

Minnesota Department of Human Services  
Adult Mental Health Division  
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Case Manager reference guide

# **SKILLS FOR CLIENT ENGAGEMENT**

# WHAT IS ENGAGEMENT?

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- Engagement is a “commitment to be present” for the client by listening to what they say, showing interest in and respect for who they are as a person, and acceptance of their current situation
- The goal is development of a safe, trusting relationship based on honesty and openness

# ENGAGEMENT SKILLS

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- Use Open-ended questions
- Listen reflectively
- Affirm strengths
- Foster autonomy
- Express empathy
- Encourage self-confidence and hope
- Roll with Resistance
- Collaborate

# OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

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- Gives the client freedom to answer in whatever way they choose
- Evokes the client's own internal experience rather than directing them to provide the answer they think you want
- Assumes a not-knowing stance on the part of the case manager
- Prevents an interrogation format where the case manager asks multiple serial questions and the client provides minimal responses
- Encourages the client to do most of the talking

# EXAMPLES OF OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

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- “What are your expectations for our time together today?”
- “How can I help you with that?”
- “Tell me about a time when things were going better for you”
- “What was different then?”

# CONVERTING CLOSED TO OPEN QUESTIONS

Closed Question	Open Question
Do you think that was the best way to handle that situation?	Tell me what you liked and didn't like about the way you handled that situation.
Don't you have a bus schedule?	What will make it easier for you to get here?
Is finding work important to you?	What type of work would be interesting?

# USING OPEN QUESTION TO FACILITATE RATHER THAN PRESCRIBE SOLUTIONS

Prescribe Solutions	Facilitate Solutions
Can't you find someone in your group to give you a ride to meetings?	How are you going to get to your meetings?
What about asking your sister to stay with your kids when you go out?	How can you get a break and make sure your kids are safe?
You could tell yourself to calm down before you reach that point of exploding	When you think about times you've been able to manage your anger, what things have worked for you?

# REFLECTION

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- A declarative statement that comments on the client's words, non-verbal cues, or feelings and uses professional judgment to hypothesize a deeper or more expansive meaning for what the client said.

# REFLECTIVE PROCESS

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- ✘ The client considers the reflective statement and agrees or corrects the case manager so the hypothesis is confirmed, discarded or reshaped.
- ✘ The process continues and eventually ends with a shared deeper understanding of what the client means
- ✘ The client often confirms the attainment of this shared understanding with something like “that’s right or you get it”

# EXAMPLES OF REFLECTION

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- Client: “If I don’t get my kids back soon, they won’t listen to anything I say.”
- Clinician: “You’re afraid you won’t have any authority as a parent”
- Client: “Oh I can make them do what I say.”
- Clinician: “You would like them to listen and do what you want rather than make them.”
- Client: “That’s right”

# AFFIRMATIONS

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Two levels of affirmation

1. A sincere, specific and immediate positive response to something the client has attempted or accomplished
2. A positive statement about the client's character

# AFFIRMATION LEVEL 1 EXAMPLES

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- “I appreciate how consistent you have been keeping your appointments with me or letting me know when you won’t be here.”
- “I want to compliment you on getting to your first class. I understand how much you have to do to make that happen.”
- “I can see the progress you are making in consistently taking your medication. You’ve come a long way. Congratulations!”

## LEVEL 2 AFFIRMATION EXAMPLES

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- “That was a difficult decision for you. You showed some real strength and persistence”
- “You were there for Maxine when she needed you. It’s a real gift to have friends like you.”
- “I’m impressed with how level headed you were in that situation.”

# SUPPORT AUTONOMY

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- Clients always have a choice even though they may not always see their options.
  - “I know you’re not asking me for advice and it’s your choice, but would you be open to my thoughts about that?”
  - “I realize you came here because you felt you had no choice, but you’re here and didn’t just blow it off completely.”

# EXPRESS EMPATHY

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- Show the client you accept and genuinely attempt to understand what they are saying.
  - “I can only imagine what that must have been like for you, but it sounds devastating.”
  - “Wow! I get excited just listening to how enthusiastic you sound.”

# ROLL WITH RESISTANCE

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- Client resistance is often the result of the clinician expecting change the client is not ready for.
  - “Treatment is a requirement of your case plan. You know what will happen if you don’t go”
- Instead try:
  - “Treatment is your choice. Are you willing to talk about the pros and cons of going and not going?”

# COLLABORATE

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- Include the client in negotiations and decision making
  - “I don’t claim to know what’s best for you. Your thoughts and ideas are important factors in deciding how we proceed.”
  - “I want to make sure I know what’s most important to you, what you think you’re ready to work on, and what things we can do together that will lead to success.”