



## Effective Engagement in Supportive Housing

### **CREATE THE PROPER PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

- Make people feel comfortable and offer private spaces for talking
- Meeting areas should be clean, well lit and not too noisy
- Remember, this is where people live, so it should not appear or feel institutional

### **RESPECT, ACCEPT AND SUPPORT PEOPLE**

- Always address tenants by name
- Be friendly and use eye contact when talking
- Be responsive to tenants' requests
- Don't turn people off by lecturing, demanding, or being too analytical

### **DEVELOP ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS**

- Focus attention on the speaker and tune into the speaker's feelings
- Avoid roadblocks to listening
- Reflect back what is heard
- Ask clarifying questions and explore for meaning

### **LET THE TENANT'S GOALS DRIVE THE SERVICES OFFERED**

- All services should help the person reach his/her intended goals
- Remember, there is no such thing as a "wrong" goal
- Reinforce all achievements along the way
- If a tenant hasn't reached a goal in a realistic time frame, it should be viewed as a problem with the goal or the steps towards it, not with the person
- Outline obstacles to achieving the goal and list them as steps in the process

### **HELP PEOPLE MAKE INFORMED CHOICES**

- Engage people in choices about their lives and their homes
- Encourage tenants to inform decisions about rules, common spaces, etc.
- Establish committees or project work groups made up of both staff and tenants
- Discuss lack of choices in certain situations

### **BE CONSISTENT WITH REPEATED, PREDICTABLE PATTERNS OF INTERACTION**

- This can be especially helpful with mentally ill tenants
- If a tenant does not want to talk and asks you to leave, remain polite, say goodbye, and let him/her know when you will return

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Note: This document is included within the *Supportive Services* section of CSH's *Toolkit for Developing and Operating Supportive Housing*, which is available at [www.csh.org/toolkit2](http://www.csh.org/toolkit2). This document has been adapted from the HUD-funded curriculum *Developing the Supportive Services Program*, which is available at [www.csh.org/training](http://www.csh.org/training).

- **ENGAGEMENT SHOULD BE NON-THREATENING**
- Do not choose controversial topics during initial engagement attempts
- Do not agree or disagree with delusional content when working with mentally ill tenants - instead, look for a shared reality

### **SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE A MENTAL ILLNESS**

**DEVELOP A SHARED REALITY:** The base of reality can be different for a person living with serious and persistent mental illness. Developing a shared reality assists worker and resident to mutually agree upon service needs.

**CONSISTENT INTERACTION:** Repeated and consistent interaction over time is key to developing trust. Interactions can also be informal and non-demanding. This helps the person to feel accepted and develop comfort with the worker.

**RESIDENT MUST HAVE CONTROL:** Worker needs to strike a delicate balance between communicating an interest in and concern about the person without engendering fear or distrust. The consumer should be allowed to set limits and exercise control in the interaction.

**DO NOT DENY OR “JOIN” DELUSIONS:** The worker attempts to engage the individual in reality-based areas of experience, avoiding a focus on delusional content. The worker neither directly confronts nor reinforces delusional content, but instead attempts to respond to the feelings related to or created by the delusion.

**COMMUNICATE YOUR ROLE CLEARLY:** The worker states his/her role clearly and is specific about how he or she can help. Responding to the person’s felt or physical needs is often a vehicle for engagement that creates opportunities to address other goals.

### **SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS WITH PEOPLE WITH SUBSTANCE USE ISSUES**

- Do not pursue the issue of tenant’s substance use as an engagement vehicle. This issue is best pursued once a relationship is in place that will sustain this kind of discussion. At the same time do not collude with the tenant’s denial by ignoring provocative signs.
- Worker should be aware of own judgmental attitudes regarding substance use and avoid conveying them to the tenant.
- Maintain realistic expectations. Helping people effect change in their lives is most often a slow, gradual process. Do not expect major changes to occur overnight.