

HOUSING SUPPORT TRAINING SERIES...

***PRACTICING EFFECTIVE
ASSERTIVE
ENGAGEMENT***

RESOURCE & WORKBOOK

ORGCODE CONSULTING INC.

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“Practicing Effective Assertive Engagement” is an interactive training program to assist housing support workers in better meeting the needs of their clients that are actively resisting change through the use of specific defenses.

Through this training you will:

- Refresh your understanding of the Stages of Change in a housing support context
- Become familiar with the defenses that are most likely to be erected when focusing on discussions about change
- Learn what assertive engagement is, in theory and practice, and how best to apply it in a client-centred manner to promote improved housing and life stability

This training is focused on and grounded in a housing support context. Assertive engagement can be practiced in a range of Human Service contexts. This training is limited to its application to housing support programs.

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ASSERTIVE ENGAGEMENT WORKSHEET

PART ONE: FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE

Provide three client examples for each defense where:

Denial and minimization has been used

Rationalization and Intellectualization has been used

Projection and displacement has been used

Internalization has been used



PART TWO: CREATIVE APPROACHES TO SITUATIONS THAT OCCUR COMMONLY

Assertive engagement requires creativity. Support workers need to think beyond just “talking” to an individual. This requires changing the support worker behavior, approaches and strategies to engage in the hopes of having the individual client become more vulnerable to the information and open to the possibility of change.

Below is a range of situations that frequently come up in this type of work. For each, outline two creative approaches to get the individual to potentially engage with you.

a. The individual has collected so many belongings that the apartment door can barely be opened and none of the rooms in the apartment can be used for the purpose with which they were designed. (For example, the individual can no longer use their bathroom.)

1. What are two creative approaches you can use to gain access to the unit to see the extent of what is going on?
2. What are two creative approaches you can use to make the individual attuned to the need to clean up the space?

b. The individual is nowhere to be found each time you attempt to accompany them to an appointment to meet with their psychiatrist.

1. What are two creative approaches you can use to help the individual actually connect with their psychiatrist?

c. The individual is being exploited for money and beaten each time they get their benefits, but doesn't see it as a big deal. Meanwhile, their physical health suffers and they never have enough money to get through the month.

1. What are two creative approaches you can attempt to help them protect their money and avoid being beaten or exploited?
2. What are two creative approaches you can attempt to help them address their physical health issues that stem from being beaten?



d. The individual spends/ gives more money to a loved one (e.g., a child, a boyfriend, a parent) than they keep to meet their own needs each month.

1. What are two creative approaches you can use to highlight the importance of using money for personal needs?

2. What are two creative things you can suggest that the individual try instead of spending money to still feel connected/honouring of loved ones?

e. The individual frequently wanders into traffic after they have been using extensively.

1. What are two creative things you can attempt to decrease the risks of entering into traffic and being harmed?

f. The individual has thoughts of suicide each month after they run out of food and money, and no one talks with them.

1. What are two creative things you can try to decrease the likelihood of suicidal thoughts with this individual?

g. The individual resorts to using extensive amounts of non-palatable alcohol (mainly mouthwash and cooking wine) for about two weeks each month when most of their money is gone.

1. What are two creative things to attempt with the individual to decrease the extent of use or type of use?



h. The individual keeps getting tickets for panhandling about a block away where they live, which they can never pay for. Shopkeepers detest the individual's presence. Neighbours of the individual wish he was not panning in the neighbourhood.

1. What are two creative things you can attempt to decrease or stop panhandling activities and/or continue panhandling use but decrease negative community reaction to it?

i. The individual is a binge user of crack, and when on a run for several days is inclined to make an extensive mess of their apartment, smoke in bed, and listen to music really loud at all hours of the day.

1. What are two creative things you may attempt to decrease the binge use?
2. What are two creative things you may attempt to alter the behavior of messing up the apartment and smoking in potentially harmful ways?
3. What are two creative things you may attempt to decrease the impacts of the loud music during the use?

j. The individual has an extreme toothache and uses to numb the pain instead of seeking out dental care.

1. What are two creative things you may attempt to get them to engage with dental care?

k. The individual believes that several men are out to get him because of past debts and other things he may have done that he doesn't want to talk about. As such, he refuses to leave his apartment, rarely opens the door for you during home visits, and wants you to bring him food, cigarettes, clothing, etc. each time you visit.

1. What are two creative things you may try to get the individual to get out of their own apartment and meet his own needs?



2. What are two creative things you may try to get the individual to confront those seeking him and resolve the source of the conflict?



PART THREE: CASE STUDIES

John has been staying in shelters in the community for several months. When asked to meet with one of the Housing Resource Specialists, he always agrees that would be a good idea, that he would be most grateful for the help and that having housing would “get him out of his rut”. However, each day that the appointment has been made he is nowhere to be found. When he returns to the shelter he is always apologetic that he missed the appointment and would like you to help him book another appointment.

Is John using one of the defenses, and if so, which one? What are some creative ways that you may be able to help John link into the appointment with the Housing Resource Specialists? How would you communicate the plan of action to John?

David has been housed for two months. Since becoming housed he has only been home for two home visits. Case planning has been very difficult given he has not been home. Notes left on his door and voicemail go unreturned. The landlord says that the rent has been getting paid and that there are no issues as far as she knows with the tenancy.

What are some creative approaches or interpersonal skills you may use to try and engage with David? What information would you try to get across – and how would you communicate it?

Anabelle drinks several bottles of Listerine per day and huffs a few times per week. In the last month, there have been 16 ambulance trips to the ER after blacking out on the street or in the park – that you know of. You have seen her sleep outdoors, and guess that in the three months she has been housed about half of the nights have probably been spent outside rather than inside. When approached in the mornings she frequently accuses you of being a “narc” and “fucked up do-gooder” or some other colorful phrase. When visited in the afternoon or evening – when she is home - she is heavily intoxicated. In her drunken state she frequently repeats that all the stress of housing is making her drink; that she would drink less if she were homeless again and didn’t have to worry about bills and dishes and people always bugging her to stay at her place.

What defense(s) is Anabelle using? How would you challenge the defense to make her more vulnerable to the new information? What information would you try to get across – and how would you communicate it?



Henry was accepted into the program a couple of months ago, but has not attended any appointments to view places. He always sees intake staff after the fact very contrite and apologizes profusely to the worker who is supposed to be helping him find housing. A couple of weeks ago he was diagnosed with prostate cancer and has yelled at intake staff and his designated housing worker that if they had just housed him he would not have gotten cancer. He is refusing all treatment for the cancer, and tells the workers that they will find him dead one day and it will be a good reminder to them that they really suck at their job.

What defense(s) is Henry using? How would you challenge the defense to make him more vulnerable to the new information? What information would you try to get across – and how would you communicate it?

Gary has been housed for four months. He spends every day bottle collecting in the morning and “treasure” collecting in the afternoon and evening. The landlord is concerned with amount of belongings that Gary has brought into his unit. Gary has resorted to meeting you in the hallway for home visits – when he is home, or dropping by your office to chat with you.

What are some creative ways to engage with Gary? How can you alter the meeting arrangements to make it more conducive to an engaged discussion?

Veronika has been housed for nine months and has done very well in her case planning. She recently invited Steve to live with her. Steve is a former partner and you know there is a history of abuse between the two. Since Steve moved in she has resisted home visits, and on the last visit told you that Steve provides all the support she needs in her life – that your support is no longer required.

What defense(s) is Veronika using? How would you challenge the defense to make her more vulnerable to the new information? Given the unique situation, what creative ways would you use to have a conversation with her? What information would you try to get across – and how would you communicate it?



Frankie experienced seven months of sobriety, and is in his ninth month of being housed. Dustin and Dave – his two cousins from Reserve – started staying with him last week. You have been by twice since that time and find the apartment is loud, a mess and that Frankie is inebriated each time. The landlord is threatening to evict. Frankie says landlords are “Always out to screw the Indian” and has told you if he gets evicted that him and his cousins will just go live at the shelter.

What defense(s) is Frankie using? How would you challenge the defense to make him more vulnerable to the new information? What information would you try to get across – and how would you communicate it?

Vernon – a man in his late 50’s – frequently has ladies in their late teens over at his apartment for days or weeks at a time. He says the sex with the younger ladies keeps him feeling young. Being with them, he says, is the best part about having a place of his own. He has a habit after a night of partying with them of calling in sick to his job. The police are frequently called to his place for disturbances. When he feels he has fallen in love (which happens a lot) he also has been known to give away all of his remaining money for the month or possessions to the young ladies – or buy them gifts that he cannot really afford which has left him short on rent twice and almost always means he goes hungry for a period of time. His fast food job pays minimum wage but he is convinced that he will be asked to become a manager sometime in the next year and money will no longer be an issue for him and his girlfriends.

What defense(s) is Vernon using? How would you challenge the defense to make him more vulnerable to the new information? What information would you try to get across – and how would you communicate it?

Minnie uses meth on a daily basis, and has been homeless for about a year. She alternates between people’s couches and the shelter. Housing has been suggested to her on numerous occasions and the community resources for housing have been explained to her. She indicates all she needs to do is get a job and everything will be okay, though she hasn’t been employed for almost five years. She thinks housing help should be for those who can’t get a job, not people like her.



What defense(s) is Minnie using? How would you challenge the defense to make her more vulnerable to new information? What information would you try to get across – and how would you communicate it?



PART FOUR: ETHICS, MOTIVATION & ACTION

Assertive engagement requires a delicate balance between stimulating positive change while remaining focused on the client's wishes.

Reflecting on your practice:

How can persistence with an individual not cross the line and become intrusively against his/her will?

Can you think of an example where you had the right motivation to help someone but actually encouraged the wrong action? What would you do differently next time?

Exposing people to new information is more than a conversation in most instances. It can require concrete action. What are some tangible things you can do with the people you serve to help them better realize, absorb or be exposed to new information?

