S.E.L.F. Treatment Planning

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BACKGROUND

Treatment Planning is the traditional method in the mental health sector, for organizing what is actually going to happen in a treatment setting or relationship, although every component of the human service system will have its own version of planning to implement its mission with individual clients. Unfortunately, without effective Team Meetings, Treatment Planning is likely to become a meaningless exercise done more to satisfy the desires of reviewers for documentation than as a real guide to day-to-day activities. Over time, efforts have been made to include clients and family members in the treatment planning process, but unless everyone shares a clear definition of what treatment actually is and shares a common language and underlying assumptions, it is likely to end up as an exercise in futility that frustrates everyone involved.

WHAT IS IT?

S.E.L.F. Treatment Planning offers a time to measure client progress in treatment, evaluate goals and struggles by organizing all the relevant information into the categories of Safety, Emotional management, Loss, and Future. The non-hierarchical setting encourages discussion and collaboration between team members and includes clients and when appropriate their families and any other relevant shareholders. It is not a rote reading of reports.

WHAT’S THE PURPOSE?

S.E.L.F. Treatment Planning meetings are the time set aside to measure client progress and plan for the next step in treatment. To avoid what is often a free-floating airing of opinions that doesn’t necessarily accomplish what needs to be done, the S.E.L.F. framework provides an accessible way to evaluate goals, struggles and progress by organizing this information into the categories of safety, emotion management, loss and future and also fosters a shared language. It organizes the way we talk about treatment without minimizing any of the important aspects of treatment. At the same time, it helps to guarantee that the issues surrounding the experience of adversity and trauma will not be overlooked or forgotten. The format compels the group to focus not just on current dangers but on increasing levels of growth and change by giving equal time to recent successes, current challenges, and future commitments in all four domains of Safety, Emotional Management, Loss and Future. To be effective the meetings themselves must be non-hierarchical and create an environment that encourages discussion and collaboration between team members and that includes clients and families, rather than a rote reporting or reading from reports. Consistent with the Sanctuary Commitment to
Democracy, all attendees are expected to participate in giving information and posing questions and all participants have an equal voice. Instead of focusing most of the time on the problem, this methodology helps a group get to the solutions and the bracketing questions always are “What happened to you?” rather than “What’s wrong with you?”.

A set time and place are established that assure participation of all key parties. Everyone who attends is expected to participate in giving information and posing questions, and all participants have an equal voice. More time is given to proposing and discussing solutions rather than problems. The group runs through the client’s, the family’s, and the staff’s successes, one by one, in each of the four S.E.L.F. domains, then discusses the present challenges and goals for each domain.