

Engagement Strategies for Clinicians

Before the Initial Session or Intake...

Consider the first phone call the beginning of services. It's not just about scheduling an appointment. Your goals during this phone call are to:

1. Clarify the need for mental health care

- How long has it been happening? Where? Has anyone been helpful? Can you give me a recent example of the problem?

2. Increase caregiver investment and efficacy

- Why are you seeking help now? What are some of the things you have done in the past or are doing now to help your child? What have you tried in the past to deal with the problem?

3. Identify attitudes about any previous mental health care and institutions

- Do you think services/mental health treatment can make a difference for your child? Have you sought services before? Was that experience helpful? Was the provider helpful? What do you think about coming in?

4. PROBLEM SOLVE! PROBLEM SOLVE! around concrete obstacles to care

- What could stand in the way of coming in? How will you get here? Who are you going to bring? How will they feel about coming? What time is best for you? Will this interfere with anything else? How comfortable do you feel talking about your child's needs? How hopeful do you feel that this will help?
- Describe what will happen in the first meeting for the caregiver ("we'll spend some time filling out forms, I'll spend some time talking with you, with your child, other family members...How does that sound?")



At the First Meeting or Intake...

Your primary goal in this session is to have a second session! Two other important goals:

- 1) To understand why a child and family are seeking help;
- 2) To engage the child and family in the helping process.

Critical elements of accomplishing these goals include:

1. Clarify the helping process for the client

- Carefully introduce yourself, agency, the intake process, and possible service options. Do not assume the client has been given accurate information about services. Do not assume clients know what is expected of them in this process.

2. Develop the foundation for a collaborative working relationship

- Balance need to obtain information with allowing child and family to tell their story about why they've come.

3. Focus on immediate, practical concerns

- Be ready to schedule a 2nd appointment that week if they need it, may need help negotiating another system (i.e., school).

4. Identify and problem solve around barriers to help seeking

- Every first meeting should explore barriers to obtain ongoing services. Specific obstacles need to be discussed (e.g., transportation, time, negative experiences with other mental health providers/agencies, discouragement by others about seeking services, differences in provider/client ethnicity/race, families experience with racism and it's impact on willingness to seek services).