

How Talking Mats can help facilitate shared decision making and goal setting.

“You are expected to put service users at the centre of your practice, working in partnership with them, being led by their needs, choices and aspirations”

COT 2017²

“Personalised care means people have choice and control over the way their care is planned and delivered based on ‘what matters’ to them and their individual strengths, needs and preferences”

NHS England 2019⁴

Person-centred practice

“The principles of person-centred care in which goal-setting and decision making are shared, are a fundamental principle of occupational therapy practice.”¹

Person-centred practice is collaborative in its nature. Concepts such as respect, partnership, choice and hope are integral to the process.³

To facilitate genuine person-centred practice, therapists need to first address the balance of power within the relationship. This handing over of control will better enable a person to set and achieve their goals.³

Person-centred practice has been also been shown to improve functional outcomes and increase satisfaction.

Creating a partnership approach

Listening and communicating, are essential elements in an effective partnership.³ People need to be reassured that their opinions and wishes have been heard, as well as respected and valued. This conversation helps to gain an understanding of each other’s perspective and avoids incorrect assumptions being made.

Talking Mats is an ideal tool to help facilitate this process. It was created to enable better conversations and provides an interactive thinking space.

Identifying priorities

The World Health Organisation (WHO) International Classification of Functioning (ICF)⁵ is a universal framework which provides a common language to describe the impact of a health condition on a person’s life.

Talking Mats have taken the Activity and Participation, Body Function and Environmental domains and converted them into easily understood symbols. These are available as the Health and Wellbeing card sets.

Talking Mats help people to think about different aspects of their life, and to say what matters most to them. A Talking Mat can help identify priorities for therapy and provide a framework for shared decision making.

“Shared decision making requires shifts in culture and systems, prepared professionals and supported individuals.”⁶

Shared decision making

Shared decision making is a collaborative process. The therapist contributes their clinical expertise, as they support a person to think about the options and choices available to them. The therapist should clearly explain the risks and benefits of any given option whilst acknowledging the person’s preferences, circumstances, values and beliefs.⁶ This ensures that fully informed choices can be made.

Goal setting – creating a common vision

Goal setting is perceived as being one of the cornerstones for improving health outcomes.⁷

There is substantial literature which demonstrates its usefulness, both as part of the communication and decision-making process, and as a person-centred outcome measure for rehabilitation.⁸

A person-centred goal describes the anticipated achievement of a specific activity. This should be meaningful and written in such a way that each goal, agreed in collaboration, will create a common vision. This ensures that everyone knows what they are trying to accomplish. It should be challenging enough to motivate, but realistic so that it can be achieved in a timely way.

A plan for achieving each goal should be discussed, with options presented so that the person can choose their preferred course of action within the therapy process. This ensures that the decision has been shared and mutually agreed. Engagement in the goal setting process is widely believed to lead to higher levels of goal achievement.⁹

There is however often a misconception that shared decision making and the use of goal setting will add more time to any consultation. However, this is without evidence.¹⁰

How Talking Mats can help people think

Talking Mats has been demonstrated to be a useful tool in enabling people to think about rehabilitation goals.¹¹

The purpose of a Talking Mat is to enable a person to focus their attention on a specific topic. By doing this they become the “thinker.” The therapist is the “listener” within the process, and gives opportunity to the thinker, to explore the topic and think about, what they feel about, each option presented. A visual scale enables them to indicate on the Talking Mat their thought process and decision.

The visual scales are adapted to suit the question being asked. For example, a Talking Mat can be used to think about what makes them happy or sad, the level of difficulty of a task or what is important to them.

Goals must:¹²

- *Be relevant and motivating*
 - *Express what you want to accomplish*
 - *Be positively defined*
 - *Be put in behavioural terms*
 - *Be explicit and commonly understandable*
 - *Be attainable and enabling well-balanced planning*
 - *Enable measurement*
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Using a Talking Mat makes the process of thinking about an issue less overwhelming and helps to make sense of, and then organise thoughts and feelings.

Thinking...



Please be patient

The visual representation of a person's thinking process on the mat, can then provide a focus for further discussion, and decision making. This can also form the basis of goal formation. Talking Mats can be completed at several points in time and used to demonstrate meaningful change.

As well as the Health and Wellbeing symbols, Talking Mats have developed card sets to support conversations with children and young people, and also about social care. There is a Thinking Ahead resource which creates a safe place to discuss difficult issues about advanced illness and planning for the future. The Keeping Safe resource has been designed to explore sensitive issues in a non-threatening way and to support safeguarding.

Examples of Talking Mats

This Talking Mat was completed by a young person. Here the visual scale "how things are going" was used to help them consider their participation in a range of activities. They identified several areas of life that they felt were going well. This is an important aspect of rehabilitation conversations, as too often the focus can be on what is difficult, and not on what is successful. The young person also identified several areas of life that were not going well and from this, in collaboration with their therapist, they were able to set goals related to each of the areas identified.

"A goal without a plan is just a wish"

Antoine De Saint-Exupéry

The mat was repeated at the end of the therapy programme. The young person identified that things were now going well with their daily routines and they could organise themselves ready for school every day. This in turn had reduced their stress levels.



This Talking Mat was created by a man who had sustained traumatic orthopaedic injuries in a work place accident. He found talking about his future work goals overwhelming however, the Talking Mat helped him to sift and organise his thoughts in a non-threatening way.

For more information:

Take a look at the Talking Mats website: www.talkingmats.com

The blogs have lots of great examples of how Talking Mats are being used.

Try the digital Talking Mats Taster App for free.

Follow on Twitter or Facebook

Contact Rachel:

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With the support and advice of the therapist he weighed up the pros and cons of his options and together they set goals.



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