



Case Manager - Tip Sheet

Working One-On-One With Couples on Relationship Education

If you are providing case management services to individuals and couples, it is almost inevitable that those on your caseload will present with existing relationship issues or issues may surface over time. You may find it difficult to address these issues well with your clients due to having a high caseload, already overextended visit agendas, and/or longer work hours. Does this all sound familiar?

The truth is that case managers are almost always overburdened and there is never enough time in the day. However, when it comes to addressing relationships, a key feature in your client's health, you should make time!

Listed below are 10 tips to help you understand the importance of relationship education as a part of service delivery, and how to address relationship issues without being overburdened.

1. Recognize why identifying relationship goals in service plans are important.

It is safe to say that every couple experiences relationship troubles of some form throughout their time together. These obstacles are not always severe enough to dissolve the bond shared by two people; however, they are often significant enough to cause long-term damage to the relationship as well as the entire family unit, if not handled well.

It is important to understand that these relationship issues exist and that they may hinder your work in helping participants meet their goals. The impact of each problem depends on the couple's situation, how well they cope, and how they choose to adapt to or change their circumstances. By providing support in this area and incorporating relationship goals in your service plan, you are giving the couple resources that may help them become stronger and better equipped to build a healthier relationship.

2. Don't assume the problem isn't yours.

Assuming that you don't need to address the couple's relationship problems because the problems will go away, they are insurmountable, or because you don't have time, will more than likely result in a lower rate of success in helping couples meet their goals. Happiness in relationships has a direct impact on overall life satisfaction and achievement of many other personal goals.

3. Utilize your supervisor to help you identify and plan relationship activities into your visits.

Whether you are seeking advice on appropriate activities or needing help rearranging visits to include relationship activities, your supervisor can offer suggestions and techniques to help couples be successful in addressing issues.

4. Solicit ideas from co-workers.

Each case manager brings a unique set of skills and varying degrees of experience. Most are likely experiencing similar issues with their clients. Learn the strengths and skills of your co-workers and be open to asking them for new ideas and support.

5. Access free relationship education activities from the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center.

The National Healthy Marriage Resource Center offers a wealth of free resources relating to communication, family structure, culture, relationship dynamics, couple stressors, domestic violence, etc. (<http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/index.aspx>)

6. Request that your organization purchase books that include relationship exercises and games.

Recognizing that non-profit organizations operate with limited budgets, case managers can advocate for a limited supply of materials that include exercises and games. The activities can then be shared between case managers and exercises can be reused with multiple couples.

7. Become familiar with resources available to couples in your local community.

If your organization does not support adding relationship education to your current practice, you can still provide appropriate referrals to couples. You can locate relationship education classes in your community via the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center or by word of mouth and provide your couples with a place to turn for additional relationship support.

8. Host a workshop onsite or invite couples on your caseload to offsite workshops.

Often, local organizations offer relationship workshops in varying locations throughout the community. Some of them will even host them at your office, at YMCA's, or other local venues. If a workshop cannot be offered onsite, you can still inform the couples on your caseload about other available workshops and encourage their attendance.

9. Encourage couples to utilize Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), if available.

For those couples that receive benefits through their employers, encourage them to inquire about services available through the company's Employee Assistance Program. Often, many couples are not aware that this resource is available to them.

10. If the couple attends religious services, encourage them to contact their place of worship.

Many couples attend church on a regular basis. Religious institutions often offer free individual relationship counseling sessions and group workshops to members. Encourage couples to utilize services that may be readily available to them.