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# Tool 1 – Outcomes Conversation Tool

## The Evidence



### PCF Social Work Level - Intervention and Skills Domain

Social workers should be competent to ‘enable effective relationships and are effective communicators’.

*‘They should communicate effectively; with compassion and authority; engage and build relationships in the short-term and over time; evaluating both their own practice and the outcomes of the people they support.’*  
(TCSW, 2014).

Personal outcomes are identified through good conversations with people using services during assessment and support planning. It is also critical that the outcomes are reviewed, to ensure the continued relevance of support and services and to support service-planning, commissioning and improvement (Miller and Cook, 2012).

Assessments should be conversational in style and start with discussion about the needs, concerns or problems most important to the person. Practitioners should aim to build rapport, facilitating openness about personal circumstances and minimising embarrassment or anxiety - enabling them to gather and record accurate, relevant proportional information about the person as a whole (FACE, 2011).

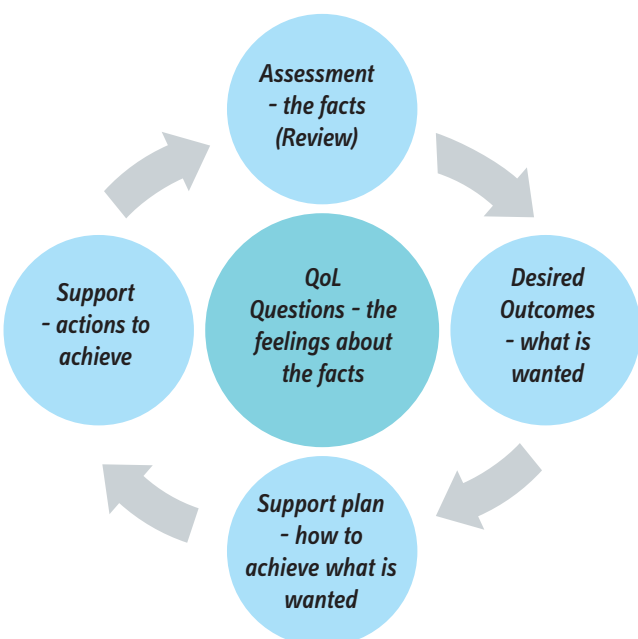
The *Care Act 2014* is very clear that assessments and reviews should be in the person’s own words and focus on what is important to them (DH, 2014a).

‘SMART’ principles can be usefully employed when discussing and recording outcomes (Miller, 2011). These should be:

**S**pecific  
**M**easureable  
**A**chievable  
**R**ealistic  
**T**ime-bound

The *Standards We Expect Consortia* work (2010) includes a value-based definition of self-directed support. This provides a useful framework for conversations about personal outcomes and would suggest that these should:

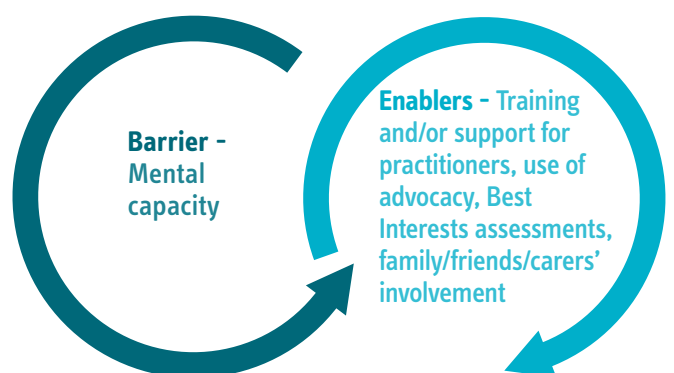
- > keep the person at their centre – concentrating on what is most important to them
- > treat the person as an individual, ensuring their personal choices and preferred level of control are reflected and respected
- > support people setting outcomes and goals - listening to service users and acting on what they say
- > develop a good rapport, trust and working relationship between the practitioner and the person
- > think creatively about support to achieve outcomes rather than ‘fitting’ the person into services
- > provide up-to-date, accessible information about appropriate services
- > be flexible, letting the pace and priority of areas discussed be led by the person
- > maintain a positive approach - focusing on what the person can do, not what they can’t
- > avoid being negative, don’t present it as questions you ‘have to ask’ or a form you ‘have to fill in’, but as a way of finding out about all of the different areas of their life and how important these are for them.



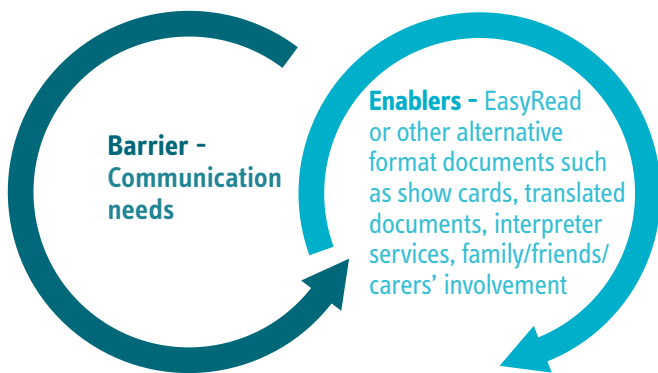
Learning from outcomes work in Cumbria (Johnstone and Page, 2014) suggests that effective conversations about outcomes require a flexibility that rigid processes, forms and questions can inhibit. Resources they have produced suggest that **to enable processes to work it is important to:**

- > be clear about the different ways you can phrase questions to suit different people or circumstances – thinking particularly about communication needs, mental capacity or learning disability
- > focus on asking what is important to them in relation to questions or domains and keep the discussion proportionate
- > pick up on different areas of life as they mention them throughout the discussion and, if you can, let them dictate the order in which the domains are covered
- > keep style conversational by asking any mandatory or ‘set’ questions within the assessment process as a way of summarising the discussion about an aspect of life – for example after discussion about difficulties using the bathroom, summarise what the person has told you and then ask any set questions relating to personal cleanliness and comfort
- > use professional judgement, for example, in crisis situations detailed discussion about outcomes may need to wait until things are more stable
- > be flexible, desired outcomes can be discussed and identified before, during and after assessment and review.

Conversations about care and support needs will inevitably involve barriers for both the practitioner and the person, for example:



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### Solution Focus

Solution-focused approaches assume change is inevitable and that the worker's role is to support people to notice, to take control and to shape change in ways helpful to them (Cook and Miller, 2012, citing Bucknell, 2006).

There may also be barriers directly related to outcomes where, for example:

- > it is unfeasible to achieve the outcome with the services or support that is available
- > there is tension around the potential impact on family, friends or carers
- > the person has a fixed view of the required service or support they want, but this is not necessarily appropriate to achieve the outcome
- > the person is uninformed about their options or is simply overwhelmed by their situation
- > the person has low expectations of what they can achieve
- > the person has a condition or disability which is degenerating or limiting, with a low chance of improvement.

The *Talking Points Personal Outcomes Approach* advocates a solution-focused approach and active listening as key in conversational assessment style, suggesting that practitioners need to support the person to identify ways to make the most of their current life situation and build strategies that individuals have used to achieve their goals. It says:

*'Through the conversational process, people become more aware of what they want, the strengths and abilities they already possess, the support networks and community supports around them, all of which come together to increase their motivation and expectancy that they can realise their hopes and aspirations.'* (Cook and Miller, 2012)

### Exercise - Roleplay

This exercise is designed to help you develop outcomes-focused conversation skills, giving you the opportunity to practice active listening and being solution-focused, while prompting solution focus enablers for working with outcomes.

- > Use the 'Identifying Outcomes Tool' and 'Enabling and Reviewing Outcomes Tool' with a colleague. You can either identify outcomes personal to their real life or ask them to make up a scenario where they are a service user (or try both).
- > Record your colleague's outcomes as you would those of a service user in their own words.
- > Acknowledge any barriers which arise and take a solution-focused approach to challenge these.
- > Ask them for feedback on whether they felt the outcomes recorded truly reflect their views and wishes – if they do then you have been actively listening.
- > Reflect on the experience using Kolb's (1984) *critical reflection cycle*

