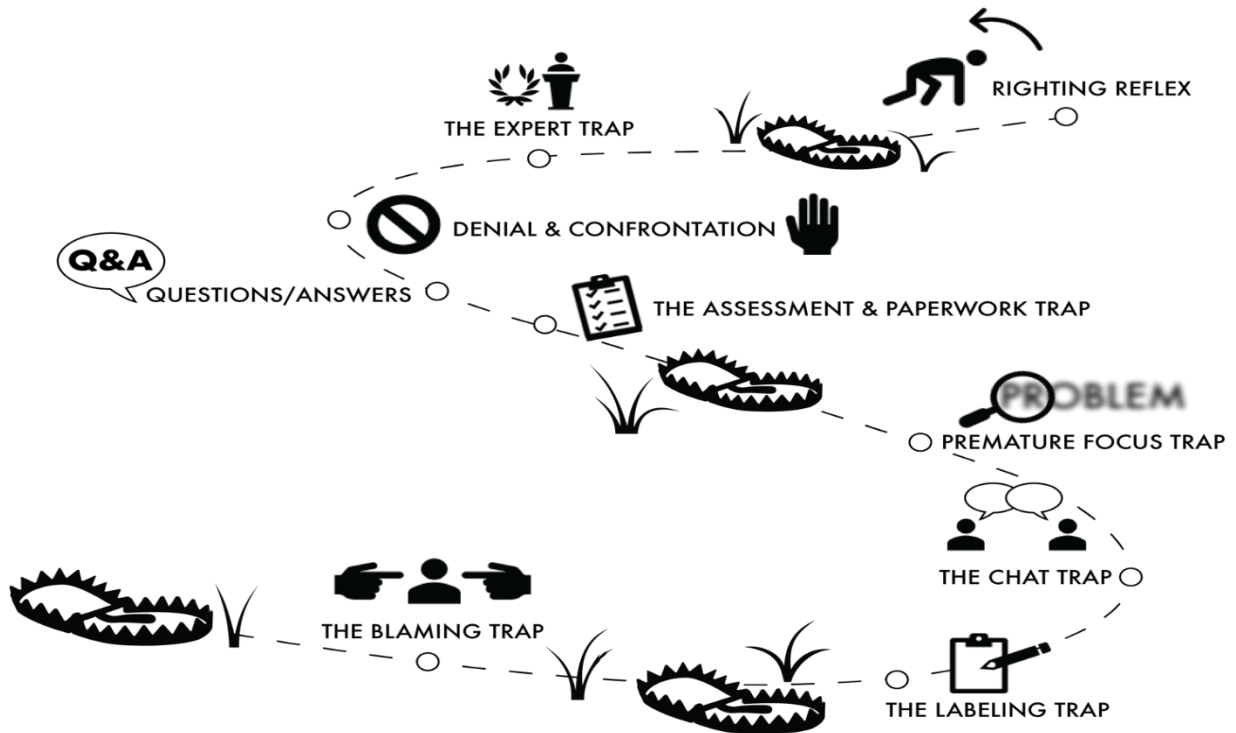


Traps Coaching Sheet



Roadblocks to Reflective Listening

In addition to the traps, Miller & Rollnick (2013) remind us of Thomas Gordon's Roadblocks to Reflective Listening (1970): Ordering, directing or commanding. These are listed below.

1. Warning, cautioning or threatening
2. Giving advice, making suggestions or providing solutions
3. Persuading with logic, arguing or lecturing
4. Telling people what they should do, moralizing
5. Disagreeing judging criticizing, or blaming
6. Agreeing, approving or praising
7. Shaming, ridiculing or labeling
8. Interpreting or analyzing
9. Reassuring, sympathizing, or consoling
10. Questioning or probing
11. Withdrawing, distracting, humoring or changing the subject

Righting Reflex Trap



Most people who enter into the helping professions do so for a variety of selfless reasons. They may have had a family member or friend who needed help. They may be driven to help others or alleviate suffering. Some do so to repay or help others who provided help to them in a way to play it forward.

This desire to help can almost lead to a drive to make things right for the other person. Seeing people heading down the “wrong” path or just being ambivalent about the changes that could clearly improve their lives stimulate a desire to say:

“Wait, let me tell you a better way.” This is done with the best of intentions and with a heart that is in the right place. Miller and Rollnick (2013) call this the Righting Reflex and we list it as the first of the MiiWrap traps.

As we reviewed in Chapter Two, Ambivalence is a natural part of the change process. It may even be biologically adaptive in that this consideration of pros and cons keeps us from “just doing things” that may be extremely harmful. Let’s consider what happens when an individual who is ambivalent about a certain chance meets a helper with the Righting Reflex. The individual already has both sides of the change argument, and the helper focuses on the pro change side. The rather predictable response is the individual will counter with the reasons not to change. When you argue (or just energetically propose) one side of the change argument, this individual responds with the other. Remember successful change arguments come from within.

Yes, for some people the Righting Reflex works, and that’s why people keep doing it. But more often for those people who are harder to engage and motivate, it actually does the opposite. Miller (2013) describes his own personal journey with the Righting Reflex in saying: “It soon became apparent that client openness versus defensiveness, Change Talk versus Sustain Talk is very much a product of the therapeutic relationship.”

The Righting Reflex is strong in most helping professionals and we must concentrate to recognize it and find a better way. Let’s look at a list of things not to do that contain the Righting Reflex.

- ▶ Giving advice or making suggestions based on your assumptions of the problem
- ▶ Providing information without finding out first what the person already knows and, secondly, asking if they want the information (in a way that allows them to say no)
- ▶ Sharing unsolicited stories of what you have done, failed to do, or miracle or horror stories of people in similar circumstances
- ▶ Telling them what they need to do (even if they ask)
- ▶ Persuading with logic or lecturing
- ▶ Focusing only on the reasons to change when the person is ambivalent

What should you do when the Righting Reflex tries to assert itself?

- ▶ First, recognize it and acknowledge that both the helping spirit and the knowledge of possible solutions is a personal strength.
- ▶ Then, focus on listening and reflecting to gather information to gain an empathetic understanding of what the individual wants and knows what to do.
- ▶ Focus on connecting instead of fixing.

Expert Trap



MiiWrap is done in a Collaborative Partnership between the youth and family and staff. In the Expert Trap, staff do things to create a one-up relationship. The Expert Trap often occurs as the staff exhibit the Righting Reflex. The key feature that makes it the Expert Trap is doing anything that unbalances the Collaborative Partnership. This trap can subtly emerge and create an impression of the passive individual and the expert staff.

Although this trap may be nothing more than an enthusiastic and knowledgeable staff member, this trap can present as a sense of the staff taking control and reduces the chance the youth and family will explore and resolve Ambivalence themselves. In this passive role Motivation will not be elicited and we will not have tapped the internal resources of the youth and family that result in lasting change. In addition, the one-up relationship works against building the youth and family's Self-Efficacy. Let's examine some of the things staff do that would constitute the Expert Trap.

- ▶ Setting the session agenda for the youth and family instead of discussing options for the agenda and coming to mutual agreement
- ▶ Using an assessment/diagnosis to determine the youth and family's needs for them
- ▶ Unsolicited sharing of stories or advice on ways to handle their needs
- ▶ Comments like: "I know about this...how the system works...good options to meet your needs, so trust me I can help you."

Denial/Confrontation Trap



Most MiiWrap staff have had the experience of interviewing a person who is not yet ready to change, and who provides an argument in response to every statement the staff make. The MiiWrap staff then counter with a reiteration or additional reasons for changing. It might go something like:

This type of interaction usually isn't productive and can easily frustrate the staff and disengage the youth and family. As the discussion goes on, Sustain Talk goes up and the youth and family argue more strongly against change. Signs of these negative effects might include interrupting, ignoring, arguing, denying, day-dreaming, and passive short responses. More intense signs may include canceled appointments, lack of follow through with plans and dropping out of services.

Some of the things to avoid in this scenario are:

- ▶ Attempts at persuasion or changing someone's behavior using logic
- ▶ Contradicting what the individual says – remember change comes from their Change Talk, not yours
- ▶ Warning, cautioning or threatening

Remember that if a person feels backed into a corner, or into one point of view, they will usually defend the opposite point of view more strongly. If you leave your youth and family with no other option than to argue with you, that is what you'll get. Your goal is to get them to make the argument for change and anything you do to increase sustain talk works against your goal. Respond to Sustain Talk with Open-Ended Questions, Reflections and Affirmations.

Question/Answer Trap

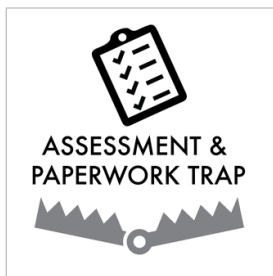


When staff ask one question after another, the youth and family will often give a series of brief answers. Such exchanges promote passivity on the part of the individual which creates the one-up relation of the Expert Trap and doesn't result in guiding the youth and family to more deeply explore the issue and possible needs and Motivation for change. The staff are unlikely to uncover content, feeling or perceived consequences, which define the youth and family's point of view and help staff develop the understanding to be truly empathetic.

Some of the common examples of the Question and Answer Trap are:

- ▶ Intake processes that gather specific information, often to meet agency requirements, in which the youth and family is asked a series of short answer questions. The basic structure of a working relationship may be formed quite quickly. During this time the youth and family are often determining their role and the value of the process. These short answer questions lay the foundation for an unequal relationship and guarded answers.
- ▶ Questions with minimal Reflections. Even good Open-Ended Questions without Reflective Listening (more reflections than questions) can undermine the Collaborative Partnership.
- ▶ Using a pre-determined set of questions, especially those that require a numerical rating by the individual or staff, does not give the youth and family a chance to explore other needs.
- ▶ Repeated questions to accumulate evidence with or without judgement to determine a course of treatment
- ▶ Being focused on what you need to know to complete documentation instead of following up on areas of importance to the individual

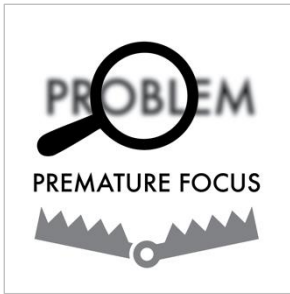
Assessment and Paperwork Trap



Many if not most agencies and organizations predictably fall into the Assessment and Paperwork Trap, as though it were necessary to know a lot of information before being able to help. The format of an assessment-intensive session is also very predictable in that the key worker asks a whole bunch of questions and the youth and family answer them. This quickly places the youth and family in a passive and one-down role. What makes this trap worse is that the youth and family will usually struggle to see the purpose or use of such questioning, as they are already intimately knowledgeable about the information being discussed. Examples of this trap are:

- ▶ Filling out numerous forms, consents, eligibility assessments as part of intake before Engagement and the Collaborative Partnership are established
- ▶ Rushing through information gathering (often falling into the Question and Answer Trap or Premature Focus Trap) to complete strengths, needs and culture discoveries and functional assessments to meet deadlines
- ▶ Completing information gathering using other sources instead of direct conversation with the youth and family involved, so not having each family member's own perceptions of the situation
- ▶ Pushing to complete your requirements without being in the moment with the person listening and reflecting

Premature Focus Trap



Although MiiWrap does not suggest that the staff simply "follow" the clients' lead, but guide the process, MiiWrap also cautions against focusing too quickly on a specific problem or aspect of a problem. Youth and families often come to MiiWrap with needs identified in the referral packet. Although these needs may be eventually determined to be the prioritized needs, focusing primarily on them from the beginning may raise Discord and will work against forming the Collaborative Partnership. This may also happen when in the early sessions you come to believe you know what the need or problem is and begin to focus on it.

It's important to remember that MiiWrap is for families with complex needs that generally involve multiple areas of their lives and often multiple people in the family system. Premature focus will often miss important needs and will generally miss needs that individuals would be most motivated to change thus building Self-Efficacy. Difficulties with premature focus include raising discord and focusing on an unimportant or secondary problem. Examples of this trap include:

- ▶ Focusing on something that seems overriding to you or the person you are working with before completing the Strengths, Needs and Culture Discovery (SNCD) assessment
- ▶ Persistently trying to draw your client into addressing issues that you think are important. Dissonance arises when what you think is important is different from what they think is important.
- ▶ Trying to solve their problem before you have established a working collaboration and negotiated common goals

Chat Trap



It's possible to fall into the trap of simply chatting and having insufficient direction in the conversation and/or session. Making small talk may seem like a friendly opener, and there is no doubt it can and often does have an ice-breaking effect. This is especially true of some cultures where a certain amount of chatting is both polite and expected before getting down to the more serious matters at hand. Although this type of chat is comfortable for many, it's unlikely to be very helpful when used in more than small doses. In one treatment study, higher levels of in-session informal chat predicted lower levels of client Motivation for change and retention (Bammatter et al., 2010). Some common examples of the Chat Trap occur when:

- ▶ Staff are concerned that the individual is not fully engaged and uses chat with the idea that this will build trust and a personal relationship.
- ▶ The individual deflects Change Talk conversations with their own chat and the staff follow along.

Labeling Trap



The current social culture is quick to put labels on people and their behavior.

"It's just his ADHD he can't help it."

"He sure is moody, he must be bipolar."

Whereas diagnosis may sometimes assist treatment and medication selection, using labels in MiiWrap decreases our flexibility to develop real empathy for the person. As Miller and Rollnick state: "because such labels often carry a certain stigma in the public mind, it is not surprising that people with reasonable self-esteem resist them" (1991, p. 68) Despite this, some staff believe that the person must accept a

label or diagnosis to change their behavior. MiiWrap disagrees with this view and suggests that MiiWrap staff de-emphasize labels whenever possible. Some examples include:

- ▶ Diagnostic labeling that comes from our belief that there is a benefit to people accepting what they are/have.
- ▶ Labels are easily seen as judgmental. They often carry a social stigma, raise issues of self-esteem, and can cause disagreement and Discord.

Blaming Trap



It's natural, easy and common to fault someone for their problems. By the time youth and families come to you, they have likely been blamed, or have themselves blamed others for their problems. Engaging the question of fault can be a time-consuming source of Discord. Blame is irrelevant. Miller and Rollnick (2013) suggest establishing a "no-fault" policy when working with a person by commenting, "I'm not interested in looking for who's responsible, but rather what's troubling you, and what you might be able to do about it."

Some examples are:

- ▶ It's possible that individuals attempt to blame others for their problems. Staff may feel compelled to show the individual how he or she is at fault for the difficulties encountered.
- ▶ Holding individuals responsible for his or her behavior is a key principle of motivational interviewing. However, blaming or assigning fault will undermine the collaborative relationship you're trying to build.
- ▶ Similarly, individuals may minimize their impact on their current needs or problems and staff may feel it is important for them to own it.

None of these situations should just be "let go" but addressing them through Open-Ended Questions, Affirmations, Reflections and Change Skills will be more effective in engaging them and getting them to own the problem, without using blame which will likely cause Discord.

Part of the enhancement that is MiiWrap is a focus on building and maintaining a genuine and healthy partnership with the youth and families we work with. The Mindset and Principles place a strong emphasis on this Engagement and Collaborative Partnership, and we teach staff five specific Relational Skills. These Relational Skills are the basic tools to avoid the traps discussed above. As you look at the list of Relational Skills you may find yourself thinking "I do these things," or some of them. Some people do them well, almost like art but most of us must practice and focus to use them consistently. Falling into a trap is a clear sign of more work needed. Failing to fully engage and form a Collaborative Partnership should have us considering what we could do better, not what's wrong with the youth and family.