

OPEN Quick Guide: Client Experience

Practitioner

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This OPEN Quick Guide provides a useful overview of how to keep your clients, with their unique values, preferences and experiences, at the centre of planning and decision making.

We use 'client' as a general term to capture the diversity of people who actively (not passively) utilise and participate in child, youth and family services

What

Client experience is one of the three cornerstones of evidence informed practice. It includes actively pursuing and drawing on the unique views, concerns and expectations of a person or group of people utilising or participating in a service.



Involving clients directly in the design, delivery and evaluation of programs and services by building genuine partnerships has many benefits including; facilitating a two way knowledge transfer, highlighting and drawing on existing strengths and resources and enabling ownership.¹ It is widely recognised that working alongside clients to make decisions about the programs and service designed for them increases the likelihood of achieving positive outcomes.

¹ Coughlin, Steven S., Selina A. Smith, and Maria E. Fernandez. (2017). Overview of Community-Based Participatory Research. Handbook of Community-Based Participatory Research.: Oxford University Press.

How

Developing effective relationships

One of the most important ways to unearth the unique values, preferences and experiences of our clients is by developing a relationship.² Ten features common to effective relationships are:³

Attunement/ engagement	Responsiveness	Respect/ authenticity	Clear communication	Managing communication breakdowns (repair)
Emotional openness	Understanding one's own feelings	Empowerment and strength- building	Assertiveness/ Limit setting	Building coherent narratives

These features help to develop the space required for clients to safely reveal and explore their needs which can then be integrated into case planning. It is worth exploring how you practice these features in your own work; how is this supported by your team and organisation?

Being person-centred

Being person centred means your client is the key to decision-making and service planning. As a practitioner this means learning what is important to your client, listening to their experience, values and ideal image of what change looks like and working toward this together.⁴ There are lots of different person-centred tools available, including the [Perfect Week tool](#) which maps a client's desires and matches supports accordingly or [Learning Logs](#) to document and recall what you have learnt about a client's preferences to ensure continuity in support and reduce the burden on a client.

Using relatable tools and language

Jargon can be alienating and different approaches work for different people. It is important to use relatable language and select activities relevant to your client's interests and experience. For example, not all tools will be relevant for culturally and linguistically diverse or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. Checkout [Deadly Story](#) for examples

² Moore, T.G. (2017). Authentic engagement: The nature and role of the relationship at the heart of effective practice. Keynote address at ARACY Parent Engagement Conference ~ Maximising every child's potential ~ Melbourne, 7th June.

³ Moore, T.G. (2017). As cited above

⁴ Washburn, A. M., & Grossman, M. (2017). Being with a person in our care: Person-centered social work practice that is authentically person-centered. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, 60(5), 408-423.

of culturally safe support plans. [The Australian Institute of Family Studies \(AIFS\)](#) also links to some great resources for engaging Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) families in a variety of settings.

Thinking outside the square

Keep in mind that the concept of client engagement is not unique to human services and there are useful tools available from other arenas including the social innovation and design sector. IDEO's [human-centred design tools](#) are applicable to both individuals and groups and help to incorporate client experience in authentic, creative and client-centred ways.

Checkout IDEO's "Draw it Tool" [here](#) and consider how you might adapt this to case planning with your next client.

Considerations

To help you get underway, here are some questions to consider when incorporating client experience in practice:

<p>What level of participation should I be aiming for?</p>	<p>Participation will depend on factors including the length of the engagement and the expectations of your individual client. No matter age, gender or culture the best start is to build a relationship and learn about <i>their</i> unique values and preferences. The Scottish Health Council's Participation Toolkit provides a useful starting point.</p>
<p>Whose voices and experiences should I include?</p>	<p>Your client will be at the centre of all decision-making and help to decide whose perspectives they want included in their service response e.g. they may have family or community members who's opinion/s they would like you to consider. Drawing an Eco-Map with your client will help to uncover this.</p>
<p>When do I start?</p>	<p>From the beginning! But remember, without building a relationship, your clients may be reluctant to reveal their unique preferences, values and interests.</p>
<p>Are there any historical, structural or contextual reasons for a power imbalance?</p>	<p>Being conscious of existing or potential power imbalances means; selecting an appropriate environment for engagement, considering the caseworker who is allocated to a particular client and selecting appropriate engagement tools. E.g. some clients may be more comfortable discussing sexual health with a worker that they identify with or may not disclose certain information if they are not in a culturally safe environment.</p>

Tools

Here are some useful tools to get started and think creatively about the role of client experience in evidence-informed practice:

<p>Deadly Story: Tools and Templates to Help Carers and Practitioners</p>	<p>This website, developed in partnership with several Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) aims to connect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in care with traditional culture and identity. It offers a range of resources to support culturally safe engagement and info on communicating with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and elders.</p>
<p>Helen Sanderson's Person Centred Practices: Person-centred Tools for Practitioners</p>	<p>These person-centred thinking tools include printable templates to help structure conversations. They provide support to capture information, enhance support planning and to build authentic relationships with clients.</p>
<p>Pilotlight: Co-design Tools</p>	<p>To help think creatively about ways to involve clients and stakeholders as active participants, Iriss, a Scottish based charity committed to driving positive outcomes in social services, shares their co-design tools.</p>
<p>IDEO: Human Centred Design Kit</p>	<p>Learning from the design industry, IDEO shares some practical tools on human centred design.</p>