



## Keeping “Human” in Human Services: The Art of Engagement

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September 9, 2020  
CCS/CST Statewide Virtual Meeting

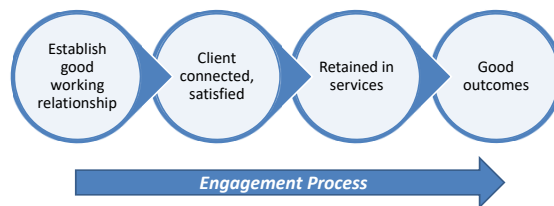
## Presentation Outline

1. Engagement what and why
2. Core communication skills
3. Demonstration and debrief
4. Closing activity

## What is engagement?

- Client involvement in initial services
- Process of establishing then maintaining a good working relationship
- What happens during the first few minutes of **every encounter**
- What the practitioner says and does (core communication skills) which are readily measureable, observable, and assessable

## Why is engagement important?



Lack of good  
working  
relationship

Client shut  
down,  
defensive,  
dissatisfied

No shows,  
drop out of  
services

Poor  
outcomes

**Disengagement Process**

*People cannot benefit from services  
that are not received.*

## Core Communication Skills: OARS

- Open questions
- Affirmation
- Reflective listening
- Summarizing

*Skillful use of OARS effectively and efficiently  
establishes and maintains a good working  
relationship with people.*

## OARS: Open Questions

- Engaging open questions makes the person's views, perspectives, and experiences central
- Curiosity promotes initial connection
- Avoid fact-gathering, closed questions
- Starters: What...? How...? Tell me about... Describe...

*In the chat box: What is an example of an engaging open question?*

## OARS: Affirmation

- Focusing on strengths is powerful way to develop a good working relationship
- Look for strengths
- Affirm specific strengths
- Avoid non-specific praising

*In the chat box: In a word or phrase, what are some of the strengths that people bring to services?*

## OARS: Reflective Listening

The most important communication skill is listening. Careful listening involves understanding the person's views, perspectives, and experiences.

*Skillful listening saves time and promotes rapid engagement.*

## OARS: Reflective Listening

Four steps to forming a reflection:

1. Listen carefully to what the person is saying.
2. Make an educated guess about the person's underlying meaning.
3. Choose a reflection direction.
4. Share your reflection as a **statement** (not a question).

## OARS: Reflective Listening

Starters:

- Sounds like...
- You mean...
- It seems to you that...
- For you it's a matter of...
- From your point of view...
- You're feeling...

Avoid:  
What I hear  
you saying is...

## OARS: Summarize

- Demonstrates careful listening
- Consolidates initial sharing
- Provides transition to the next thing

## Demonstration

- **Practitioner** preparation: How am I thinking about the first few minutes of this encounter? What is my intention for using OARS skills? Am I deciding to listen carefully?
- **Speaker**: getting started in services
- **Observers**: Use observer sheet to count and categorize OARS skills; provide examples; note speaker response

## Example Observer Sheet

OARS Skill	Count (hash mark)	Practitioner Example	Speaker Response
Open question		<i>What...? How...? Tell me about... Describe...</i>	
vs. Closed question		<i>Can you...? Did you...? Are you...?</i>	
Affirmation		<i>Must be about <b>specific</b> strength</i>	
Reflective listening statement		<i>Must be a <b>statement</b> Simple vs. Complex</i>	
Summary			

## Debrief: What did you observe?

- General observations?
- Specific skill examples?
- Speaker response?

## Benchmarks for basic skill level:

- At least 70% of all questions are open.
- At least 1 affirmation of specific strength.
- At least 1:1 ratio of reflections to questions.
- At least 40% of all reflections are complex.
- At least 50% of talking time is by the client.

## Closing Activity

In the chat box: What is one thing you learned or re-learned about engagement?

## References

- Elliott R., Bohart, A. C., Watson J. C. et al. (2018). Therapist empathy and client outcome: An updated meta-analysis. *Psychotherapy, 55*(4), 399-410.
- Miller, W. R., & Rollnick, S. (2013). *Motivational interviewing: Helping people change* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Moyers, T. B., Miller, W. R., & Hendrickson, S. M. (2005). How does motivational interviewing work? Therapist interpersonal skill predicts client involvement within motivational interviewing sessions. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 73*(4), 590-598.