

## Module 3 ~ Working with People ~ Video

### Title slide

We've already focused on Developing a Risk Mindset in Module 1, and examined the concept of Working with Risk in Module 2... Now, I'm going to suggest to you that it's time to turn more of our attention towards who we're involving... in this challenge of working with risk? To achieve something like clear risk decisions... and putting positive risk-taking and a Strengths Based Approach into practice... it will require us to examine how we work with individuals... and how we work in teams.

### Next slide (Values)

Let's start by thinking about values... our values influence everything we think... everything we decide... and everything we do... this is going to include an influence over how we work with other people... including our considerations regarding risk, and risk-taking... and how we work with other people to achieve clear and confident decisions.

So whether you largely work alone... perhaps even enjoy working in isolation... or, you feel more comfortable as part of a group... perhaps you feel more secure and supported when collaborating as a team... our preferences are going to be largely shaped by something we spend little conscious thought on or discussing... our personal values! That level of comfort, or discomfort, we feel when working with other people, is something that's a combination of influences and experiences... that we've stored up, pretty much over a whole lifetime.

### Next slide (from Values to Principles)

Having said that... let's also think in terms of an underlying principle that would be relevant to this idea of working with others... In the United Kingdom, the Department of Health set out a whole series of principles back in 2007... in a publication that's available online... It's about Best Practice in Managing Risk...

One of the core principle's states what you see on this slide... that *risk management should be conducted in a spirit of collaboration... and based on a relationship between the service user and their carers, that is as trusting as possible.*

This is focusing very much on that need to develop collaborative working relationships, with the individuals who are in need... those people who need the service... but also with those who are closest to them... the people that provide, or offer, most of their care and support. The challenge for many practitioners though, in this situation, or this type of working relationship... is to 'openly and trustfully discuss' issues of risk... inquire into historical incidents, or events... and explore the potential for repeat patterns in these behaviours or these activities.

But this can be a very delicate balance... you're often feeling for the earliest opportunity in the relationship, to try and make a start on, what are, very sensitive discussions... It will be

important to frame these, in terms of the positive benefits to the individual... of exploring what will often be seen by them more usually as very negative events.

**Next slide** (philosophical conflict)

In whatever ways you happen to be working with risk... however you go about it... and particularly, however you go about developing your ideas with other people... it's often going to present conflict. When you're put into a position of trying to balance the needs of the individual, with the safety and the protection of others... whether that's the close relatives of a person... whether that was people working with that individual... or indeed, rarely, but occasionally... thinking in terms of, protection and safety of the general public... It's important to recognize that the types of risks that generate these conflicts are rare events... that's a message that I hope comes through strongly throughout the whole of the Positive Risk-Taking training materials.

Nonetheless, we must recognize the needs of the individual, in rare circumstances, will not sit easily with either the real, or more often, perhaps, the perceived fears of the public.

As outlined in Module 1 these conflicts can often be the cause of us taking a more cautious or defensive position... particularly if we fear being blamed if an idea goes wrong. In such a situation we become more concerned with stopping things going wrong, than we do trying to do the right thing... or move things forward... or take the risk. But, this may not necessarily be the best option for the person we should be serving!

So the risks of defensive practice, might be for example, the failure to effectively involve and empower people in the whole conversation around their risk, and their risk taking... ultimately, a failure in working with people!

**Next slide** (an empowering process)

First of all, it's always important to remember information is power... so share it! And that works in all aspects of our lives, not just in terms of risk... and sharing, implies working with people. An empowering process comes out of listening to and understanding the other person... their personal experiences and perceptions of risk... not quickly jumping to our own conclusions of what we think they are saying!

This collaborative discussion is about jointly identifying early warning signs... so, if we're thinking about taking risks... have we really held that conversation, about anticipating what could go wrong? How we'd identify that together... negotiating, bargaining... but keeping that bargain very much focused on the individual... the person themselves... using person-centred as the main focus of the language here. In reality, working with people is about relationships... and working together within those relationships.

The last point here identifies this idea of helping people to express their choices... and to receive flexible support around those choices... being responsive... being open with people... to mutual learning, as part of this working relationship, as part of these collaborative discussions.

So, in summary, empowering people really involves good discussion... being aware of choices... listening to priorities... supporting people to make decisions.

**Next slide** (shaking hands image)

This image reminds us, that we all need a helping hand occasionally... particularly if we're going to achieve those very challenging, difficult goals... cooperation through working with people is usually going to be better for all involved.

**Next slide** (engagement is...)

Engagement of the working relationship needs to be seen as a separate function that requires specific attention in its own right... It can be easy to take engagement for granted and think of assessment as being the first thing we get involved in... *The potential success of all subsequent parts of the process may depend on the investment put in from the start into developing this trust...* But working on trust is something we must always be paying attention to, and never take for granted.

**Next slide** (Keys to engagement)

Engagement is an attempt to build something positive, as a solid foundation for building a working relationship.

At the outset of my case management career... way back in 1990... I still remember an important question being raised... *do you want to be a travel companion or a travel agent?* The distinction is very significant... as a travel agent, you have a limited relationship with a person, focused on directing them to what might best meet their needs. Whereas a travel companion, is prepared to undertake the journey with the person... a much deeper relationship emerges, with a fuller picture of ongoing changing needs and wishes.

For positive risk-taking decisions, my advice to you, is to work towards being that travel companion... as difficult and challenging risk-taking decisions will be made more clearly, and confidently, the stronger that trusting relationship is!

The importance of the first meeting can't be underestimated... so preparation is key... Remember the saying: you don't get a second chance to create first impressions! Mistakes made because of poor preparation can be very difficult to turn around... leaving you on the back foot playing a game of catch-up.

Creating a difference in the person's mind can go a long way to putting them at ease... they may have met many workers before... and are expecting the same old questions to be trotted out. As a worker, you may feel under pressure to 'get the things done' that the organisation expects of a first meeting... my advice is not to give in to that temptation. Treat this first contact as your chance to initiate a partnership, not an interrogation! This is even more important when thinking about launching into the negative language of the risk assessment!

But, it's not just about difference... use the similarities, if they will open up a conversation, rather than it feeling like an interview.

**Next slide** (Teamwork... airplanes)

I've focused most the attention, in this talk, up to now, on engaging an individual, in risk and in risk-taking discussions... but in some cases, whether it is two people or more... carefully coordinated teamwork is required to bring about the best results.

I have previously emphasised that engaging individuals is our primary concern... but in the interests of creative collaboration... challenging, positive risk-taking decisions, will often require the involvement of more than two people... who could, for example, be part of a specific team... or part of a group of people from across teams, across agencies... So, this part of the video will focus on teamworking.

**Next slide** (team quote)

A quote from Tahir Shah offers a very positive, and big, vision of teamwork... *With an enthusiastic team, you can achieve almost anything...* However, certainly from my consultancy point of view, having done a lot of work involved in training and developing teams... in reality, it requires a lot of attention... a lot of work, on teamworking itself... on the focus and the function of teamwork itself.

I'm just, kind of, reflecting back on situations where, yes, there have been major rifts and difficulties in teams... People not easily coming to a similar perspective... say, for example, on how to manage an escalating suicide risk... some people preferring a more restrictive option of hospitalisation... while others in the same team may be looking at the details from a completely different perspective, seeing more of the protective factors, and possibly the safety net of contingency plans within a specific situation... So, this concept of teamwork needs a lot of continuous work on it... a lot of effort and negotiation!

**Next slide** (meetings...)

When you think of teamworking, one of the first things that usually comes to mind are the team meetings... the supposedly natural way of organising and planning the work together.

Well... this quote from J K Galbraith provides a note of caution, before we plunge into, a lazy call just to have meetings... our first consideration should be not to have meetings just for meetings sake. Because, as JK Galbraith says... *meetings are indispensable, when you don't want to do anything...* when you don't want to achieve anything. And I've certainly sat in many meetings, where the idea of democracy kicks in... so that we can all be chipping in our own two-penneth... with a result that nobody's really taking the decision... we all hope someone else will take up the baton of responsibility!

So good meetings really do require skilled chairing... a clear purpose in its agenda... and encourage an inclusive culture. They need to be time-focused, as well... so that we can focus

on achieving timely decisions. Remember... the ideal has been achieved when everyone wants to be at the meeting, because they feel they're missing out by not being there!

**Next slide** (When it comes to taking risks)

Thinking about positive risk taking... the very focus of this entire course... when it comes to taking the risk, I just want to remind you, that we're faced with very challenging decisions... It's perfectly reasonable, and human, to be fearful of blame... a blame culture... But, I will say, that collaboration with others will usually achieve more confident shared decisions.

The individual, particularly if there is an experience or a perception of a blame culture... might well revert to risk averse decisions... defensive decisions, for the wrong reasons...

A shared decision, can then lead, usually, to more confident action... And, I will suggest to you that in terms of working with people... a cohesive group is more difficult to undermine... than the individual acting alone.

**Next slide** (Working with people)

I'll finish this presentation with an image that goes a long way to capturing the overall message of this module... working with people is essentially offering a helping hand. It's about supporting each other to achieve what is important to each of us!