Person-Centered Thinking and Practices

8 First Impressions and Conversation Skills

ACL
Administration for Community Living

NO WRONG DOOR

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Introduction

These slides contain content adapted from the Administration for Community Living's Person Centered Counseling Training Program. The content includes text and narration from online courses. To view original content or for more information, please visit nwd.acl.gov or contact NoWrongDoor@acl.hhs.gov.

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Welcome! (1/2)

This lesson will help you understand the importance of starting off well with a person. It reviews the difference between person-centered discovery and assessment. It reviews methods of discovery conversations that are likely to support the person's engagement. It describes the power of purposeful but branching conversations. It will reinforce a technique of guess/ask/write in documenting information. It describes the usefulness of open-ended questions. Keep in mind, you will have opportunities to practice these skills and others during the in-person portion of the blended learning model.

Welcome! (2/2)

Learning Objective

After completing this lesson: You will be able to demonstrate your ability to use a purposeful branching conversation that is likely to help people to identify their "to/for balance."

Working Toward Better Starts and Better Results (1/3)

Lack of choice, direction, and control are not the only issues people experience when they engage human services systems. People find the systems are too complex and disjointed. There is little sharing of information between entities and no follow-up. This is sometimes called a lack of a "warm hand-off."

Working Toward Better Starts and Better Results (2/3)

The result is that people are asked to repeat important information multiple times to different agencies. If the agency is not the correct one, the person must start from scratch. If the service ends or more than one is needed, the person is expected to track information and pass on recommendations. These issues can leave people angry, perplexed, overwhelmed, and discouraged. Important information is often lost. Sometimes people choose not to get help at all rather than deal with these issues.

Working Toward Better Starts and Better Results (3/3)

The No Wrong Door approach is meant to counteract some of these problems. A goal of person-centered counseling is ensuring people are connected in a streamlined and supportive way to helpful resources. Regardless of whether a person is eligible for any specific program or service, helping them with next steps and providing appropriate follow-up is a goal. Starting with discovery rather than program eligibility assessment helps support this.

Working Toward Better Starts and Better Results

It's important to keep in mind that people may not have much experience with the system or a Person-Centered Counseling professional's role in supporting them. Others may have plenty of experiences with systems but not always very good ones. Considering people's comfort right away is important regardless of whether the interaction is over the phone or in person. Explaining your role to people early on so that they understand the context of your conversation can help them. Remember, your first contact with someone might be your only opportunity to help them.

Comparing Motivational Interviewing with Person-Centered Discovery

A key to good starts and informative discovery is the spirit in which the Person-Centered Counseling professional approaches both the person and the task. Many Person-Centered Counseling professionals have a background in motivational interviewing. This is a definite advantage in discovery. The spirit of motivational interviewing has the same spirit as person-centered discovery. However, the two are not exactly the same.

Branching vs. Linear Conversations

An essential skill in person-centered discovery is how to have a conversation that is both purposeful and open-ended. The temptation is to have a linear conversation. However, a branching conversation is often more fruitful.

Checking Assumptions with Guess/Ask/Write (1/2)

As we are having conversations, it is easy to assume we understand someone when we don't. Assumptions help us function and problem-solve quickly. They are important to our ability to be efficient. However, untested assumptions are a problem. Very often our assumptions can be based on stereotypes, our own beliefs, experiences, or culture. You must regularly check in with the person for accuracy to remain person-centered. If assumptions are often wrong and end up in service plans or other communication, it will break trust. People feel unheard, frustrated, and diminished.

Checking Assumptions with Guess/Ask/Write (2/2)

Guess/ask/write is a method of checking understanding at frequent junctures in the conversation. It's a reminder to check with the person specifically before documenting anything you think you have learned. It means writing or documenting only what you said you would.

Guess/Ask/Write (1/2)

Guess/ask/write is particularly useful when helping someone develop their person-centered plan. But it's not a bad practice in general. People should not be surprised about what you write about them. They should not be in disagreement with it. A person-centered plan or one-page description belongs to the person, and they control all aspects of what goes on it. However, even your professional notes and documentation can affect them. Review the process below.

Guess/Ask/Write (2/2)

Guess: Listen to what the person is saying. Guess in your head what it means. Repeat it back in your own words to the person. For example: "I'm guessing that getting up early to start your day is important to you."

Ask: Ask if your guess is correct. Use words like: "Does that sound right? Is that what you meant? Do I have the right? Do I understand this correctly? Is there something else I should know?" Continue your conversation until you receive affirmation that you are on the right track.

Write: Write down what you learn exactly as you said it.

The Power of Open-Ended Questions

Good practices of not making assumptions can be helpful in identifying hidden differences due to culture or other differences in backgrounds. They also encourage people to share context and leave more room for a natural give and take of information. Many groups have reasons for being suspicious of systems or government programs in our country. Your kindness, patience, and willingness to be respectfully curious about what will work best for each person can make a difference.

Conclusion and Lesson Review (1/3)

- Giving people a warm welcome and helping them understand your role in a friendly way will help get things off to a good start. People should feel important when they contact a No Wrong Door system. Discovery is different than assessment.

- Discovery is a process of finding out what is important to a person and how best to support them. It can inform eligibility processes but is not defined by them.

- Purposeful branching conversations often do not take much longer than asking people close-ended questions about themselves. Conversations feel less like an interrogation. They help gather information about what the person's needs are, but in the context of what is important to them and what makes sense to them.

Conclusion and Lesson Review (2/3)

- Nothing should be assumed about a person without checking it out. Do not ever write anything about a person that they have not had a chance to validate. This is absolutely critical on any person-centered plan or description. Guess/ask/write is a method of reminding yourself to do this.

- Cultural and diversity issues will affect a person's communication and what works best for them. Continue your learning in this area about what works and how to tell when you are off track. Continue to develop your resources in this area. Checking assumptions frequently can help reduce misunderstandings.

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Learning Objective

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Reflection on Learning Objective

Directions: Review the objective(s) on this page. Write down your answers to the following questions.

1. What did you learn in this lesson that you felt was important?

2. What will you do differently because of the content in this lesson?

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