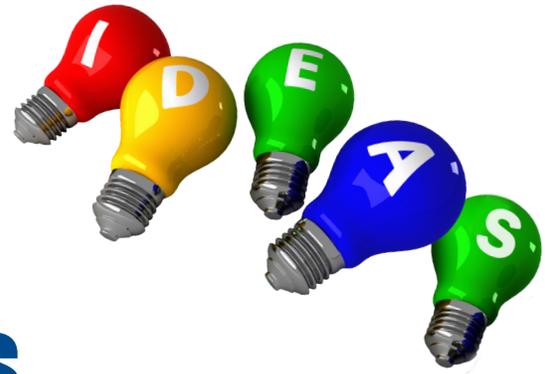


10 TIPS FOR MANAGING CHALLENGING CLIENTS



- 1. Strengthen your working relationship.** Establish rapport; build a foundation of trust, safety, and mutual respect. Without a “therapeutic alliance” little can be achieved.
- 2. Overcome resistance.** Take time to understand resistance – from both perspectives, yours and your client’s. Is there a good reason for resistance? Are past experiences contributing to it? Do you both understand the purpose and possibilities of your work together?
- 3. Avoid power struggles.** Taking a position of power is likely to escalate difficulty, not diminish it. Aim to share power with your client by providing information, choices, and opportunities to succeed. Learn to [defuse power struggles](#) rather than “taking the bait.”
- 4. Set some ground rules.** Both you and your clients have rights and responsibilities. Take time to discuss those, as well as the expectations you each bring to your work together. Discuss limits to confidentiality, reporting requirements, safety issues, and, especially for mandated clients, implications of not continuing your work together.
- 5. Stay safe.** Although your primary concern is to help your client, there is no expectation that you put your own safety at risk. Take [safety precautions](#) that are reasonable given the types of clients you will be working with. If in doubt, consult. If in danger, call 911.
- 6. Navigate conflict.** Your role is to get a job done – not always to keep everyone happy. Conflicts will arise and some clients don’t have effective conflict resolution skills. Model [appropriate conflict management](#); don’t let your emotional reactions derail your response.
- 7. Learn more about client issues.** Not all people who come through your doors are “employment ready.” Addictions, personality disorders, disabilities, chronic illness, severe mental health issues, and criminal records impact individuals looking for work and keeping their jobs once they’re hired. Information about the challenges your clients face will help you help them prepare for successful employment.
- 8. Assess effectively.** [Needs assessment](#) is the foundation of effective client-centred work. Understand what is standing between your client and successful attachment to the workforce. Take a strengths-based approach (e.g., identifying employability, transferrable, and essential skills) but don’t overlook barriers that impact employment readiness and, when necessary, assess for risk of self-harm (e.g., suicide) or danger to others (e.g., workplace violence).
- 9. Customize an employment strategy.** Some of your most challenging clients have had bad experiences with service providers – make this one different. Use a [SMART](#) goal approach to action planning. Link each action step to an identified employment need.
- 10. Know when to refer.** Inevitably, there will be some clients that you can’t help on your own. Be aware of complementary community resources and support clients to access appropriate services. Sometimes a referral ends your work with the client (i.e., you close the file); other times, however, it will be to achieve one component of an employment strategy and your role will be to monitor progress, evaluate success, and follow-up as required.



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