

The Essentials of Supporting Choice

By The Accreditation Council

As many people have discovered, understanding and supporting choice is not as simple as it sounds. Each person brings unique abilities and experiences to the act of choosing.

Personality, preferences, life experiences and social context all influence what people want. Enabling people to make choices requires forming a relationship with each person and making a commitment to providing opportunities for them to make choices and learn from their experience.

While traditional planning activities include setting individual goals and objectives, too often service goals are identified based on the service organization's perception of the person's needs. Service goals may not reflect the personal goals and desires of the person.

Personal goals are a true reflection of each person. These cannot be developed for the person by others.

Discovering each person's individual priorities involves taking time to listen to, interact with and learn from the person. Formal assessment activities may not uncover the issues most important to the person.

The person's family, friends and other people who know the person well may be important sources of information. People are most likely to tell things of

Personal significance to others they know and trust.

Everyone's understanding of the person and his or her life priorities will deepen as a relationship develops with the person.

Each person's experience is also important to consider when helping people to exercise choice. People are likely to seek and want things they know and with which they are familiar.

Choice may be limited when options are unknown or not fully explored. A review of the person's past and experience is an essential part of assessing individualized supports for each person.

Opportunities to learn about and experience a variety of things in life provide people with a point of reference from which they can evaluate what they want. Without a broad range of life experiences, people may choose what they are most familiar with instead of what really interests them.

Careful observation and trial experiences can help us to understand what people want.

Assessment of the person's preferences for people, places and activities provides baseline insight into the person's unique personality. These initial indications about the person can be used to suggest or select new experiences which people may find interested.

We can then further our understanding of the persons

Preferences and desires by paying attention to how the person reacts in these new situations.

An honest and respectful relationship between support staff and the person served can facilitate individual choice. Staff demonstrates respect for the person by working cooperatively with the person to make decisions.

Commitment to supporting personal choice is expressed by searching for ways to honor choices whenever the person expresses a preference or desire for something.

Most importantly, taking everything the person says seriously promotes honest dialog about the person's desires.

Each person's choices are uniquely individual. The choices people make must be understood within the person's priorities and situation.

We can help people to explore choices and seek alternatives, but, a strong relationship based on mutual respect is the most effective tool for assisting people to make choices in life.

Supporting individual choice requires commitment to discovering and respecting each person's priorities. Through caring and creative support, we can expand the opportunities for people to direct their lives.

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