

Self-Determination Series

Raising Difficult Issues with Your Service Provider

Determine Your Destiny

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Introduction

We've all had times when we wanted to raise tough issues with a service provider. But it can be hard to challenge someone who is trying to help you, or who may appear to have more power than you. It can be difficult to tell someone that you don't like the way your treatment is going or that you'd rather work on different life goals. Still, it's important to express your own views or desires in treatment situations.

This booklet was designed to help you discuss sensitive issues with your case manager, therapist, psychiatrist, medical care provider, or any other support persons. It teaches you ways to start conversations comfortably, so that the other person will listen and really hear what you have to say. This will help you make your own needs and desires clear to others, which is your right as a service recipient.

With the help of this booklet, you can decide how to approach your own unique situation. The statements we've provided are suggestions about how you might open a discussion with your service provider. Each of the statements allows you to be heard, puts you in control of your treatment, and opens up communication between the two of you. Of course, you don't have to use the **exact** words or issues listed here. That's up to you.

When you are ready to have a difficult conversation with a provider, try to do the following things:

- ~ Have the discussion during a scheduled meeting.
- ~ Speak in a respectful, calm, and neutral tone of voice.
- ~ Focus on how you feel, not on how you think the provider feels.
- ~ Spend 10% of the time on the problem and 90% on the solution.
- ~ Realize that it may take several meetings to come to an agreement.
- ~ Have your final agreement put into your treatment plan or in writing.
- ~ Ask a family member, friend, or advocate to attend the meeting(s) with you, if that will give you more confidence.

Remember - you have a right to manage your own life and to be an equal partner in your treatment. This is what self-determination is all about. While it may be tough at times, being honest about who you are and what you need is an important part of your recovery from emotional difficulties.

Conversation Door-Openers

Education

“I’m thinking about going back to school. I know it’s going to be hard, but it’s something I really want to do. I’d like to talk about what steps I need to take.”

Employment

“Sometimes I feel like I’m being told where I should work and what I can do. It makes me feel left out. I want to decide things about where I work and what kind of work I do.”

“I know it’s important to see you, but it’s starting to conflict with my hours at work. Since I can’t change my work schedule, I would appreciate setting meeting times that better fit my schedule.”

“The more we talk about me going back to work, the more anxious I feel. I want to move a little slower on this, figure out where the worry is coming from, and deal with that first.”

“I know that you helped me to get this job, and I appreciate it. But it makes me feel uncomfortable when you visit me on the job. When I’m at work, I just want to be like everyone else. I want your help, but in a more private way.”

Conversation Door-Openers

Finances

“I want to start managing my own money. Would you show me how to set up a monthly budget so that I can control how I spend my money?”

“I’d like some help in planning for my financial future. Can you or someone else provide me with assistance in coordinating my benefits with some of the other things I’d like to do, like getting a job or finding tuition assistance for college?”

“Lately, I feel pressured to tell you what I bought at the store and why. This makes me feel uncomfortable, as if I’ve done something wrong. I have the right to spend my money on what I want. Can we talk about what’s worrying you?”

Partnering

“Sometimes I feel like I’m either being pushed or pulled through treatment. I need you to walk beside me, not in front or behind me.”

“Right now, the recovery goals we’ve set aren’t what I want. I want to work towards goals that matter most to me. Let’s start working together as partners.”

Conversation Door-Openers

Intimate Relationships

“One of my main goals is to start dating. I know this may not seem like an important goal to you, but it would make my life a lot better. I would like to add this to my plan so we can work together on....”

“I have the right to date or have sex with anyone I want. I don’t mind if we talk about your concerns, but my partners are my choice.”

Life Decisions

“I may have some serious issues, but I can still make good decisions about my life. I need your help in deciding what to do, but I want to be the one who makes the final decisions.”

“I don’t like where I’m living right now. I would like to work together to find a better place for me.”

“I don’t feel good about my life. But, I’m not sure why or how to move forward. Can you recommend a tool I can use to sort out what I most want to change and how to get started?”

Conversation Door-Openers

Privacy

“I realize you are trying to help me when we talk about _____. But I’d like to keep some areas of my life private. Can we work together on other areas for now, and set aside discussing _____?”

“I understand that you’re trying to help me. But please ask first before discussing my private matters with other people like my family, friends, or anyone else.”

History of Abuse and Trauma

“Because of things in the past, I don’t like talking to a [male/female] staff about anything related to sex or relationships. Would you please put this in my recovery plan?”

“I’m having memories and fears about bad things that happened to me in the past. I really need to talk to someone about being abused. Would you help me find someone with experience in this area?”

Conversation Door-Openers

Medical Appointments

“Since I have been working really hard on changing my eating habits, I would like to have another blood sugar test done soon, rather than waiting until next year/quarter to see if I have improved.”

“It’s embarrassing for me to bring this up, but I have been having problems with _____ and I would like information on treatment options, not just one idea.”

Health Care Decisions

“I want to change my doctor (or other provider). I feel like we don’t communicate very well, and it isn’t helping me get better. Can you help me find a new doctor (or other provider)?”

“I have to see too many different providers for my health care. I would like to find a single place that can address all of my needs, or someone to help me coordinate my care.”

Conversation Door-Openers

Psychotropic Medications

“I want to get more involved in understanding what medications I’m taking and why. I’d appreciate it if you would tell me about their benefits and side effects. Can you give me information to take home so I can learn more?”

“I know that you want me to switch to this new medication, but I don’t feel comfortable with that idea yet. Could we talk some more about the benefits and side effects of this new medication, and why you think it might be good for me?”

“I know that medications are important, but it seems like that’s all you talk about. Can we talk about some other things?”

“I know that you want me to take medications, but I don’t like what they do to my body or how they make me feel. I need to take a break. I want to talk with you about the right way to do this.”

“I would like to be on less medication. Can we talk about what I can do to reduce my medications and how else I can manage my symptoms?”

Conversation Door-Openers

Respect

“I show up on time for our appointments, but I often end up waiting a long time before I see you. It’s frustrating and makes me late to other places afterwards.”

“Sometimes I feel like you are impatient with me or not really listening to what I’m saying. I feel hurried or rushed through our talks. I know that this could just be my feeling, but I want to talk about it and understand why I feel like this.”

“Sometimes I feel like you don’t respect what I say or what I do. I realize that what I’m feeling may not be what you’re feeling, so I’d like to work out some of the things that are happening between us.”

Conclusion

As you think about how to use these conversation “door-openers,” feel free to reword them to fit your own personal style and way of talking. The topics here are only suggestions. Also remember that good service providers will want your feedback about how things are going in your work together, and will welcome your comments and suggestions. If providers resist your attempts to talk things over, be firm and solution-focused while remaining calm and polite. Don’t be surprised if it takes several meetings to move things in your desired direction.

Having a trusted friend or family member present at these discussions is helpful for some people. You also might consider giving your provider a brief note (briefer is better) containing the conversation starter the day before your scheduled meeting. This will give the provider some time to think about things in advance. It also may help you feel less nervous, knowing that you have expressed yourself clearly in writing. Before your meeting, review the seven pointers listed in the introduction of this booklet so that you feel prepared and focused.

Whatever you decide to do about handling things, congratulations for being willing to stand up for yourself and making a commitment to shape your own life! This isn’t easy for anyone, especially when dealing with sensitive topics. It takes courage to determine your own destiny, and this is a sure sign of your journey on the road to recovery.

Notes

Resources

To learn more about communicating with your provider...

“Questions to Ask Your Doctor” -

<http://www.ahrq.gov/patients-consumers/patient-involvement/ask-your-doctor/index.html>

“Why Shared Decision Making?”

<http://www.informedmedicaldecisions.org/shareddecisionmaking.aspx>

“Being Assertive”

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/assertive/art-20044644>

If you'd like to work on your self-determination in any of the areas from this booklet, you can use either of these resources for free...

“Express Yourself: Assessing Self-Determination in Your Life”

<http://www.center4healthandsdc.org/express-yourself.html>

“This Is Your Life: Creating Your Self-Directed Life Plan”

<http://www.center4healthandsdc.org/this-is-your-life.html>

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