

Conversation Facilitation: Tips from the Field

SETTING THE STAGE

- Get to know the person receiving services and build rapport with them and their team.
- A conversation can happen anywhere! The setting should be relaxed, familiar, and comfortable for the person (i.e., the park, lunch, etc.).
- Respect a person's privacy. Assessment questions should be asked 1:1 or in small group settings whenever possible.
- Explain the process, review expectations, and set healthy boundaries with people and their teams upfront.
- Do not expect to get all the answers in one sitting. You do not want to overwhelm the person, and it takes time to get to know someone!
- Prior to a team meeting, meet individually with the person to discuss things they want to talk about with and/or without the group.

HAVING A CONVERSATION

- Pay attention to the person's body language and nonverbal cues during discussion. You can gather a lot of information from nonverbal communication!
- Watch your own body language during conversations. It should be inviting and non-threatening (i.e., facing the person, arms uncrossed, etc.).
- Do not read questions from a list. The best conversations are often casual in nature.
- Let the person guide the conversation when appropriate. Know the assessment well and plug in information where it needs to be recorded.
- Use open ended questions or, instead of asking the question directly, start with "Tell me about..."
- Use simple, everyday language that people can understand. You may have to reword a question or prompt to get the necessary information.
- Utilize visual summaries and reflect information back to the person to ensure understanding.
- Be patient. Allow sufficient time for the person to process and respond to a question.
- Stay engaged in the conversation through good eye contact and active listening. Listen first, then respond. Conversations are a two-way street!
- Be curious. Ask follow-up questions or prompt further to get a deeper understanding.
- Share your own experiences or stories when appropriate. Telling a person about yourself may help them open up more.
- Remain open-minded and non-judgmental. Not everyone has the same values, priorities, goals, belief systems, experiences, etc.
- Assume trauma. Make sure the person understands that they do not have to answer a question if they do not feel comfortable.
- Always remain considerate and sensitive to the person. During team meetings, be mindful of the person when they are present.

WRAPPING UP/ONGOING PROCESS

- Thank people for their time and for sharing with you.
- Remember that the assessment is an ongoing process and not an annual event.
- Follow team process and complete necessary monitoring. Seek information from all team members throughout the span, not just during meetings.
- Be genuine and empathic, and always remember why you got into this field.