

How Comfortable Are You?

Self-Assessment and Group Discussion Activity

Purpose

To increase awareness and discussion about different kinds of client encounters or circumstances that might be difficult for staff.

Who Should Attend

This activity is ideal for staff who have just completed the Family Planning Basics eLearning Course. Other staff, with any level of background in family planning, may also benefit from participating in this activity.

Objectives

By the end of this activity participants will be able to:

- Discuss their feelings and personal comfort level when talking with clients about sensitive family planning topics.

Preparation

Make enough copies of the handout so that each participant has a copy. Review this handout and the facilitator notes to help you prepare for how you might respond to challenges dealing with sensitive topics that staff may bring up.

Instructions

1. Introduce the activity by saying:
This activity will give you a chance to think about and share how comfortable you feel when discussing a variety of sensitive topics. The purpose of the activity is to help increase awareness about what kinds of encounters or circumstances with clients might be difficult for you. The idea is not to make anyone feel badly or wrong. Instead, the goal is to provide an opportunity to practice discussing some of these topics. Ideally, talking about the sensitive topics will help us find ways to become more comfortable and strengthen our communication skills.
2. Give each participant a copy of the handout “How Comfortable Are You?” Ask each person, individually, to read all the statements on the handout and to check the box that best reflects how comfortable they feel talking about this topic with clients.
3. Encourage participants to take note of which statements are challenging for them.
4. Instruct participants to pair up and discuss which statements were easy, which statements were challenging, and to share with each other WHY certain statements were challenging.

Time Needed

30 minutes

Materials Needed

Handout “How Comfortable Are You?”

5. Return to the larger group and facilitate a group discussion. Ask questions such as:
 - What did you think of this self-assessment activity?
 - Is anyone willing to share some of their observations about their own experience doing the activity? Any surprises?
 - Which were the hardest things to talk about and why?

Wrap Up

In a circle, one-by-one, ask each participant to share something they plan to do to help them become more comfortable with a topic or statement that was challenging for them.

Stress the following points:

- It is OK to feel conflicted.
- Talking about these topics and your feelings about them helps increase comfort.
- Understanding why we ask clients about these topics helps increase comfort.
- There are resources and people at the agency (name these) that can help you increase your confidence, comfort and skill when discussing sensitive family planning topics with clients.

Staff Handout

Family planning counselors and medical assistants need to feel comfortable discussing a variety of sensitive topics with clients AND have the ability to provide client-centered care to a variety of clients. The following exercise will help you evaluate your own readiness to discuss important issues with your diverse clientele who come to you with a wide range of needs.

Instructions: For each topic area mentioned, put a check in the box that best reflects your own feelings. Notice which statements are more challenging for you. Check N/A (not applicable) if you feel the statement does not relate to your role in the clinic.

	I feel comfortable	I will be comfortable but I need to practice	I am conflicted about	N/A (not applicable to my role)
Explaining confidentiality and mandated reporting				
Asking teens if they have an adult they trust to help them with family planning decision-making				
Telling an accompanying guardian or adult that you would like to meet with your client privately first before he or she joins the session				
Providing contraceptive information to a young teen				
Discussing all pregnancy options with a neutral tone				
Keeping personal opinions to myself, even when my "buttons are triggered"				
Saying all sexual and reproductive parts.				
Providing client-centered care to a transgender client				
Explaining the sexual response cycle				

	I feel comfortable	I will be comfortable but I need to practice	I am conflicted about	N/A (not applicable to my role)
Offering clients the most effective contraceptive methods FIRST				
Offering IUDs to teens				
Discussing a reproductive life plan with all types of clients including young teens, men and LGBTQ clients				
Providing emergency contraception multiple times to the same client				
Explaining how to use a condom				
Asking clients about current AND past partners				
Asking clients about their sexual practices or behavior; saying "vaginal sex," "oral sex," and "anal sex" when counseling a client.				

Facilitator Notes

- Ideally, staff are able to work towards increasing their comfort with serving all kinds of clients with a variety of needs.
- Their comfort, sensitivity, and respect in discussing these topics will impact rapport and trust with the client.
- When staff are comfortable in discussing and bringing up these topics, the clients' comfort will also increase and they may feel able to ask questions that they may otherwise be too embarrassed to ask.
- Staff need to be able to address clients' concerns in a professional way, without embarrassment. It is impossible not to have reactions and judgments, but it is critical that staff be professional and separate personal values from professional interactions.
- Being nonjudgmental means that we must hold an accepting attitude toward the client, demonstrating respect and personal warmth in an unconditional manner and communicating acceptance with no evaluation.
- In extreme circumstances, staff may need to identify a co-worker who can handle the most difficult issues so that a graceful exit from the counseling session can be made. Due to staffing issues, transferring a client due to personal feeling cannot happen frequently, so staff need to be able to work with a variety of situations.

Sensitive topics	Suggestions for Addressing Sensitive Topics
1. Explaining confidentiality and mandated reporting	<p>If clients understand ahead of time that what they say will be kept private (unless they say they intend to hurt themselves or someone else, or say someone is hurting them) they will know what to expect before they disclose information. This helps foster trust and respect.</p> <p>Invite a staff member to practice how to do this or ask staff to practice in pairs.</p> <p>Sample statement to use:</p> <p><i>"Before we begin, I want you to know that the things we talk about today are between you, me and the other staff who work here on a need-to-know basis. It is what we call 'confidential' or private. The only time things are not confidential are if you tell me you are in danger of hurting yourself or others or if someone has hurt you. If those things come up, for safety, we may need to contact someone for help."</i></p>

Sensitive topics	Suggestions for Addressing Sensitive Topics
<p>2. Asking teens if they have an adult they trust to help them with family planning decision-making</p>	<p>When young people feel connected to and can communicate with a caring adult, they have a support person. Adolescents with connectedness to parents or other caring adults are also less likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors. You can let teens know you care, and why you are asking if they have an adult they can trust. This way the teen will better understand the reason for the question.</p> <p>Practice how to ask teens about a trusted adult.</p>
<p>3. Telling an accompanying guardian or adult that you would like to meet with your client privately first before he or she joins the session</p>	<p>Everyone has a legal right to confidential and quality family planning services. You can tell a disgruntled guardian or adult that we always ask some questions of the client alone, by themselves. This helps us provide the best care. Model and role-play how to do it this, especially if someone insists on being present with your client.</p>
<p>4. Providing contraceptive information to a young teen</p>	<p>As mentioned directly above, everyone has a right to quality family planning services. According to Title X, sensitive services are available for all clients. Personal discomfort with a client's age should not impact the information that you provide. There are methods that are tailored and targeted at teens, because they are a sexually active part of the population. It is a responsible decision to go to a family planning clinic for birth control at any age, but teens tend to face more challenges to accessing services. If coercion or abuse is suspected, it is also required to follow up on these issues.</p>
<p>5. Discussing all pregnancy options with a neutral tone</p>	<p>Body language, word choice, and the tone of the voice is key in providing complete, accurate, and unbiased information to clients. Besides providing information on <u>all</u> pregnancy options (referrals to those services that your site might not offer), your tone can influence a client's comfort level and decisions. It is vital that tone remain neutral; approval or disapproval should not be conveyed to the client.</p> <p>Share examples of verbal and non-verbal communication that reflect a person's "tone." If a staff member is unable to use a neutral tone when discussing pregnancy options, another staff member should discuss this with pregnant clients.</p>

Sensitive topics	Suggestions for Addressing Sensitive Topics
<p>6. Keeping personal opinions to myself, even when my “buttons are triggered”</p>	<p>One purpose of this activity is to help identify triggers in order to be aware and begin addressing them. Take a personal inventory of what your triggers are, and start to think about how you can address them. Remember, it’s ok to have triggers, as long as you don’t allow your personal feeling to impact your clients’ services.</p> <p>Ask participants what “triggers their buttons.” This way you can talk about concrete examples relevant to the participants and explore ways to act professionally, even if a person has personal opinions that are different.</p>
<p>7. <u>Saying</u> all sexual and reproductive parts</p>	<p>It is important that clients learn about their anatomy. It provides knowledge on how pregnancy occurs, how STIs can be transmitted, and of how sexual contact can be pleasurable. It is empowering to the client. Many people have not learned the correct names for the sexual and reproductive organs. Often slang words are used. Clients and/or staff may feel that using these words is wrong or bad. Practicing how and why we use these words in a reproductive health setting can help.</p> <p>Ask participants to write the names of all the sexual and reproductive parts on a large piece of paper, including slang words. Together, discuss the names and function of the parts. Using these words and talking about their meaning can help increase staff comfort and use of the correct terms as well as increase knowledge of common slang terms clients may know.</p>
<p>8. Providing client-centered care to a transgender client</p>	<p>Discuss experiences participants have had and explore issues to consider when providing client-centered care for a transgender client. Practice using sensitive and inclusive language when talking with a transgender client. Ask your client what gender pronoun is preferred.</p> <p>Look for training on transgender care and creating a transgender-friendly environment. Transgender clients have reproductive health care needs like everyone. It’s important to hear their needs and address them in a respectful and professional manner.</p>
<p>9. Explaining the sexual response cycle</p>	<p>Review the information in Lesson 4 – Sexuality. Demonstrate how to explain the sexual response cycle. Ask participants to practice how to do this in pairs or a small group, giving each other feedback.</p>

Sensitive topics	Suggestions for Addressing Sensitive Topics
10. Offering clients the most effective contraceptive methods FIRST	If a client comes to you with interest in a specific method, it is appropriate to explain that method. It is still appropriate to ask if she is interested in hearing about even more effective methods as well. If a client doesn't have any idea about which method to use, it makes sense to begin with offering the most effective methods, just as a doctor would first offer the most effective medicine or treatment.
11. Offering IUDs to teens	In the past, it was believed that IUDs were not appropriate for teens. Current research shows that long-acting reversible contraception (LARC) such as IUDs and implants are effective, safe and acceptable methods for teens. Once in place, a girl or young woman doesn't need to do anything for many years (other than periodically check the string and use a condom for STI protection) and still she is protected from pregnancy.
12. Discussing a reproductive life plan with all types of clients including young teens, men and LGBTQ clients	<p>Explain that this topic is on the comfort scale as a reminder that not every client will be heterosexual. However, clients who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual, may be exploring their sexuality and have intercourse with a person of the <u>opposite</u> sex time to time or unexpectedly.</p> <p>We really can't assume anything about clients' reproductive life plans without talking with them about it.</p> <p>Ask how participants feel about asking young teens, men or LGBTQ clients about their plans to have children soon or not. What makes this hard for them to do? Discuss how information about a person's reproductive life plan helps clinicians provide better health services. Practice ways to sensitively ask about this topic with young teens, men and LGBTQ clients.</p> <p>Men need to be part of the reproductive life planning conversation. Encouraging them to voice their plans for children in the future can help to support contraceptive use.</p>
13. Providing emergency contraception multiple times to the same client	There is no health risk to using emergency contraceptive pills multiple times and it is not an abortion pill. While it is also important to encourage and support a client in using an ongoing contraceptive method, every client has the right to use emergency contraception when needed.
14. Explaining how to use a condom	As a training group or individually, review how to use both a male and female condom. Have staff practice saying any words they are uncomfortable saying.

Sensitive topics	Suggestions for Addressing Sensitive Topics
<p>15. Asking clients about current AND past partners</p>	<p>Asking about current and past partners helps assess the risk of STIs. Telling clients why we ask such personal questions helps them feel more comfortable and willing to answer. Clients always have the right to not answer a question if they don't want to.</p> <p>Normalize by saying, "We ask all of our clients some questions about partners and these questions may feel a little invasive or private. But, we ask these questions for a good reason - so we can provide the best care possible."</p>
<p>16. Asking clients about their sexual practices or behavior; saying "vaginal sex," "oral sex," and "anal sex" when counseling a client.</p>	<p>Discussing sexual practices with clients helps to assess STI risk. Many clients do not realize that all FP methods (except condoms) do not protect against STIs. Use a similar statement as above to normalize your questions.</p> <p>Have staff practice saying sexual practice terms out loud to increase comfort.</p>