

Sometimes, the people in most need of support are the least able to access it. It can be difficult to build and maintain relationships. Behaviours can be perceived as aggressive, manipulative, confrontational and rude. In many cases, these behaviours have developed as ways of coping with experiencing trauma, mental health issues and having been treated unfairly by other people. As community workers it is important to learn ways to engage people who struggle to maintain relationships. Here are some tips on how to do this:

Take advantage of the good moments

Be proactive in getting to know people when they are not in crisis. Spending a little time building a relationship with someone when they are doing well will make it a lot easier to connect with them when they are not.

Be curious

Behaviour communicates how someone is feeling but it can be difficult to know exactly what's going on for them now. Take time to get to know what is going on in their life. This will help you build a positive relationship with them and may give you information that will help you avoid conflict. One note of caution: be careful not to delve too deep into past trauma. People will share what they are comfortable with in their own time.

Plan for crises

When the person you have a difficult relationship with is calm and you can communicate with them effectively, ask them how they would like you to respond when they are not so calm. Use these opportunities to come up with a crisis plan. It can include:

- What are you like when you are well?
- What do you do to stay well and can we help with this?
- How will we know if you are struggling?
- Is there anyone we can call when you are not doing well?
- How would you like us to talk to you if we notice you are not doing well?



Be consistent

Respond in a predictable way. This is not just about how you respond each time you see someone. It also needs to include how you respond to other people and how all the other people in your team respond. People who struggle to maintain relationships often feel anxious in general so if you or your team are unpredictable, this will make those feelings worse. This doesn't mean that you need to treat everyone the same, it just means that you need to have clear rules and guidelines relating to how you run your groups or meetings and that you stick to them. Treating people fairly and consistently helps everyone feel valued and secure. Being consistent can be challenging if our own emotions are triggered by how other people treat us so...

Stay calm

Difficult relationships and extreme, angry or aggressive behaviour can make us feel very strong emotions. If we react to these emotions we can sometimes make a situation worse. It is important that we build resilience skills that enable us to put our feelings to one side while dealing with difficult interactions. This will help to respond in a way that helps the person we are supporting. However, it is important that we then seek support to process how we felt during the interaction. Talk to a colleague or friend about what happened and make a plan for how to respond if the same situation comes up again. In mental health services this is called "containment".

Look after your own wellbeing

Make sure you take time to do things that make you happy – go for walk in nature, play sport, spend time with friends or family. If we are not doing well, it will be difficult for us to support others. Doing things that maintain our own wellbeing also gives a positive example to others around us.

For more information or advice around supporting people with mental health needs, you can call the ACE Service Enquiry Line on 0117 239 8969



BUILDING EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE IN COMMUNITIES

