the survivor on how far they have come, the positive changes they have seen and the goals that they have met. The case worker should reaffirm to the survivor that life is not linear and that the service will continue to be here if there are any changes in the survivor's situation.

"It's amazing to see these positive changes that have been made by you. You were the one that made these decisions and took these steps. It has been great working with you and seeing this progress. This is just the beginning."

Quiz Questions¹

1. What are the circumstances under which you can close a case?
 - a. When the survivor's needs are met and/or their (pre-existing or new) support systems are functioning
 - b. When the survivor wants to close the case.
 - c. When the survivor leaves the area or is relocated to another place.
 - d. When you have not been able to reach the person for a minimum of 30 days
 - e. All of the above.
2. Which of the below tasks are not involved in case closure?
 - a. Document when the case is closed and the specific reasons for doing so.
 - b. Discuss the case closure with a supervisor.
 - c. Destroy the case file.
 - d. Safely store the closed case file in a separate file cabinet for closed cases.
 - e. Remove the consent form from the closed file.

Discussion Prompts

- How do you prepare for case closure?
- How do you set the survivor up for success (for eventual case closure)?
- What to do when the survivor's needs are perceived as being met, but the survivor does not want to close the case?



¹ All of the above, Destroy the case file