*For your toolbox*

**Eliciting Feedback from the People We Serve**

**WHY:**

* Research clearly indicates that positive outcomes are associated with the degree to which clients feel understood by, and in sync with, their provider. (see scottdmiller.com)
* Care is more trauma-informed when clients are respected and empowered by having their opinions and preferences elicited, understood, and honored.
* One of the most effective ways for providers to improve their work is to ask for, and be responsive to, client feedback.

**HOW:**

1. **Explain and normalize your request for feedback:**

**1. Right from the start:**

* During one of your first meetings you might say, “I’m hoping you will give me ongoing feedback as we work together so that we can collaborate in making this process as helpful as possible.”
* You might even set the stage for regular post session feedback forms by saying, “I have clients take a few minutes after each meeting to fill out this post-session feedback form. There is actually quite a bit of research that indicates regular feedback increases positive outcomes.”
* At the end of your first (or later) session you could say, “As we are wrapping up our time today, I’d like to talk a little about how this is fitting with what you were hoping for.”

**2. Introducing feedback later in your ongoing work:**

* Even if you’ve been meeting quite a while you can still simply bring it up, “I like to check in regularly with folks about how things are going and I don’t think we’ve had a chance to do this yet. Can we take a moment to do this as we get started (or as we wrap up) today? ”
* If eliciting feedback feels like a new or incongruent change to your ongoing approach, you might explain, “I’ve recently learned that one of the best ways to improve effectiveness is to ask for feedback from the people I serve. Would you be willing to give me some input about what I do that is most helpful and what could be improved?”
* If it feels better you can frame it as an external requirement or assignment, “Our agency is encouraging us to ask for feedback (or to have people fill out this feedback form.”

1. **Start by asking general questions:**
   * How do you feel about how things are going in our work together so far?
   * What do you think be working well and what could be better?
   * What are your favorite parts of our work together?
   * Let’s make sure to also talk about the things that seem off track or unhelpful?
2. **Invite Elaboration. Don’t settle for superficial responses** such as, “things seem fine.”

* Clarify, “I’m really hoping to get your specific thoughts on what is working well and also what is not fitting, is less helpful, or could be improved.”
* Follow-up your initial general question with lots of support for them to get more specific by using some of the strategies listed under “F” below.

1. **BE RECEPTIVE**:

* Listen thoughtfully.
* Reflect back and clarify what you are hearing.
* Appreciate and validate what you hear.

1. **Don’t take critical feedback negatively**. Rather express appreciation for how much their honesty is helpful so you can modify your approach or can further clarity roles or expectations.
2. **Be prepared with follow-up questions** to help people elaborate:

* Can you say more about what makes it seem “fine”.
* What are some of the things you remember after our sessions?
* What are some times you’ve felt a bit misunderstood, confused, frustrated, etc.?
* Did you like it when we did XYZ?
* Which do you prefer:
* More talking /less talking,
* Activities/conversations/sharing feelings/problem-solving
* When I ask questions or when I wait for you to share,
* When I let there be long silences/pauses or when I jump in and share thoughts or ask questions
* When I share my opinions or concerns openly or keep quiet.
* When I share a little about myself or we keep the focus on you, or we discuss other things?
* I’m going to start working with someone who has some similar challenges with XYZ, do you have an tips for me?
* Other (think ahead about other things you are curious about)