

Framing the Questions

Before You Ask:

- Collect as much collateral information as possible about the client.
- Make sure the client is in a comfortable, safe setting.
- Know the limits of your own expertise.
- Develop questions that encourage the client to talk about the specific (alleged) situation.
- During your time with the client, assess the client's ability to:
 - Understand and follow instructions.
 - Understand risks and benefits.
 - Make and execute a plan.

Setting the Scene For The Interview:

- Conduct the interview in a quiet, private location.
- Make sure that the client is not facing towards a glaring light.
- Make sure that your (the interviewer's) face is well lit.
- Take time at the beginning and end of the interview to make social conversation before asking difficult questions.
- Don't rush the interview.
- Check frequently to make sure that the client is comfortable. Does he/she need a glass of water? Is the room warm/cool enough? Is he/she getting tired?

Do Not:

- Assume that a person with physical disabilities, including one who is non-verbal, lacks mental capacity.
- Ask questions that can be answered "Yes" or "No" such as "Are you OK" "Do you understand?"
- Ask long, complicated questions. (Instead, start general and move to specifics, one step at a time, using short sentences).
- Put words in the client's mouth. For example, "I guess you were pretty scared". "So you would call '911' if there was a problem?"

When Asking Questions, Do:

- Conduct multiple interviews at different times of the day and in different circumstances, if possible. Some clients function poorly at certain times of the day.
- Use communication aides—special equipment or adaptive devices, as necessary
- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Use the native language of the client, and the style of speaking that is understandable to the client.
- Ask only one question at a time.
- Ask open-ended questions
- Consider using techniques to assist the client's capacity, "for example", using hand gestures or drawings.
- Provide the client with examples of choices that others have made in similar situations.
- Ask for clarification and/or more information.

- Let the client know gently but clearly when you are about to ask a difficult question.
- Give the client plenty of time to answer. Don't be afraid of periods of silence.
- Reassure the client if he/she appears anxious about answering.
- Keep your tone of voice steady. Try not to react emotionally, no matter what you hear.
- Reflect back what the client is telling you (Use "active listening").

Useful Questions To Focus On The Client's Understanding Of Relevant Information:

- Can you tell me why I am here today?
- What are those pills for?
- How often do you take them?
- What kind of food are you supposed to eat because of your diabetes?
- When did you eat your last meal?
- What did you have to eat?
- Who fixed your meal?
- What is your doctor's name?
- Who pays your bills?
- If # 1 means no pain, # 3 means some pain and # 5 means that your pain is unbearable, tell me how much pain you are having right now .
- What does it mean when you have sex with someone?
- Are there rules about having sex?
- Please repeat the question I just asked you.

Useful Questions To Focus On The Quality Of The Client's Thinking Process:

- What would you do if your monthly check didn't arrive?
- What would you do if you fell and could not get up?
- What would you do if you had a fire in your kitchen?
- What would you do if you had a serious medical emergency, such as severe chest pain?
- What would you do if someone wanted to have sex with you?

Useful Questions To Focus On The Client's Ability To Demonstrate And Communicate A Choice:

- If you were unable to live by yourself, where you would want to live?
- If you only had enough money to buy medicine for yourself or food for your cats, what would you do?
- How involved do you want your family to be in taking care of you?
- Do you have to have sex with someone if he/she asks you?

Useful Questions To Focus On The Client's Understanding Of His/Her Own Situation:

- What do you think will happen if you do nothing to change your present situation?
- What are your choices right now?
- Why are you making this choice?
- What do you think will happen if you make a decision to.....?