HEADSS

Forming connections to create plans

HEEEADSSSSSS

Home
Education/Employment
Eating
Exercise
Activities
Drugs
Sexuality
Suicide/Mental health
Spirituality/Culture
Significant events
Safety
Strengths

Building Rapport

Aim to form a strengths-based relationship so they leave feeling better than when they came in. Build trust through light, positive interactions before addressing serious topics. Use humour: if they respond well, gentle humour can distract or defuse tension. Making them feel seen and valued can help you gain insights into the vulnerability, risk and protective factors in their lives to create a management plan that works for them. It can be difficult to 'solve' the risk factors; it may be easier to focus on and enhance protective factors in their lives, e.g., family, sport, groups, places.

Important: Assess what is important to the young person. Make a plan *with* them, not *for* them.

Interviewing

Motivational Interviewing Strategies

- **Engaging:** "Shall we work together"
- **Focussing:** "What to change"
- **Evoking:** "Why change"
- **Planning:** "How to change"

Safety

It's important to discuss confidentiality of disclosures - especially when they are at risk or in danger.

"Respecting your privacy is not secret-keeping. We will need to tell others in order to help you get better".

Getting Started

BEARDS Framework:

Bite your tongue
Express empathy
Avoid argumentation
Roll with resistance/ Reflection
Deploy discrepancy
Support self-efficacy

Start with what the young person is there for, then link the presenting complaint to the HEADSS framework by using the answer they have given you for your next question. Move from the less sensitive to the more sensitive topics, going from the third-person approach to the personal. Avoid "dunno" - using a feelings wheel may help them put names to feelings and dig a bit deeper. Be keen to get to know them. Remember, behaviour is a form of communication. "What is this young person trying to communicate with me right now?" Listen with your eyes not just your ears to gauge how they are really feeling.

THE COLLABORATIVE TRUST
For Research & Training in Youth Health & Development

Creating Calm Environments

5 E's (+ 1)

Expression
Eating
Exercise
Encouragement
E moe
Energy – mental meds (serotonin increase)

Create a calm, welcoming space - be mindful of noise levels, lighting, and the overall atmosphere. Talk while doing something (e.g., tidying up) to reduce pressure and give thinking time. Use gentle guidance to lead toward desired behaviour without direct challenge. Stay calm and be self-aware – use a steady tone, relaxed posture and facial expression to communicate safety. Aim for an open, relaxed, non-threatening stance. Respect personal space - they'll feel safer if you maintain a comfortable distance.

Assessing Where They Are At

Consider their developmental stage rather than their age. Gauge how far ahead they can think. Focus on the near future rather than long-term plans.

Notice when thinking shifts from concrete (facts) to more abstract concepts Avoid too many choices until they can hold more than one idea at a time.

Active listening: Let them express frustration, reflect back what you hear, and find common ground quickly.
Clear communication: Use simple, concrete language and repeat key messages.
Ask open, supportive questions: "Do you want to tell me what's going on for you?".
Offer reassurance: "I'm here to help" or "When you're ready, we can…".
Give choices to offer control: "Would you like to get some fresh air?" or "Shall we pause for a minute?"

Creating Plans

Process:

- Identify goals
- Look for strengths
- Plan to remove blocks
- Motivate
- Use info you have gained

Be realistic about what can be achieved in their current situation. Identify supports that can be relied on. This may be people, services, physical or medical supports. Gently encourage extending their social network (e.g., interest groups). Celebrate any efforts currently being made. Create clear steps to be followed if challenges come up. Look at risk factors and see what changes they are willing and able to make, or come up with strategies to help cope with these.

Next Steps

Encourage follow up appointments and arrange check ins. Be understanding if they cancel plans, continue to let them know you are there and reach out to them.

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