

Person-Centered Thinking and Practices

6 The Role of Relationships and Cultural Context in Person-Centered Thinking



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)

A central part of what makes life meaningful is connections to others. People also value the ability to set goals or prioritize life according to their own values. Culture, background, and resources will have a large impact in these areas. As a result, the context of what is valued and how it looks will vary from person to person. It will also vary from community to community.

This lesson introduces the learner to these important issues. It provides approaches for applying them. However, this lesson introduces this content only briefly. It does so in the context of the person-centered thinking skills and tools. It is strongly recommended that you seek additional training and information about these topics. You can check out the resources listed with this course to learn more.

Welcome! (2/2)

Learning Objective

After completing this lesson: You will be able to describe the methods you use to identify important aspects of relationships and culture in person-centered discovery.

The Importance of Relationships, Social Roles, and Culture

Relationships, valued social roles, and personal goals are a large part of what creates a good life for most people. These bring comfort, enjoyment, fulfillment, and opportunity. However, “community,” “family,” and “valued roles” are defined differently by individuals.

Keep in mind, too, that the way people communicate will vary. So will their understanding of the Person-Centered Counseling (PCC) professional’s role. All of these aspects will influence what will work best for people. Artful consideration of people’s relationships and the cultural context of their lives is part of the PCC professional’s role.

— Influence of Culture and Diversity Issues

Culture and diversity issues are at the heart of being person-centered. The ability to respond to people in ways that are meaningful to them is supported by understanding these aspects of a person. The skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed to work with diverse individuals are very subtle but pervasive. They touch every part of the interaction.

The Importance of Exploring Relationships (1/2)

Life is primarily about relationships and social roles. The people we know do a lot for us. In fact, the value of these relationships is sometimes referred to as social capital. They watch out for us. They set expectations for us, encourage us, or mentor us. We give back by fulfilling these roles mutually or for others. In our families, jobs, and communities, we like to be thought of as useful and valuable.

A Person-Centered Counseling (PCC) professional will consider a person's relationships in discovery. Some reasons for doing this include:

- To ensure supports align with maintaining or developing the unique valued roles people would like to have at each stage of their lives, such as friend, parent, or employee

The Importance of Exploring Relationships (2/2)

- To understand who might rely on the person
- To know more about which relationships are very important for the person to maintain or develop (from their view)
- To understand who is providing support for the person, including emotional, instrumental, or support for decision-making
- To identify strengths in social networks that should be maintained or gaps that the person may want to fill
- To identify who might be helpful in a well-rounded discovery process (other people to talk to)

Supporting Diverse Individuals

Relationships, goals, social roles, and culture are all critical aspects to be explored in discovery. However, directly asking about these issues may or may not be the most useful approach. Discovery is a purposeful conversation. It should not feel like a job interview or responding to a checklist. Identifying what is important to the person and support for what is important for them is best done in a natural way. However, some ongoing practices and approaches will make it more likely these critical pieces are included.

Working with Family and/or Important Others (1/2)

Loved ones in family homes provide the majority of support in this country. For many people this is the preferred choice. However, sometimes it is not desired or even possible. Even so, people and their loved ones usually want support that helps them stay engaged with each other. Sometimes families have significant formal or informal roles in the person's life. Other times less so. It's important to consider with the person the roles people play and how the person would like family engaged.

Working with Family and/or Important Others (2/2)

Discovery includes identifying what the person most prefers. It also includes identifying what family caregivers and other supporters need. For support to work well, it is best if everyone involved feels it's a reasonable choice given the circumstance. Everyone must be supported in the process. People must be realistic about what they can and cannot do. There must be a basic quality of life for each person in the situation. Person-Centered Counseling (PCC) professionals will often support a portion of this process through discovery and planning. By recognizing and working well with this aspect of support, families and individuals are more likely to have a good start on this portion of their personal journeys.

Balancing Choice, Rights, and Legal Limits (1/6)

One challenge for Person-Centered Counseling professionals in balancing person-centered strategies is when the person has legal limitations to decision-making or when family influence is unduly strong. The person may be a minor. They may be civilly committed, under guardianship, or on parole. They may be subjected to other limits such as sex offender registries. They may have willingly signed forms that allow others to complete legal work in their stead, such as through a power of attorney. However, the PCC professional may not always have assurance that the legal surrogate is working in the person's best interest.

Balancing Choice, Rights, and Legal Limits (2/6)

There are dozens of legal ways in which rights are expressed or limited. In addition, the family configuration and resources may prevent the person from being able to fully express their own voice. At the same time, confidentiality and privacy laws may conversely limit what caregivers have access to in ways that limit their effectiveness in supporting the person. Families may be engaged in conflict over whether a person is competent or not. It's important to stay neutral about family dynamics. You do not have a full understanding of the situation. Offering empathy and resources to each member is important. Be transparent about your role and your limits in these areas. Advice from supervisors, legal experts and formal mediation may be needed.

Balancing Choice, Rights, and Legal Limits (3/6)

Person-Centered Counseling (PCC) professionals need to develop their network around these complex issues. In order to organize the best support possible, they need to keep their focus on quality of life and work within the law. Some general practices and approaches that a PCC professional will want to include:

- Know and follow the confidentiality, privacy, and reporting laws that apply to your professional role in your state. Ask people to sign consents as needed for you to share or gain information. Ask to see actual documentation of legal orders

Balancing Choice, Rights, and Legal Limits

(4/6)

- Recognize that trends in decision-making continue to move to maximum individual rights and least restrictive options. Supported decision-making is an emerging practice that contrasts with “substitute” decision-making (such as guardianship). The goal is to provide people with specialized support for decision-making rather than having others make decisions for them
- Unless explicitly removed through a legal process, people maintain all of their rights. Even when they are under guardianship or similar arrangements, people maintain certain rights

Balancing Choice, Rights, and Legal Limits Continued (5/6)

- Sometimes full choice, direction, and control are not possible for a person at the time. Discovery should still be an open process driven by what is important to the person. However, you must be honest about your limits in supporting options. Maximize choice, direction, and control within the scope of what a person does control

Balancing Choice, Rights, and Legal Limits Continued (6/6)

- Recognize that families can become overly persistent when they haven't felt heard or supported. Find ways to listen with empathy. Connect them to resources that may help support them and provide balanced perspective. Sometimes privacy laws are used inappropriately by providers. Sometimes a provider is not savvy about the laws. Other times they may be exerting inappropriate control. If a family provides care, it is reasonable for them to have basic information about a person's conditions or needs. Work with the person to clarify what will work best as far as sharing information
- Recommend formal dispute resolution, mediation, or advocacy services when needed, have resources on hand

Balancing Expectations and Developing Resources

No one human being is expected to know everything. The role of a Person-Centered Counseling (PCC) professional requires a willingness to work well with others. That includes having knowledge of a variety of issues and views. It also includes ongoing learning, sharing, and mentoring. A PCC professional should have a variety of resources to draw from.

However, they will also be willing to simply ask around when they are unfamiliar with something. Work teams might also consider how they assign work. Professionals may develop areas of specialty based on their interests and strengths. Referral to culturally appropriate services can be helpful. It can support the capacity of the whole organization, if people mentor each other and share learning.

Conclusion and Lesson Review (1/3)

- Culture and diversity will influence every aspect of a person's life. Person-Centered Counseling (PCC) professionals must be skilled in communicating and working with people in ways that help the core values be expressed in culturally relevant ways. This will require ongoing learning and effort.
- Relationships are a central part of people's lives. Relationships are a primary way people experience support in community. They are a critical piece to most people's sense of satisfaction with life. Therefore, discovery should include exploration of relationships as makes sense.

Conclusion and Lesson Review (2/3)

- Legal aspects of consent and privacy will influence the ability of the PCC professional to support choice, direction, and control. Be very careful to learn about rights in each situation. Be honest when you cannot support certain options but focus on what you can help with to improve the person's quality of life and support them in their hopes and goals.
- The skills and approaches a professional has cannot resolve every issues. They should have resources and make referrals for mediation, conflict-resolution, protection, advocacy (legal), and advocacy-support (informal) when needed.

Conclusion and Lesson Review (3/3)

Learning Objective

After completing this lesson, you will be able to describe the methods you use to identify important aspects of relationships and culture in person-centered discovery.

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?