Connexions National Evaluation and Research Strategy

Developing good practice in Connexions: Techniques and Tools for Working with Young People

connexions

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Acknowledgements

This guide to developing good practice was the idea of Martin Patrick of The Humberside Partnership. With colleagues at Connexions Humber he explored the potential of a range of techniques and tools during the pilot phase of Connexions. This project is a development of that work. His invaluable contribution at all stages of the research is acknowledged with many thanks. We are grateful to the Connexions Service National Unit for funding the research and particularly to Derren Payton, project manager. Additional funding was provided by Connexions Humber and the Humberside Partnership, and we are grateful for their generous support. We would like to thank the Connexions Partnerships and PAs who took part in the research and especially the managers who hosted visits and arranged discussions with staff. They are Paul Wilkinson (Cheshire and Warrington), Susan Spoors (County Durham), Judith Cook (Cornwall and Devon) and Angela Hill (South London).

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1 Introduction

The techniques and tools covered in this guide are for use in interventions with young people, usually following or alongside assessment using the Connexions Framework for Assessment, Planning, Implementation and Review (APIR). They are distinct from assessment tools in that they are intended not to measure skills or abilities but for personal development and to improve an individual's capacity to bring about change[1]. They are also distinct from psychotherapy or counselling aimed at exploring problems and their underlying causes. They have been usefully described as 'communication techniques' (Barker and Irving, 2001) and are derived from counselling approaches, such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

Background to the guide

The need for Connexions Partnerships to find new ways of assisting young people experiencing barriers to progression or in danger of dropping out was recognised at an early stage in the development of Connexions. During the pilot phase of Connexions, The Humberside Partnership explored the potential of a range of techniques and tools for working with young people, derived from counselling. These were assembled into a 'toolkit' designed to support the work of Personal Advisers (PAs) and others delivering services within Connexions. The toolkit, available on the Partnership's Website (www.getting-on.co.uk) reviews and evaluates tools and approaches that have been identified as potentially useful in helping individuals to move forward. As Connexions developed into a full service Martin Patrick, who led the 'toolkit' project for The Humberside Partnership, identified a need to conduct research on techniques and tools within Connexions. The idea was that this should establish current usage of techniques, levels of training, the potential for further development and issues relating to practice. This guide is the result of that idea. It is aimed at helping Partnerships and PAs to be more effective in their interventions with young people and to achieve better outcomes, particularly with young people in the priority group[2].

Current use of techniques and tools in Connexions

The research began with a survey of all 28 Phase 1 and 2 Partnerships to establish baseline information on the current usage of techniques and tools within Connexions. Their responses strongly indicated that this is an area under development within the service but has already got off to a strong start[3]: of the 23 Partnerships who responded, all but one were using at least one of the following approaches:

- *Motivational interviewing*
- *Neuro-Linguistic Programming*

1 The distinction is, however, not clear since some techniques aimed at personal development include assessment as a means of identifying issues and measuring change in attitude.

2 These are young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) and potential NEETs irrespective of ability or circumstances.

3 This is partly because many careers services began to introduce techniques and tools following the DfEE policy, from 1998, to focus the delivery of guidance services more directly on need and particularly to address disaffection, low aspiration, low achievement unsuccessful progression to learning beyond age 16.

- *Brief (or Solution Focused) Therapy*
- *Cognitive Behavioural Therapy*
- *The Rickter Scale*

Of these, Motivational Interviewing, Neuro-Linguistic Programming and the Rickter Scale were most widely used, adopted by more than half of the Partnerships. Eleven of the Partnerships were using three or more approaches. The background research confirmed that Connexions Partnerships perceive a need for techniques and tools for use with young people, particularly with individuals requiring intensive support because of barriers to participation, learning or progression.

In discussions with Partnerships it was apparent that many were experimenting with particular techniques and tools, through trials of training, piloting and evaluation, before deciding which to adopt as standard practice. One manager described this as 'deciding which horse to back'. A number of Partnerships had gone a stage further and were developing their own approach to working with young people combining various approaches.

Purpose of the guide

The guide is intended to assist Connexions Partnerships, managers and PAs to develop good practice in working with young people. This includes deciding which techniques to introduce and the training necessary for PAs. It is aimed at the following:

- *The standard PA, not those working as specialists who will require more in-depth training and practice in counselling*
- *For use in face to face contact with young people (although some of the techniques are equally applicable for telephone contact)*
- *For use principally with young people (although some techniques may also be useful with parents and other adults)*

Although many of the techniques and tools described in the guide are derived from counselling, PAs are not counsellors, with the exception of specialist PAs trained in such areas as drugs and alcohol counselling. The role of the Connexions PA is not to find solutions to young people's problems but more specifically to address disaffection and under-achievement and to increase participation in education, employment and training. Although this will often include intensive support, PAs should not adopt the role of counsellor and to help find solutions to personal problems, for example drug misuse or mental health problems. They must be careful not to take on this role, and when they become aware of serious and deep-seated problems, refer a young person to a specialist PA or an appropriate agency.

What are 'techniques and tools'?

In explaining the approaches included in this guide two distinctions should be made: first between psychological assessment in the form of psychometric tests; and second between assessment and intervention. On the first of these, the approaches included in this guide could be described as 'communication techniques' (see above) and are derived from theories of counselling. They are distinct from psychological assessment which aims to assess ability, aptitude and skills, typically off-the-shelf psychometric tests. These have formed the basis of much assessment in careers guidance for many years and will continue to play an important role in assisting career decisions. However, when working with disaffected or disengaged young people, PAs may need to give greater emphasis to motivational issues and attitude. This includes enabling a young person to become more aware of their thoughts and attitudes which present barriers to participation and progression, rather than focusing on what qualifications or skills they might need to follow certain paths. Such work requires particular skills on the part of the PA, particularly in interacting with young people to help them to identify their thoughts, beliefs and attitudes. To do this effectively requires an understanding of how techniques and tools can work, and this involves a basic understanding of their theoretical grounding. This is explained within the guide.

Assessment and the APIR

The emphasis of this guide is on interventions with young people. Some of the techniques also include assessment by the client, usually to measure progress made by the intervention. Sometimes the distinction between assessment and intervention is not clear, particularly where the client takes a very active role in assessment and, in so doing, identifies barriers and possible solutions. The key tool for assessment within Connexions is the Framework for Assessment, Planning, Implementation and Review (APIR). Its aim is to consider a young person's strengths and needs across a wide range of factors which may be relevant to their transition, including education and employment, social and personal developments, family and environment and personal health. It includes creating an 'assessment profile', a visual summary of a young person's situation, developing a personal action plan and associated monitoring and recording. Use of the APIR alone is unlikely to identify possible steps towards the resolution of problems and barriers. Therefore, the aim of this guide is to identify techniques that can be used in conjunction with this tool. Indeed, the need for techniques for use with the APIR was found to be a key consideration of Partnerships in developing practice in this area. Almost half of the Partnerships surveyed were either using the APIR alongside counselling approaches or were working on it.

Why are techniques and tools needed?

It might be argued that techniques and tools are unnecessary, that to assist a young person to overcome barriers and problems involves the application of personal skills which a PA brings to their job through experience in their own relationships, in friendships, partnership or child-rearing. Some PAs may be highly skilled communicators and be able to inspire people to seek change. They may work effectively through using intuition about what is likely to work with a young person. The problem with PAs relying on their personality and intuition is that these may not equip them for working with the clients they encounter within Connexions, or they may be effective with some young people and not others. It is impossible for a PA to perceive themselves as their clients see them and to adapt their personality to make it more effective. They simply cannot know how they appear to a particular young person, since this will depend on their past experiences with other adults. Indeed, the young person themselves may not be aware of why they instantly like a particular PA and not another.

A second, and more important reason why PAs cannot rely on their personalities and use the same skills they use to support friends and relatives is that the role is different. It centres on assisting a young person to improve achievement, engagement and make progress in their education and career. As such, they have a different role to that of a parent or friend. A good friend will listen to someone's problems and, through a combination of support and advice, make them feel better and perhaps more positive but will not necessarily help them to progress. This is because for change to happen, the young person themselves has to take the necessary steps forward. Therefore, the successful PA will equip the young person with the attitudes and skills to undertake this change. A lively, positive and encouraging PA may pass on some of their outlook to a young person, but without the skills to develop and maintain this, it may evaporate once the contact is lost.

Finally, it is important to recognise that the service delivered within Connexions differs from that of past provision and that the role of the PA has changed from that of careers adviser in some fundamental respects. PAs interviewed referred to the emphasis on 'hard to help' young people, on identifying barriers to participation and progression and the need for techniques to carry out this work. At the same time, it was acknowledged that the refocusing of the Careers Service in the late 1990s to address disaffection, low aspiration and low achievement had put this process in motion. Therefore, many PAs joining from careers services were prepared for the demands of their new role. What many lacked was a set of tools to help them carry it out.

Can techniques and tools be harmful?

Counselling, and the more in-depth approaches of psychotherapy, are widely advocated, but are also frequently criticised. Stories of individuals 'damaged' as a result of being encouraged to delve deep into their past and to explore their problems are commonplace. Some people argue that such practice merely exacerbates personal problems and difficulties that would otherwise be resolved by the passage of time. Whether this is true or not, this is not the approach advocated here. It is not the idea that PAs should become counsellors or psychotherapists. The purpose of this guide is to present techniques and tools that can move young people beyond their current problems in order to achieve and progress. Therefore, this is not a guide to counselling young people, although many features of such an approach might be useful to the PA.

The benefit of using specific techniques and tools derived from counselling is that they give a structure to PA interventions with young people. This removes the need for PAs to rely on their own personality or intuition. Such an approach may lead to personal doubt and loss of confidence when young people do not respond. A PA might even undergo a loss of confidence in their interactions with others, outside of the guidance intervention. Therefore, having techniques and tools can give a PA confidence in their role. They can literally equip them to do the job. As a PA interviewed explained: 'When I first arrived in the role I wanted the tools and armoury to give me confidence, but there was nothing there for me to use'. This guide is intended to help meet that need.

The techniques and tools described in this guide have a theoretical base in understandings of human behaviour and, to be used effectively, it is important that this is understood. A key component of safe and successful use of techniques is that the PA knows what he or she is doing and why. Therefore, it is important that training in techniques and tools includes their theoretical grounding and rationale. It is also important to recognise that, while techniques are sometimes 'dressed up' in complex language, they are based on quite simple ideas and are relatively easy to understand.

The techniques presented in the guide have been chosen for their inherent safety and their practicality. They are all approaches that Connexions Partnerships have adopted or are in the process of introducing. Many are based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, which emphasises positive thinking and personal empowerment. They do not involve any form of psychotherapy or investigation of the causes of personal problems. They are client-centred, but this actually enhances their safety, by separating the client's perceptions and actions from the beliefs and values of the PA.

It is also important to note that even PAs who are not using specific techniques and tools will be using some method of working with young people. These might be developed over time, or based on what a PA has found to work with other people in other situations, for example friends and family. However, it should not be assumed that these approaches are harmless. For example, it is quite inappropriate and potentially harmful to use approaches that encourage a young person to win personal approval from a PA, or foster a mutually dependent relationship, although these might be appropriate parenting styles. The difficulty is that, if contact with a young person is lost because they find the approach unhelpful, the negative impact of a particular contact may go unnoticed. More often, the absence of an approach will merely be ineffective. As Carr states in relation to working with children and adolescents,

> *'Talking supportively to children about their problems is not an effective treatment in and of itself' (2000:312).*

Although the techniques presented in this guide are designed to minimise the possibility of any harm to the young person or adviser, any technique and tool can be harmful if it is not used properly and within a clearly defined structure and with appropriate systems of support. For this reason Sections 2 and 4 of the guide cover such matters as ground rules, confidentiality, training and supervision. These are important not just to protect young people, but for the protection and job satisfaction of PAs.

How effective are they?

Existing studies tend to focus on the use of particular techniques in particular settings, for example schools or social services, or with certain groups, for example substance abusers. Many such studies are trials or projects of limited duration. There has been little systematic research to establish the effectiveness of specific techniques with specific groups. This seems to be particularly true with regard to young people (see Somers and Flanagan, 1997). Some projects claim to find particular techniques effective but the number of young people and interventions are invariably too small to be statistically reliable.

Because the circumstances and needs of young people vary so widely, it cannot be assumed that an approach or technique that works with a particular set of young people and advisers in a particular setting could work equally well in Connexions. Moreover, PAs should not expect techniques they find to be effective with some young people to be effective with all. When using a particular technique or tool, PAs should be clear about why, what they are aiming to achieve and if it is therefore the most appropriate and useful.

One key factor which may lead to wide variation in effectiveness is the motivation of the young person. A young person who does not acknowledge or recognise their problems may be both generally difficult to work with, but also not respond to particular techniques. The Connexions PA diploma handbook (Module 2) provides useful guidance on working with young people who are 'unaware', to raise their awareness of their difficulties. PAs interviewed saw their greatest challenge as providing assistance to young people with low levels of motivation and felt the greatest need for techniques for use with this group.

Care should also be taken in applying techniques that have been successful with adults to work with young people, since the circumstances of young people are different in some key respects. To give two examples: they may be more likely than adults to have difficulties with communication and with expressing their thoughts and feelings; they may have little control over their circumstances which are presenting barriers and problems and have less power than an adult to change their situation. Therefore, the particular situation of young people in general and of those in the priority Connexions group should be considered when selecting techniques and tools for use during interventions.

Despite these precautionary remarks, existing literature on approaches to counselling and working with young people includes some invaluable advice and guidance for good practice. This is both general, relating to work with young people in general, and more specific guidance for working with young people in particular circumstances and facing particular issues. It may therefore be helpful for PAs to look at the findings of studies which have worked with clients similar to their own, to help develop their practice and for indications of what might be most effective. Some recent studies using particular techniques are listed in the bibliography. The guide also includes websites with further information about techniques and tools, and other contact information.

Most importantly, the absence of firm evidence on effectiveness means that Connexions Partnerships must themselves be prepared to experiment with approaches. Their choice of techniques and tools must be based on a full assessment of their potential benefit. Their use should then be closely monitored through regular supervision of PAs, evaluation and review.

2 Getting off the ground

The guidance in this section is from diverse sources. These include research on approaches to working with young people and adults, guides produced by agencies working with young people, and the experiences and views of Connexions managers and PAs. These are listed in the bibliography. This is not intended to be an exhaustive guide, but to offer some basic guidance to PAs and managers embarking on what for many is new territory. The section covers the following:

- *Preparing yourself*
- *Establishing a PA-client relationship*
- *The best environment*
- *Making some ground rules*
- *Confidentiality*
- *Length of the period of contact*

Preparing yourself

Literature on counselling and on working with young people frequently states the need for a 'no harm' approach. This almost always refers to possible harm to the young person. This is an important principle. However, it is also important that PAs are not harmed in their work with young people, through any of the following:

- *Feeling upset by a young person's circumstances, thoughts or feelings*
- *Feeling guilt at one's own good fortune*
- *Becoming aware of one's own problems*
- *Remembering one's past problems, which may be unresolved*

Various steps can be taken to minimise the possibility of such problems arising. Firstly, Partnerships should ensure that they have supervision systems in place. These should consist of regular meetings (at least once a month) between a PA and his or her manager. At these meetings PAs should report on their interventions and raise any issues that they have found problematic, either professionally or personally. In order for PAs' managers to be able to provide the necessary support and guidance it is important that they are fully familiar with the approaches in which PAs are trained and are using. Therefore all staff with a supervisory role should attend all training courses and undertake further reading to improve their understanding of any techniques used by staff.

The Connexions Humber Adviser Interview Training Pack[4] (see Section 6) emphasises the importance of 'personal awareness' among PAs and includes the following as a check list:

- *Try to be aware of the danger signals, monitor your own emotions and reactions to clients during interviews*
- *Keep interventions with clients within the parameters of your work*
- *Before closing the interview review with the client what you have both agreed to do*
- *Ensure you are able to carry out any actions you have agreed to undertake within the agreed time scale by incorporating these into work plans*
- *At the end of an interview spend a few minutes reflecting on it. Be aware of how you are feeling and, if appropriate, seek support*

The training pack emphasises the importance of PAs checking their own support systems. These are in addition to any formal system established by Partnerships and include colleagues, friends and partners. It is suggested that PAs identify others who can provide support if, for example a colleague leaves.

Childline has provided training to Connexions Partnerships on the complexities and dilemmas of the PA-client relationship, aimed particularly at PAs transferring from the careers service, but also newly appointed PAs. Among other issues, this training covers the PA's own support system[5].

Establishing a PA-client relationship

It is essential for the PA to establish a good working relationship with a young person. If this is not achieved, a young person is unlikely to be willing to explore the changes he or she might take and to build on these over a period of time. A good relationship cannot be achieved by simply being friendly and pleasant, although this is obviously important. Rapport is built up over a period of time, as the young person and PA understand each other and their roles. Building rapport is therefore an important skill within the PA role and is explored in Section 3. This section presents other components of a good PA-client relationship.

Existing studies and guides emphasise the importance of the following:

- *Introductions and setting ground rules*
- *Where the young person and PA meet - the environment*
- *Confidentiality*
- *Length of the contact*

4 This was designed to equip PAs with additional interviewing skills in order to undertake the APIR more effectively with young people. It includes techniques from 'Success Ladders' designed by Occupational Psychologist Anna Lawrence as well as CBT and SFBT.
5 For further information about Childline training contact Rob Gardner, Training Manager 0115 924 2544

Introductions and setting ground rules

At the first session it is important that the PA introduces his or herself, explains their role and establishes some 'ground rules' with the young person. These include:

- *Clarifying the purpose of the session*
- *Explaining the role of the PA*
- *Establishing confidentiality*

It is important that the young person knows what a PA does and how they can help. With some young people, this might include raising the possibility of referral. Being clear about the scope of Connexions and PA role from the outset can give confidence to a young person that Connexions can help, or can reduce the possibility of unrealistic expectations. In order to establish rapport it is important that ground rules are stated briefly, clearly but also in a friendly way. A young person is likely to be put off by what they may see as a bureaucratic approach.

Ground rules may need to be re-stated at subsequent sessions. Some ground rules will need to be tailored to the young person, for example if they have been abusive or violent in similar settings, the unacceptability of such behaviour may need to be stated. Similarly, if a young person has missed earlier appointments or been late, the need for reliability and punctuality may need to be clearly stated.

Although introductions are important, PAs must be aware that some young people may have pressing needs and find such preliminaries unhelpful. It is therefore important that the PA recognises situations where immediate action is required to assist a young person, for example where they have become homeless or think they may be pregnant. In such circumstances preliminary explanations may still be necessary but need to be as brief as possible.

Showing respect

Young people vary widely in their attitude to those in authority, some are submissive and expect to follow instruction, while others will react against direction. Young people sometimes place a high value on 'respect', which includes being treated fairly and with acceptance. They may be sensitive to attitudes or behaviour that they see as treating them as inferior. Whatever attitude the young person brings with them to the session, it is important that the PA is careful to show respect. This includes a number of small but important details, including being on time for the meeting, using the young person's name and remembering details of what was said at previous meetings.

It is also important to tell a young person how long the session is likely to last. While this may not be of any importance to them, it may help them to focus their thoughts, or encourage them to think through issues in more depth. It will also avoid possible damage to rapport when a PA has to finish a session before a young person is ready to do so.

The environment

A young person needs to feel comfortable in order to express or raise issues of concern to them. Much will be dependent on the skills and approach adopted by the PA, but the physical environment may be influential. In some cases there may be little choice about where to meet a young person, but the PA should always be aware that the environment could affect the attitude and behaviour of the young person. Existing studies refer to particular issues in relation to seeing young people at school or in their home.

Young people in school may feel that the intervention is less confidential in a school setting, because information about pupils is commonly shared between teachers and the staff team. Additional reassurances may therefore be necessary. They may also feel that other pupils are aware of the contact and therefore 'in the spot-light'. The possibility of this will depend partly on the culture of the school and in particular whether it has a strong pastoral care system.

The advantage of meeting a young person in their home is that they are more likely to be relaxed and at ease. However, the main issue for PAs is that the young person will not necessarily be alone. Parents may be present and may wish to be involved in the intervention. PAs interviewed saw this as sometimes problematic, since a concerned parent may dominate a session. On the other hand, PAs had also often found that the involvement of parents is sometimes helpful. It can help to identify ways in which the parent can help to find solutions. Therefore a PA will need to decide when to welcome a parent's involvement and when not to. When parents are present at an interview session, wherever it takes place, it is important that the PA establishes ground rules at the start. These will need to be tailored to the particular circumstances, but will include everyone taking their turn to speak.

The timing of a meeting is also important, in particular PAs should try to ensure that it does not prevent a young person from attending an activity they enjoy, since this is likely to influence their attitude towards the session.

Confidentiality

The quality of the relationship between a PA and young person is determined to a great extent by the degree of trust established and maintained. A young person will want to know that the PA will not talk about them inappropriately and that information given in confidence will not be passed on to another agency without their permission. PAs should work within their own Partnership's code of practice on confidentiality and exchange of information.

It is not reasonable to give 'blanket' confidentiality for two main reasons: first, because the service to a young person may be considerably improved if information can be shared with other agencies, for example the school or social workers, secondly, for reasons of safety. On the first of these, it may need to be explained to a young person that they cannot be helped unless something of what they say is communicated to others. The young person should then be made aware of what information will be passed on to others, when and for what purpose. This will include the following:

- *Sharing of information with other Connexions staff to ensure a co-ordinated approach and to 'sign-post' to other services*
- *Sharing of information with other agencies, when referral to specialist help is needed*

It is important that the young person is made aware of such practice so that they do not feel that trust has been breached when information about them has been shared. In fact, this process may actually be beneficial in helping a young person clarify what other people need to know in order to help them to achieve their aims.

Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed where a PA believes that a young person may be in some kind of danger or is endangering the well-being of others. This might include information about serious criminal activity, suicidal feelings or physical or emotional abuse. Ideally, in such circumstances the young person will give their permission before any information is passed on to the appropriate agency and are kept fully informed and supported by Connexions and the PA throughout.

Length of the period of contact

Some PAs interviewed raised the issue of the period of time over which a young person should have regular contact with a PA. Some projects set up to provide support to young people, for example coaching or mentoring, have imposed a limit on the length of contact of about 8 weeks. Although there is general agreement among writers on counselling that the contact should not go on forever, there is no consensus on the necessary time since this will depend on the circumstances of the young person. Telling a young person at the outset that they will receive help for a limited period only may place undue pressure on them to find solutions and make progress, and could lead to despondency when progress is slower than anticipated.

Some PAs interviewed were concerned that, by leaving the period of contact open, a young person might become dependent on them through a lengthy period of contact. The way to avoid this danger is not to curtail the contact with the young person. This may lead to a young person feeling let down and abandoned. A better approach is to work effectively with the young person and enable them to take responsibility for themselves and to become more self-reliant. After this process begins, the PA can reduce the counselling input and develop more of a 'mentoring' role. The frequency of contact may also be reduced. The young person should also be given clear opportunities to say when they would like to contact to end. When this decision is taken it is useful for the PA to summarise the contact they have had and any outcomes achieved. The young person should be encouraged to express their thoughts and feelings about ending the contact. The PA should also ensure that they know where to find further support should they need it[6].

6 The Personal Adviser Handbook (2002) produced by Connexions Cornwall and Devon includes detailed guidance on bringing interactions to an end.

3 Basic counselling techniques

In Section 5 we describe a number of approaches to working with young people, derived from counselling theory and techniques. This section looks at the basics of a counselling approach. It includes guidance on the following:

- *Acceptance and empathy*
- *Active listening*
- *Reflective listening*
- *Asking open-ended questions*
- *Cultural sensitivity*

The types of approaches described in this guide are 'directive' rather than 'non-directive' counselling. This means that young people are guided and assisted in trying out various solutions. 'Non-directive' counselling puts a stronger onus on direction on the individual being counselled and the subject or direction of discussion is left open (see Jones, 1977). This is more usually practised with adults in psychotherapy. It is possible that young people in the priority Connexions group will require a more directive approach than other young people because they may be overwhelmed by their problems and have difficulty in identifying solutions without such help[7].

Acceptance and empathy

To establish a good relationship with a young person and for the PA's approach to be effective, it is important that the PA accepts the young person as they are. This includes their appearance, manner and current situation. This acceptance can be communicated through adopting a friendly and open manner, through acting with respect, as described above and always showing interest in what they say.

Empathy refers to understanding how a young person feels, both in the meeting with the PA and more generally. It is important for the PA to both feel and show empathy because an intervention is likely to be more effective if it is based on such understanding. A PA can demonstrate empathy by listening to a young person and seeking their perspective on their situation. He or she should try to understand what they are saying, and to see the young person, their life and their situation as they themselves see it. This does not involve accepting it as true or accurately reflecting reality.

Understanding a young person's perspective on their situation is essential in order to help them to find solutions that are both appropriate and acceptable to them. In adopting an empathetic approach, a PA should show acceptance and warmth, but this should not lead to over-involvement. In particular, a PA should not try not to identify too strongly with a young person or take on responsibility for their problems (see Section 2).

7 This point is made in relation to counselling of 'street children' by Brown and Falshaw (1998).

Praise and encouragement

A number of counselling approaches emphasise the importance of giving praise and encouragement to clients. In Solution Focused Brief Therapy (see Section 5) this includes giving compliments. The Personal Adviser Interview Training Pack commissioned by Connexions Humber (see Section 6) emphasises the importance of being positive and non-critical in giving feedback to a young person. The use of praise and encouragement are seen to help to develop an individual's self-confidence and to build a positive relationship between adviser and client. At the same time, it warns against the danger of being sycophantic.

Active listening

It is important that the PA gives a young person their full attention during any intervention. This includes not just listening to what they are saying, but discerning the feelings behind the words. This includes their tone of voice, but also what is often described as 'body language'. This includes the way they are sitting and looking, whether they are tense or relaxed or expressing other emotions physically, for example through nail biting or yawning. It is particularly important that emotional stress is identified, because this may indicate a need for immediate action. PAs should not, however, be overly concerned about reading a young person's 'body language'. As with spoken language, it may sometimes be very individual and difficult to interpret. Moreover, a PA should not attempt to be a psychotherapist. Body language is simply something that PAs should be aware of in trying to understand a young person's perspective and feelings.

It is just as important for a PA to be aware of his or her own body language. This includes giving full attention to a young person, and demonstrating this by maintaining eye contact and verbal and non-verbal feedback. Therefore PAs should keep note taking to a minimum, at least while the young person is talking. Getting up to find notes or to take telephone calls should also be avoided. Watching the clock, doodling, scratching or yawning are absolutely unacceptable!

Active listening involves not just giving one's full attention, but participating both by directing the discussion and clarifying. this can usefully include:

- *summarising the issues*
- *identifying key issues*
- *re-stating what the young person is saying*

This can help to clarify what the real issues are to a young person, for example that barriers to their participation stem from their previous poor performance in school and associated feelings of inadequacy. This can then help to focus discussion about possible solutions.

Reflective listening

The technique of reflective listening has been described as 'listening in the same way as when we are being given instructions'[8]. It involves repeating back essential points made by the speaker, using ones own words. Its use can therefore both check and demonstrate that the PA has understood what the young person is saying. The technique is useful at all stages of an interview, including at the outset to ensure that issues such as the purpose of the meeting are understood and agreed.

It does not matter if, in reflecting back, the PA demonstrates that they have not understood something said by the young person because the young person has the opportunity to correct them and to clarify their perspective or situation.

Reflective listening may also include interpreting a young person's feelings through their tone of voice or body language, for example saying something like 'I've noticed you look happy when you talk about cooking for your Gran'. The Connexions Humber training pack (see Section 6) makes the additional point that a young person's body language may actually belie their real thoughts and feelings. For example, a young person who is quiet and uncooperative in an interview may appear uninterested, when in reality they are very keen to be helped but are nervous or lack confidence. Reflective listening and open-ended questions may be helpful in such situations.

Clearly, reflective listening is not a style one would use in normal conversation where it might be both odd and irritating to have one's views repeated or restated. However, PAs should remember that they are making an intervention, that they should expect to use techniques which they would not use in their normal day to day interactions and, more importantly, that it may be helpful to the young person.

Asking open-ended questions

We have already stated the importance of understanding the young person's perspective. This means that questions asked by the PA should be open-ended, aimed at drawing out a young person's own views on their situation. Questions that are phrased to give yes/no answers do not allow a young person to explore issues as they might like. Some young people may not respond to this type of questioning, particularly at first. Consequently, a PA should allow a young person time to respond to open-ended questions but not allow prolonged silences, which some young people may find awkward. In such circumstances a PA may have to take more of a 'leading' role than usual.

A PA should not ask a young person to accept a particular point of view, but encourage them to think it out for themselves. The PA should also avoid giving a young person advice. If they believe a young person should take a particular course of action, this is more likely to be achieved if a young person takes the decision themselves. Therefore the PA should assist a young person in taking their own decision about appropriate action. To do so, a young person may require information, and the role of the PA includes giving such assistance. However, it is important not to 'dress up' advice as information.

The young person should be encouraged to review their decisions, and how they have reached them. They should also be encouraged to lead the process of review, identifying any problems with the action taken and how these may be addressed.

8 See Young People Now, Counselling in the Classroom, October 1991, p15

Cultural sensitivity

It is important for PAs to recognise that young people may have different values to their own and to those which they may believe are generally held or accepted. Not only should a PA accept a young person's beliefs and views, they should also show empathy and not attempt to impose their own alternative stance. Where a young person's views result in barriers to progression, a PA should work with them to explore their situation as they are experiencing it and assist them in identifying solutions within their own framework.

There is some debate whether counselling approaches are more successful when the two sides are similar culturally, for example whether black young people are best seen by black counsellors. While a black adviser is more likely to relate to the experiences of a black young person than a white adviser, the consensus is that the similarity or dissimilarity between personal characteristics of the client and adviser is of relatively little importance. What is important is that the adviser accepts a young person's perspective and does not question it because it does not match their own. This does not mean they must believe it is real, but that they should recognise it as no less real than their own[9]. The PA must therefore recognise that they have their own perspective and that, like the young person's, this is an interpretation of experience rather than reflecting an objective situation (see discussion of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy in Section 5).

Of course, a young person may initially feel more at ease or 'bond' more readily with a PA who appears, speaks and behaves in a similar way to them or in ways they find familiar. However, regardless of race, ethnicity or culture, they may also respond well to a PA who reminds them of their mother, father, brother, favourite aunt or television personality. Equally, a young person may take an initial dislike to a PA who in some way reminds them of an unpopular teacher or disapproving uncle. The difficulty for a PA is that they cannot guess whether they are likely to have such an advantage or disadvantage with an individual young person. This is not least because the young person may themselves be unaware of such comparisons and feelings. It is therefore almost impossible for a PA to adapt themselves in order to increase their acceptability to a young person. In fact, to attempt to do so is likely to result in dishonesty as the PA presents a false image that they may not be able to maintain. The best approach therefore is to be genuine and to rely on skills rather than on personal characteristics and qualities. If these are successful in improving a young person's motivation and engagement, a good and effective relationship will certainly develop along the way.

9 For a discussion of issues of cultural identity in counselling in an American context see Brinson, 1996

4 Helping PAs to be more effective

This section looks at how the work of PAs in their interventions with young people can be supported and made more effective. Its contents include:

- *Training*
- *Supervision of PAs*
- *Disclosure and making referrals*
- *Evaluation and measuring outcomes*

Training

Almost all Partnerships surveyed said that PAs had been trained in the use of counselling techniques. In some cases this training had been carried out under the former careers service. Only three Partnerships had trained all PAs. The main reason for this was the need to provide new staff with initial training. Some Partnerships were in the process of deciding which techniques and tools to introduce and in which to offer PAs training. Some managers expressed the importance of the timing of training. In particular, PAs should not be overwhelmed by training, since this might result in confusion and 'burnout'.

PAs interviewed were generally very satisfied with the training they had received. Although most had volunteered and were therefore clearly receptive to the training, it had often exceeded their expectations. PAs especially welcomed training which allowed them to practice counselling-related skills. Although this is obviously important, counselling training has been criticised for being too heavily geared towards the acquisition of skills at the expense of counselling theory. It has been argued that it results in people using interventions without knowing why[10]. Therefore, training should ensure that PAs understand the theory that underlies the techniques and tools. This need not be detailed or complicated, but sufficient for the PA to understand the purpose of using them and to take a tailored approach where necessary. Without an underlying understanding of the purpose of techniques and tools, such flexibility in their use is difficult, and PAs may simply abandon their use when the text book approach is not feasible.

Only half of the Partnerships surveyed said that all staff trained in the techniques or tools were using them, although a number of other respondents said they did not know the current extent of their use. Some Partnerships indicated that the techniques had not been found useful by all PAs. Further information on this issue was obtained in interviews with managers and PAs where it was apparent that lack of confidence in their use was a barrier. A number of PAs felt they could not use the techniques and tools in which they had received training because they felt insufficiently skilled, knowledgeable or confident in their approach.

Some PAs were reluctant to fully 'practice' on young people, for fear that this might jeopardise a relationship they had worked hard to establish. Therefore, they wanted time to try out some techniques and then to practice them in training or follow-up sessions.

10 For a discussion of this see E Noonan (1983)

Some PAs also said they would like 'refresher' training, after they had been using an approach for some time. This suggests that training should not be regarded as 'one-off', consisting of only one or two sessions. Partnerships should consider building in a follow-up training session where PAs can report on their experiences and learn how to refine their techniques.

Partnerships reported that most training in techniques and tools is delivered by external trainers rather than internally or as part of the PA diploma training. External trainers are largely private training companies, often based in the local area or at local universities and colleges. Some specialist training has been delivered by Social Services departments or charities such as Relate or Childline. PAs and managers reported positive feedback from training delivered by external trainers, particularly in motivating PAs to incorporate the techniques and tools into their work with young people.

PAs preferred the 'style' of training and of the trainer to be in tune with the aims of Connexions. Therefore, some felt quite strongly that a trainer should understand what Connexions is about, what PAs do and what type of young people they work with. Partnerships should therefore be aware of this when selecting trainers. Making enquiries of other Partnerships may help to identify trainers who are most knowledgeable and responsive to the needs of the developing service.

Although Partnerships generally had very positive experiences of training courses and of individuals delivering the training, some PAs felt that the style of trainers and the materials used sometimes clashed with the 'culture' of Connexions. For example, courses sometimes use American materials or a more confrontational style than might be considered appropriate in Connexions. Some trainers were seen to be somewhat 'evangelical' in their advocacy of a particular approach. However, most PAs did not let issues of delivery style affect their appraisal of techniques and their potential.

Most PAs and managers felt that the training delivered by external organisations was of high quality. This was a key reason why they chose external trainers, who were often recommended by other Connexions Partnerships or former careers service companies. However, it was considered important that someone from the training team attends each training course to be fully aware of its content and quality.

Some managers and PAs felt that, where possible, Connexions should carry out training in techniques and tools internally. In addition to the reasons given above, cost was a consideration. To make the most of the trainer's fee, some Partnerships had enrolled as many PAs as possible. This may not create the best conditions for learning. If training is conducted internally, small groups are more feasible. Whether training can be delivered internally is clearly dependent on the availability of expertise in both the techniques and tools and in training. It is possible that Partnerships have such expertise, in new staff, without knowing. Connexions County Durham has been training staff to deliver training where they have the skills. To establish whether such expertise is available internally Cornwall and Devon Connexions are conducting a 'talent audit', asking all staff:

- *What training might you be able to deliver?*
- *Are you willing to do it?*
- *Do you think you will have the time to do it?*

It is important that managers are certain that a member of staff who is willing to deliver training has the appropriate knowledge and experience, both of the technique and in delivering training. It might be advisable to run a trial session involving only a small number of experienced staff before they are 'let loose' on larger groups. Any training delivered internally should be subject to the same monitoring, quality checks and evaluation as that delivered by external trainers.

Rather than arrange for staff to deliver training courses, Partnerships could involve staff in endorsing training, through informal follow-up sessions which allow PAs to exchange experiences of using techniques and tools. This approach is recommended to support the development of Solution-focused interviewing (see Section 5).

Supervision of PAs

Supervision of PAs is important for two main reasons:

1. *To provide support and guidance for PAs in their work with young people*
2. *To help develop the service to young people*

On the first of these, Partnerships should ensure that they have systems for supervising PAs. These should consist of regular meetings (at least once a month) between a PA and his or her manager. At these meetings PAs should report on their interventions and raise any issues that they have found problematic, either personally or professionally, for example about referral systems.

Sometimes PAs may experience problems with the approaches they are using or feel in need of different ways of working with a young person. Therefore, in order for PAs' managers to be able to provide the necessary support and guidance it is important that they are fully familiar with the approaches in which PAs are trained and are using. It would also be helpful if they were aware of other approaches that a PA might investigate using. Therefore all staff with a supervisory role should attend all training courses and undertake related reading to improve their understanding of any techniques used by staff.

Regular supervision can also help managers to identify techniques that PAs find most and least effective and any training needs. This information can then be used to inform plans for training and for other aspects of service delivery. For example, if PAs report an increase in particular problems among young people, for example alcohol misuse, this may suggest a need to work more intensively with the appropriate specialist agencies.

Disclosure and making referrals

Some young people may need encouragement to talk about the issues of concern to them and which present barriers to their participation and progress. Others may be ready to talk about such issues. Sometimes young people will raise personal issues which are impacting seriously on their health and well-being or threaten to do so. These may include drug and alcohol misuse, all forms of abuse - sexual, physical and emotional, bereavement, anorexia and mental health problems. The ability of a PA to deal with particular issues will vary according to their employment background, qualifications and experience. However, depending on the particular case, it is usually beyond the scope of the PA role to address such issues directly. A young person cannot be expected to know this, even if the PA explains his or her role clearly at the outset (see Section 2) and where such issues present real barriers to progression it is reasonable for a young person to expect they will be addressed. Therefore, PAs need to be able to refer young people for specialist help.

When a PA becomes aware that a young person's problems are beyond his or her remit or expertise, they should make a referral to a specialist agency or individual. It may not always be obvious when this is necessary. If a PA is unsure about the boundaries of their role, they should discuss this with a supervisor or manager who can advise them whether to refer a young person. In recognition of a need for guidance on this issue, Connexions County Durham is developing a checklist to help PAs decide when to refer a young person. The charity Childline has provided training to Connexions Partnerships covering complexities and dilemmas in the PA-client relationship, including disclosure[11].

It is important that PAs are knowledgeable about the full range of services and help available to young people in their area. This can include those to which referrals can be made and those to which they can refer themselves, for example Childline.

Referral is not, however, simply a matter of passing a young person over to another service or individual. PAs interviewed emphasised that the process often takes time, during which it is important to provide continuing support to the young person. Sometimes a young person may be reluctant to accept help with a particular problem for which they are being referred. In such cases it is helpful for the PA to discuss with them the consequences of not doing so. This is likely to be more effective where a relationship of trust has been built up between the PA and young person.

Evaluation and measuring outcomes

The aim of Connexions is to make a difference to the lives of young people by easing their transition to adult life. It involves the use of large resources, both financial and of time and expertise, from Partnerships and all organisations and individuals involved in delivery of its services. Therefore it is important that interventions are effective. The difficulty is in measuring effectiveness. This is particularly difficult with the priority group of young people who typically have a number of problems presenting barriers to participation and progress. The process of target setting within the APIR allows PAs to both establish with the young person what progress is reasonable to expect and to aim for. Following on from this, the process of review allows a PA and young person to see/explore whether and how targets have been met.

11 Childline has also provided training in supervision of PAs. For further details of training courses offered by Childline contact Rob Gardner, Training Manager 0115 924 2544

PAs raised two main issues to bear in mind when considering measuring outcomes for young people in the Connexions priority group:

- *Progress may be very slow, and although a young person's attitudes are changing, interventions may appear ineffective*
- *Progress may appear to be rapid, but because under-lying problems remain, it is short-lived*

In the first such case, a PA may be aware of small changes in attitude which may eventually result in real changes, for example in engagement and achievement, but these may not yet be considered significant. One PA gave the example of a young man who had usually responded violently when arrested, which was a frequent occurrence. On his latest arrest he had not resisted, holding out his hands to the arresting officer. Taking into account the circumstances, this could hardly be seen as a hard outcome. However, to the PA, this was a sign that the young person was learning to control his violent outbursts and an indication that further progress could be made. At the same time, he still needed to make considerable progress to change his offending behaviour.

To give an example of the second case, a young person may be encouraged by the help received from a PA and agree to take the step from inactivity to joining a training scheme. However, if they have lacked confidence in the past or have unresolved issues, their participation may be short-lived. One PA gave the example of a young man who agreed to take part in 'Life-Skills'[12] but dropped out because he lacked confidence and felt unready to make change in his life.

Managers and PAs therefore warned against 'short, sharp fixes' and emphasised the need for interventions that result in good long-term outcomes for young people.

Hard and soft outcomes [13]

'Hard' outcomes are those that are relatively easy to categorise and quantify. In the context of Connexions they include, for example, finding a job, a place on a college course or gaining a qualification. Research for the Department for Education and Skills on measuring outcomes in ESF projects points out that,

> *'It is often both unlikely and inappropriate for many projects to expect to achieve 'hard' outcomes from target groups that are socially excluded and facing multiple barriers to employment' (Dewson et al, 2000).*

12 A pre-vocational training scheme tailored to individual needs.
13 This section draws on some of the concepts developed in work by Steer and Humm 2001, and Dewson et al, 2000.

These ‘hard’ outcomes are often reliant on less tangible progress, in change in aptitudes, attitudes and skills or on changes in social behaviour and to the formation of positive social relationships. Many such changes, which are pre-requisites of ‘harder’ outcomes can be seen as ‘soft’ outcomes. However, not only are they necessary for such steps to be achieved, they represent important progress in their own right.

‘Soft’ outcomes can include changes in attitude, personal skills and even practical skills and key skills. They often involve progression rather than a clear change, but this does not mean they are intangible. Indeed, soft outcomes can include such changes as improved health, improved communication skills and improved levels of attendance. Therefore, the difference between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ outcomes is not easily drawn. Moreover, many ‘soft’ outcomes can be measured, although usually on a scale. The term ‘indicators’ is sometimes used in preference to ‘outcomes’ for this reason.

Distance travelled

The use of measures of both hard and soft outcomes are considerably strengthened if they take into account ‘distance travelled’. This recognises that individuals start from different points and that progress, rather than absolute achievement, is important in whether an intervention is successful. Distance travelled is potentially very useful in assessing the effectiveness of a particular tool or technique. The Connexions APIR framework is designed both to measure soft outcomes and distance travelled, based on the assessment of the young person themselves. Other techniques also involve similar self-assessment, typically using numerical scales (see Rickter Scale and Solution-Focused Guidance in Section 5).

Attribution

It is not usually possible to attribute positive soft outcomes to a particular intervention. This is because the work of a PA is only one input into the young person’s life. PA contact may coincide with changes in family circumstances or other events that impact on a young person and affect their progress. However, soft outcomes are no different to hard ones in this respect. Without a control group, similar in all respects but without the intervention, it is not possible to measure effectiveness with any certainty. What is important is that progress is made, and that this is either perceived by the PA or acknowledged by the young person and ideally measured through the APIR or other assessment. To a certain extent, PAs will need to decide for themselves whether the techniques and tools have been effective in bringing about any change.

5 Techniques and tools

Introduction

We referred in Section 1 to the difference between assessment and intervention. The former refers to the process of analysing strengths and weaknesses, often by means of tests or other devices aimed at establishing an individual's score or point on a scale. Assessment is necessary both to establish an individual young person's needs for services and other assistance, and also to measure the effectiveness of interventions and other work.

Within Connexions the Individual Assessment Profile, part of the APIR framework, has been developed for this purpose. Therefore, our focus here is on the techniques and tools used in interventions with young people. These may be used during the assessment process, when the profile is being established. More often, they will be used following initial assessment, once a young person's issues, problems and barriers have been initially identified. The use of techniques and tools should also be followed by, or integrated with, the target setting and review stages of the APIR.

Some PAs interviewed felt that the APIR profile can 'highlight' problems and that this could de-motivate young people, particularly those who have undergone many previous assessments. However, it is difficult for a PA to work with a young person without knowing what their issues are and their perspective on these. This is not the same as dwelling on problems or delving into their causes. While profiling and assessment may not be encouraging for either the young person or the adviser, it is important to establish what issues need to be addressed. It can also be used to measure progress made by a young person over a period of time.

Guidance and training in the use of the APIR profile and framework emphasise the need to take a flexible approach, guided by the circumstances and needs of the young person. Therefore, exactly how it can be used with other techniques and tools will also be at the discretion of the PA. This will not be difficult, as long as both the purpose of both the APIR and intervention techniques and tools are understood. What is important is that the APIR identifies the key issues, problems and barriers experienced by a young person. It is then that the intervention techniques and tools come into their own. Some Partnerships are planning to deliver training on linking the use of the APIR with intervention approaches. One such approach has been developed for Connexions Humber by Occupational Psychologist Anna Lawrence. This approach suggests strategies and techniques for each stage of the APIR individual assessment profile (see Section 6).

This section of the guide is intended to provide managers and PAs with basic information about a range of techniques and tools that are currently used by Connexions Partnerships. These are practical and safe approaches. None involves any form of psychotherapy or investigation into personal problems. However, it is nonetheless important that PAs receive training in their use before using them with young people. This is essential to ensure that the approach, and its rationale are fully understood, and that PAs learn and practice techniques rather than 'experimenting' with them on young people.

Each technique is briefly explained, including the theory behind the practice. This is not complicated because, although techniques are sometimes 'dressed up' in complex language, they are based on quite simple ideas. Information about the techniques includes whether they require the use of particular equipment, including pen and paper. This is not unimportant, since some PAs see any equipment as a distraction or barrier to communication, while others see it as helpful to the young person, who may be shy of individual adult attention. The guide includes some feedback from PAs about their experiences of using some of the techniques.

The approaches included in this section are:

- *Cognitive Behavioural Therapy*
- *Solution-Focused Therapy*
- *Neuro-Linguistic Programming*
- *HARP*
- *Motivational interviewing*
- *The Rickter Scale*

Other approaches, including some developed by PAs themselves, are included in Section 6.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

Many of the techniques described in this section are based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). The central idea of CBT is that behaviour is learned and that feelings and emotions are based on thoughts rather than having an independent existence. Therefore it is thoughts that create responses in the form of emotions and behaviour. Consequently, someone who is thinking about their problems, thinking negative or unhappy thoughts, will behave in a way that reflects this. CBT is aimed at changing the way an individual thinks and therefore feels and behaves.

What is the basis of CBT?

CBT is derived from a combination of behavioural and cognitive theories and approaches:

- *Cognitive refers to how certain thinking patterns are causing emotional symptoms. These are seen to give an individual a negative and distorted picture of their life and make them feel anxious, depressed or angry. They may also lead to certain actions or inaction.*
- *Behaviour refers to the connections between thoughts and reactions to them. An individual may respond to particular thoughts and feelings in particular and habitual ways, for example through anger or fear.*

Linking the two areas of cognition and behaviour recognises that an individual's response to a negative situation is largely determined by their views on it, and that these in turn are based on their thoughts about it. Central to CBT is the theory that our thoughts about ourselves are an interpretation - they are not a reality. Therefore, how we perceive events and situations is to an extent up to us. We can either see things in a positive and optimistic light or look for problems and faults.

CBT does not suggest that a person's perspective is always a question of interpretation, since events such as serious illness or sudden death are clearly negative. Rather, it refers to patterns of thinking, which are both learned, developed over time and can present real barriers to progression. The emphasis is less on how an individual responds to a specific situation than to basic attitudes and underlying assumptions. Particularly important are automatic thoughts that appear to be spontaneous. These occur to everyone, but some people allow these to develop, to take on a reality of their own and to affect their emotions and behaviour. It is this negative spiral that CBT aims to address.

One important feature of CBT, which enhances its usefulness in Connexions, is that it does not conceive of 'right' or 'wrong' ways of thinking, but sees everyone as interpreting their own reality. What it seeks to change is negative thinking and the problems this can cause. This is important because, rather than trying to establish some objective 'truth' about a young person's circumstances and opportunities, a PA can help them to see these in a different and more positive light.

Where has CBT been used?

CBT has been widely used with young people in addressing a range of problems, including substance use, school phobia and depression (see Carr, 2000). In relation to increasing participation, it has been used to boost self-efficacy in job search and re-employment, with good results (see Proudfoot et al, 1997).

CBT has been used by practitioners in a range of fields, and there is no reason it cannot be successfully adopted and used by PAs. The approach and techniques can be taught within days, although a longer period of time is necessary to refine their use.

What does CBT involve?

CBT is a skill based approach which emphasises the role of actively changing thoughts and behaviour. It involves a range of techniques, and is often developed into particular approaches, for example Solution-Focused Therapy (see below). However, typical features of a CBT approach are the following:

- *Focus on the present, rather than past events*
- *Use of open-ended questions*
- *Reflective listening, to help clarify thoughts*
- *The development of skills to be taken away and practised*
- *The use of empathy*

Cognitive techniques are used to help bring out, identify, examine and 'reality test' automatic thoughts and attitudes. This includes the use of questioning to help young people become more aware of their thought processes and responses. Typical forms of questioning might include:

- *Are you ignoring good things about school?*
- *Are you jumping to conclusions?*
- *Are you making this seem more important than it is?*
- *Are you bothering too much about how things should be, instead of dealing with them as they are?*

CBT is goal oriented, which means that the adviser and young person agree goals based on their shared understanding of the young person's problem. Progress can only be made by a young person changing their negative thought processes and responses. Because this requires practice, homework is often assigned. This might consist of monitoring thoughts and checking their validity, or modifying behaviour in response to certain situations.

CBT in itself involves no particular equipment, but some paper based-techniques may be used. For example, Palmer and Symanska (1998) explain a technique involving a chart where a client is asked to identify a situation or problem which has led to a negative outcome, and then to 'reframe', or alter it. An example relevant to a young person might be getting cross in response to a teacher's critical remark. The young person could be asked to list the situation or problem, their thoughts and responses and to review these as shown in Table 1:

Table 1 A technique used within CBT

Situation/ Problem	**Automatic thoughts**	**Emotional response**	**Rational response**	**New approach to problem**
A teacher criticises my work in front of the class	It would be terrible - everyone would think I was thick	High anxiety, anger	Everyone gets criticised from time to time. Sometimes the teacher gives me praise	I'm going to attend my classes more regularly. If I am criticised I won't get upset and walk out. I'll stay calm and get on with my work

CBT also uses 'scaling', which involves asking a client to rate the intensity of their feelings. This can be used to measure progress.

Is CBT effective?

A review of treatment approaches used with offenders concludes that, 'It is mostly cognitive-behavioural, skill oriented and multi-model programmes that yield the best efforts' (see Losel, 1995). One of the major features of CBT is the relatively short time frame required for change to begin. This can be very useful for working with young people where the negative effects of a period of disengagement increase over time.

Solution-Focused Brief Therapy

Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) was developed in the United States at the Brief Family Therapy Centre, principally by therapists Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg. It is 'brief' in emphasising the achievement of short-term change through small steps, which can then become bigger. Lines describes it as a way of arriving a goals and solutions by the 'direct' route rather than the 'scenic' one. As such it is narrowly focused and aimed at setting the client on their way, rather than providing a cure. Similarly, the emphasis is on the achievement of small steps. It does not claim that difficult problems can be quickly or easily solved, but that something constructive can usually be done.

It is used in a number of Connexions Partnerships and has been given the more accurate title Solution Focused Interview Skills[14]. In addition to its use in Connexions Partnerships and former careers companies, there are a number of reports of its use in schools, which suggest it is useful because it can be used effectively for short sessions[15]. A further benefit is the emphasis on immediate change, which is useful in crisis situations, for example when a pupil is near to being excluded[16]. It has also been suggested that young people like the active style adopted by the adviser using SFBT[17]. At the same time, it is seen as a 'safe' approach because it does not involve probing into problems. Like other techniques in this guide, for example Motivational Interviewing and NLP, it can be combined with other approaches.

Writers on SFBT draw particular attention to the following features of the approach:

- *SFBT accepts the client's view of the problem, because it is their perspective and their own resources which are to be used in finding a solution. It therefore has the potential to be 'culturally sensitive'(see Section 3).*
- *The approach is described as 'future-orientated' in that it draws attention away from current problems and only looks to the past to find coping strategies and solutions.*
- *The client has the solutions within them and the adviser's task is to listen to their ideas, identifying strengths and resources they may not realise they have. The client is encouraged to employ strategies they have already used and with which they are therefore familiar.*

14 This is the title of the course delivered by Bill O'Connell of Focus on Solutions for a number of Connexions Partnerships.
15 See Rhodes, 1993; Murphy 1994; Ajmal and Rhodes, 1995; Lines 2002.
16 This point is made by Rhodes, 1993
17 This is suggested by Lines in a practitioner guide for using 'Brief Counselling' in schools (2002).

- *The emphasis in SFBT is to find 'exceptions' to the problem and to encourage clients to see solutions in these. This might involve, for example, finding lessons in which a generally disruptive pupil behaves well and exploring how this behaviour can be applied to other classes (see Murphy, 1994).*

Skills of SFBT

The principal skills of SFBT are active and reflective listening. The emphasis is on co-operating with the client. Goal setting is an important feature of the intervention. This is not necessarily at the end, when agreeing 'homework' but can be at the start, for example, setting goals for the session itself.

Goals set within SFBT should be clear, useful and short-term. Goals and tasks agreed in a session should be based firmly in the context of an individual's life, values and belief system. The adviser makes 'suggestions' and gives 'considerations' rather than tell or advise what a client should do. When change is achieved, the adviser turns their attention to maintaining the state of change. The client is encouraged to take credit for their role in successful outcomes.

Some importance is placed on the language used by the adviser. This is positive and suggests the likelihood of change. For example, when discussing the future, the adviser talks about 'when' rather than 'if' the problem is solved. As in NLP (see below) accepting a client's frame of reference includes using their belief system and, on occasion, using their exact words.

Another basic tenet of SFBT is that 'if it doesn't work, stop doing it and do something different'. This may also involve accepting that the approach is not effective with a particular young person. PAs interviewed gave examples of young people who they felt did not respond to the approach, although there was no general consensus on who these are.

Some Solution Focused techniques

SFBT uses a number of techniques which advisers can use to structure a session. The adviser can select which ones to use within a session, and they do not have to follow a particular order. They can also be combined with techniques from other approaches (see Table 2).

Table 2 Some solution-focused techniques

Feature	Brief description
Problem-free talk	A short 'getting to know you' stage, in which the adviser expresses interest in successful areas of a client's life (eg home, school or hobbies). The adviser conveys an interest in the client as a person rather than as a problem.
Preferred outcome to the session	The client is asked what they hope to gain from the session. This may be seen by clients as a prompt to make a statement of their problem(s). The PA will listen and acknowledge the problem, but avoid asking detailed questions about it, and move to a discussion of the client's preferred outcome.
A future when the problem is solved (including the 'miracle question')	An adviser can use a number of questions to help a client envisage the future they hope to have when the problem is solved. The 'miracle question' devised by Brief Therapy is phrased as follows: 'Suppose that when you go home tonight and you go to bed and to sleep, a miracle happens and the problem that brings you in here is solved. When you wake up tomorrow morning, what will you notice, what will give you the clues that a miracle has happened?' The intention is to help a client experience positive feelings which might lead to changes in behaviour. The client is encouraged to focus on the experience of being problem-free rather than permanently restricted or controlled by problems.
Exceptions	The client is asked to identify times when the problem was not so dominant, or where their situation was closer to their preferred future. If the client cannot identify any recent examples, the adviser could ask how the client has managed to cope with life and to stop things from becoming worse. The idea is that the more clearly a client is able to describe their preferred future, the more likely it is that they will want to make the effort to achieve it.
Scale questions	These questions help the client to assess the degree of progress already made towards the realisation of their preferred future. The client is asked to rate their position on a scale of 0 to 10, for example, 'If 10 is where you are confident in your abilities, and 0 is where you don't think there's any chance, where would you say you are right now? How come? What will need to be different for your confidence to be one point higher?' It emphasises the value of small steps and can be used to show progress in later sessions, and to identify ways in which a client might progress up the scale. If a client's self-rating is above 0, it can also be used to detect positive areas, on which the adviser can build.

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)

NLP was developed in the early 1970s from the work of psychotherapist Richard Bandler and linguist John Grinder. It was developed as a model of understanding human behaviour, focusing on communication. It was first applied in the business world before being widely adopted by counsellors, therapists and advisers. It is currently used in about half of phase 1 and 2 Connexions Partnerships. In explaining NLP de Luynes (1995) breaks it up into its three components. Table 3 presents these components and how they can operate in guidance work:

Table 3 Components of NLP

Component	Explanation in NLP	Application to guidance
Neuro	All behaviour is the result of neurological processes (thinking)	Advisers recognise that clients' behaviour stems from their thought processes
Linguistic	Neural (brain/thinking) processes are represented, ordered and sequenced into models and strategies through communication systems	Rapport, verbal and body language can be used to communicate more effectively, once an individual's communication systems are understood
Programming	The process of organising the components of a system for specific outcomes in the form of behaviour	Advisers can help clients to understand what motivates them and how to use this to achieve their own goals

The basis of NLP

NLP is not the easiest approach to understand, but it may help to see it as a form of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, on which some of its ideas are based.

In particular according to NLP:

- *People respond to their 'map of reality' not to reality itself – therefore as in CBT feelings and behaviour result from thoughts rather than independently*
- *Language is a secondary representation of experience – the expression of it – rather than the experience itself*
- *The highest quality information one can receive is the person's behaviour – the adviser's responsibility is to observe carefully to look for any changes*
- *People have the resources they need to change but have to access these at appropriate times and places – they can be assisted in this process by appropriate interventions (from de Luynes, 1995)*

NLP techniques

The emphasis in NLP is on communication, on understanding how an individual sees the world and then using this to work with them more effectively. Establishing rapport is therefore a key feature.

This includes the following techniques:

- *Pacing – achieved by matching the individual's verbal and non-verbal behaviour over a period of time, using the same words, phrases, expressions, tone, pace and other features of their language*
- *Using a client's 'preferred representational systems' using sensory-specific language, for example 'I see….', I hear….', 'I feel….' About what they are saying*

The technique also includes 'calibrating' which means identifying an individual's internal state with observed changes in their external behaviour, for example nail biting (indicating nervousness), sitting further back in the chair (indicating relaxation).

PAs interviewed saw the idea of representational systems as a feature of NLP which they could understand and apply in their work with young people. This is the idea that people have their own preferred systems of understanding themselves and their situation based on the human senses. NLP emphasises the gains to be made in communication and changing behaviour by understanding a client's preferred representative system and adopting it during the intervention.

Typical representational systems are as follows:

- *Visual – people who see things in their mind and who find it helpful to see diagrams, charts or other forms of visual representation*
- *Auditory – people who think though ideas*
- *Kinaesthetic – people who respond physically*

Examples of particular phrases which might be used within an NLP approach include, for example,

> *'How would you look at it? (visual)*
>
> *'Do you like the sound of that? (auditory)*
>
> *'Are you saying you would like to get a grip on things? (kinaesthetic)*

In addition to establishing and maintaining rapport, advisers can use their understanding of a client's way of thinking to 'lead' by making subtle changes in their own behaviour which a client may then pick up.

Although some PAs might find the idea of NLP helpful, it may not always be possible to clearly identify an individual's preferred system of representation. In reality, young people may vary their use of these, or may change their preferences. Therefore PAs should not be overly concerned to identify representative systems. The important feature of NLP is that it aims to improve rapport and communication between adviser and client. Therefore, NLP uses both active and reflective listening to improve the effectiveness of the intervention. Seen in this way, there is nothing complicated about it. It is simply a set of communication tools.

HARP

The Holistic Assessment and Reinsertion Procedure (HARP) was developed by Development Research Initiatives (DRi Ltd) specifically for use with 'hard to help' target groups in education, training or employment. It was developed within the UK with funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) Community Initiatives Programme for transnational pilot projects.

HARP is based on the view that the disadvantages young people have faced can be made to work to their advantage. Through the experience of being homeless, excluded from school, being in care or in an offenders institution, a young person may have developed many skills. Of particular interest to HARP are the skills of coping with such experiences that indicate personal resources and strengths. The idea is that many of these skills can be applied in other settings, such as the workplace. This involves both identifying such skills and investigating how these may be applied and developed, usually through training.

Who can HARP be used with?

The groups for which HARP was developed are similar in many ways to the Connexions priority group. These are long term unemployed, drug mis-users and young people not in education or the job market. It was also designed for use with young people experiencing disadvantage in the labour market, including offenders and disabled people. In addition to its use in Connexions, and previously the Careers Service, HARP has been used in the Employment Service, schools, young offenders institutions and in training organisations.

What does HARP consist of?

HARP has a strong emphasis on the role of guidance in identifying individual strengths and potential. In addition to guidance, the HARP model includes developing new methods of accreditation, which acknowledge non-standard achievements, and developing programmes which integrate the use and enhancement of social, vocational and educational skills. It therefore consists of more than guidance and is intended to extend to the design of programmes aimed at meeting individual needs (hence the 'Reinsertion Procedure').

HARP is described as a 'bottom up' approach because it emphasises working with an individual to identify skills and personal qualities that can be used to bring about progression and change. These are identified through a guidance process. It then determines the level of support and types of strategies that are necessary to help the individual to achieve their potential.

The guidance process itself involves helping young people to identify the following:

- *Their experiences, in situations such as school, other institutions and home life*
- *What they have learned from these experiences*
- *The skills and personal attributes they have developed and demonstrated*
- *Their strengths*
- *What motivates them*
- *Aspects of their 'soft' or 'key' skills they may need to improve*
- *Training or development opportunities open to them*

The use of HARP in Connexions County Durham

Connexions County Durham identified the potential of HARP through its links with a New Start programme for disaffected young people. It was introduced first within the Learning Gateway and then as part of an assessment system for Connexions. Its use within the Partnership is mandatory.

Within New Start, HARP was used with young people aged 15-16 who had self-excluded from school. The approach was found useful in raising self-esteem and self-confidence in order to equip young people with the skills to be able to re-engage in training or employment. Its use was then extended into the Learning Gateway and then into the pilot and main stage Connexions service.

Connexions County Durham found that it takes on average up to 4 months for a PA to feel that HARP is an integrated part of the job. PAs find the techniques of HARP useful in identifying personal skills and qualities. The Partnership has also identified its potential in helping to assess support needs and in measuring outcomes of guidance and other assistance. HARP is used by Connexions County Durham in assessing levels of need and support to help clients to progress in their work, training or education. Therefore, it is used to assist planning and allocation of PA time. It is also being introduced as part of an assessment system to establish baseline information about young people and to measure distance travelled as a result of the help and support provided.

Motivational interviewing

Motivational interviewing was developed in the United States from counselling problem drinkers and has been used most extensively with this group and with substance abusers. As such, its effectiveness has been assessed largely in relation to these groups. More than half of Connexions Partnerships surveyed said they were using Motivational interviewing, but their exact approach and extent of use is not known. It has also been used in the youth service, including to identify young people's suitability for cognitive behavioural therapy.

The ideas behind motivational interviewing

The approach, developed by William Miller in the 1980s, emphasises the importance of commitment and motivation in making change. It aims to increase motivation by helping to raise an individual's self-awareness. Of particular importance is awareness of the discrepancy between their current behaviour and their goals, which is likely to be evident in behaviour such as problem drinking. The method aims to encourage responsibility and self-efficacy.

Motivational interviewing therefore includes the following features:

- *The de-emphasis of 'labelling' eg 'alcoholic', 'delinquent'*
- *Encouragement of individual responsibility*
- *Increasing a client's dissonance between their ideal goal and their present behaviour.*

The approach emphasises the importance of the individual decision-making processes. A client is encouraged to see change as resulting from themselves and from personal or internal factors. In doing so it is expected that they will take responsibility for change. It is seen by its founders, William Miller and Stephen Rollnick, not as a technique which is applied to people but as an 'interpersonal style' which can be used outside of formal counselling settings. Seen as such, it is a method that can be used quite flexibly with young people in a range of settings.

It shares many of the features of cognitive behavioural therapy, in particular the role of thoughts resulting in certain behavioural responses. The emphasis on resolving ambivalence reflects the need for personal awareness and understanding of thought processes and decision-making. Real and long-term change is seen as possible only through changing thought processes and increasing motivation and commitment. Therefore, the counsellor has the role of facilitating the client to make change and does not use methods such as direct persuasion.

Skills of motivational interviewing

Motivational interviewing makes much use of reflective listening and empathy (see Section 3). This is in order to encourage a client to become aware of conflict between their goals and their behaviour and to resolve feelings of ambivalence about making change. The counsellor is advised to pay particular attention to anything said by a young person to indicate increases in self-esteem and motivation to change. Another feature of the technique is 'positive restructuring' - changing negative statements into positives.

Further features of a Motivational Interviewing style include:

- *Seeking to understand a person's frame of reference*
- *Expressing acceptance and affirmation*

Therefore in using the technique, an adviser will summarise and repeat back information and views expressed by a young person. This process is used to bring out any discrepancies or conflict, which can be used to identify choices available to the young person.

Clarification is an important feature of the technique and can be achieved through various techniques including:

- *'Over-shooting' - exaggerating what the young person is saying to get them to qualify it*
- *Under-shooting' - understating what they have said to get them to be more specific*

McNamara, who provides a useful summary of Motivational Interviewing in a school setting (1992) describes the 'Columbo technique' (from the 1970s television detective series) in which the counsellor claims not to understand in order to encourage the client to say what he or she wants and to consider the pros and cons of taking action for themselves. McNamara sees the technique as suitable for counselling within schools because, he argues,

> *'....just as a pupil's commitment to academic goals is a necessary pre-requisite for active learning, so a pupil's commitment to behaviour is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for behaviour change to occur'*

The Rickter Scale®

The Rickter Scale® combines an instrument, in the form of a scale, and a guidance model. The instrument itself is a plastic board with ten sliders that can be moved along scales numbered from 0 to 10. Each of the scales represents an area of a young person's life, for example school, home, teachers, or emotional states, stress or happiness, and this combination of scales produces a 'frame of reference'[18]. The board is A4 in size, and is held by the young person throughout the interview session. The Rickter Scale® is currently used in over half of phase 1 and 2 Connexions Partnerships. It has also been used in a range of other organisations and initiatives including New Start, Education Action Zones and the New Futures Initiative in Scotland[19].

Background to the approach

The approach was developed by Rick Hutchinson and Keith Stead who identified a need to assess 'distance travelled' rather than focus on hard outcomes. They were concerned that some young people had been labelled as failures because they had not achieved hard outcomes, yet may have made progress in addressing specific issues such as drug or alcohol use, improved their relationships with teachers or family or made general improvements in self-confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy. They believed that such progress should be identified and acknowledged as significant because it can represent the foundations for further outcomes and sustainable change.

18 The headings that make up a Frame of Reference are not fixed, but are developed in consultation with the commissioning organisation to reflect both the specific needs of the client group and the organisation's way of working.
19 For further details about the Rickter Scale", contact: info@rickterscale.com or telephone: 01463 717177

The Rickter Guidance Model draws on a number of approaches, including Motivational Interviewing and Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP). One aspect of NLP used within the Rickter process is 'anchoring', in which an individual is encouraged to hold on to their thoughts and the emotions they produce when holding a slider at particular points on the scales. The young person is encouraged to explore their options for the future and to set goals, using the associated emotions to produce motivational drivers. In this way individuals are more likely to take responsibility for their goals and subsequent action plan.

The Rickter Guidance Model

The Rickter Model is essentially a solutions-focused approach to guided self-assessment intended to enable young people to do the following:

- *Gain awareness of their current circumstances*
- *Identify strategies that have worked for them in the past*
- *Explore future possibilities*
- *Identify priority areas for support and intervention*
- *Take responsibility for their own goals and contribute to an action plan*

The process is designed to encourage ownership, with the young person making informed choices and therefore setting realistic and achievable goals. It also aims to facilitate change and therefore its use includes helping young people to assess their own readiness to make changes in their lives.

It identifies five levels of change:

- *Obliviousness, unconscious incompetence or outright resistance*
- *Contemplating a change at some vague point in the future*
- *'Ripeness' to formulate a plan or set goals*
- *Readiness to take the necessary action*
- *Acceptance of the need to review their situation and respond as appropriate*

Using the Rickter Scale®

During a session using the Rickter Scale®, the young person will be asked about various aspects of their life, whilst keeping contact with the Rickter board. For each of the different headings on the Frame of Reference, they are asked to position the slider on a scale from 0 to 10. They are then asked a sequence of solution-focused questions that raises awareness of what has worked for them in the past. This elicits their desired state and encourages them to suggest ways in which they might achieve that state. By doing this for each of the headings in turn, the young person begins to see 'the big picture' of what is going on in their lives and the connections between issues.

PAs interviewed had very positive experiences of using the Rickter Scale®, particularly in the reaction of young people to this approach. It is designed to lessen the intensity of the adviser-client contact, by allowing the young person to focus on the board and on their positioning of the sliders. The intention is also that, by assigning a numerical value to an issue or problem, it can be seen as something that can be improved rather than permanent and irresolvable.

The board is also a tool which tracks movement over time. This is measured by first recording, either manually or on a computer screen, where a young person has placed the Rickter Scale® sliders to represent both present and desired states, and using this as a baseline, to be compared with their responses in subsequent sessions. If appropriate, and particularly when positive movement is apparent, the outcomes can be shown to the young person in a graphical form, as a means of both enhancing self-esteem and encouraging further change[20].

20 The Rickter Company has recently developed a data management system that allows the collation and analysis of client data. Practitioners can also use this system to electronically export their own clients' information so that the organisation can identify patterns and trends across their entire client group.

6 Other techniques and tools

This final section of the guide presents five techniques and tools which are being used within Connexions Partnerships. They are not equivalent approaches: some have a strong grounding in theory, for example Success Ladders, which is based on psychological theories relating to self-concept and motivation, while others are techniques for communication or stress management. The section also looks briefly at techniques used with groups of young people. The five approaches are:

- *Success Ladders*
- *The Salt Pot*
- *Making a time line*
- *Bio-feedback*
- *Life-coaching*

Success Ladders

Success Ladders and the Connexions Adviser Training Pack

Connexions Humber has developed a training pack for advisers, drawing on techniques from 'Success Ladders' CBT and SFBT. 'Success Ladders' is a technique developed by Occupational Psychologist Anna Lawrence It is based on psychological theories relating to self concept and motivation and was developed out of research which explored individuals' concepts of success, in the context of careers, and the relationship of success to self-esteem, happiness and life satisfaction[21]. Background research conducted by Anna Lawrence found a strong relationship between individuals' perceptions of success and self-esteem. Success Ladders focuses on this relationship, and suggests techniques which use the individual's concept
of success to raise their self esteem. Importantly, it notes that in reporting success, the individual's focus shifts away from negative thoughts to a positive focus.

It is based on the belief that the successes which people find most satisfying are those which result in overcoming a particular obstacle. Such experiences are seen to provide individuals with a greater insight into themselves and the skills they possess. The approach uses examples of such success, identified by individuals, to explore future action. It therefore aims to provide a 'forward focus', giving equally strong emphasis to future aspirations as to past achievements. In relation to careers, a young person may have difficulty identifying a future goal, for example a career choice. The approach can be used to explore the skills and competencies they have achieved, which can be non-academic. It also aims to promote insight into individuals' 'self values' which is important in understanding past actions and making future choices.

21 For further information about Success Ladders and the Connexions Adviser Training pack contact Anna Lawrence: annalawrence11@aol.com

Success Ladders can be used for brief interventions and is designed to be used with cognitive behavioural techniques. It advocates the use of direct questioning, including challenging 'faulty cognitions' which are often negative assumptions, for example that they cannot take certain action because they are bound to fail. To date it has been used with individuals, but is designed for use in any situation where there is a wish to move forward, including at group or organisational level. Within Connexions, Anna Lawrence delivered training in Success Ladders to Personal Advisers employed by Connexions Humber. The Partnership then incorporated some of the techniques into its Connexions Adviser Training Pack.

The Connexions Humber training pack was designed to equip PAs with additional interviewing skills in order to undertake the APIR more effectively with young people. The pack incorporates aspects of CBT and SFBT as well as techniques from Success Ladders. It is designed specifically for use alongside the APIR, particularly the Individual Assessment Profile. It suggests strategies for exploring each area of the profile. In addition it explores the relationship between the 18 APIR factors and includes systems for feedback, action-planning and review. The design of the training pack was aimed at enabling PAs to introduce the techniques of Success Ladders, CBT and SFBT into their working practice and to overcome difficulties which are often encountered in applying learning acquired through training courses into the workplace.

The starting point and guiding principle of Success Ladders within the training pack is to identify achievement by asking a young person to identify something they have done or achieved when they have experienced feelings of success. It is emphasised that this should be something that the young person feels is an achievement for them. It is acknowledged that this may not be a straightforward process, since young people may associate 'achievement' with academic success and find difficulty in thinking of their own success.

The training pack emphasises the role of the PA in helping a young person to identify past successes which they can apply now. This might be anything which the young person identifies as a success, including anti-social activity. The skills required by the PA in this process include reflective interviewing (see Section 2).

Two key features of the approach, based on the principles of Success Ladders are therefore:

1. *It works with the young person's own values and concepts of success rather than those of the adviser, school or society in general. This is because a young person is more likely to set appropriate and achievable goals if they are based on their own values and experiences.*

2. *It identifies skills and abilities that can be used to achieve future success, or in the case of anti-social behaviour, to a more productive end.*

Within the APIR Individual Assessment Profile the Success Ladders approach is used to help a young person to identify their skills and abilities and explore ways in which these skills can be used by transferring them to particular situations or circumstances. This is seen as particularly useful for setting goals. For example, in relation to issues of 'life skills', a young person who has engaged in disruptive behaviour in school can be encouraged to think about an area of success they have identified and about the behaviour they used to do this. They can then be invited to compare this with their problematic behaviour, in order to help them to understand how some types of behaviour lead to successful outcomes, while others do not.

The method includes a 'task' or skills analysis technique designed to help a young person identify strengths, qualities and attributes which they may not have recognised they had. This is applied in relation to an example of success identified by a young person and can be used to consider future goals and ambitions. It can also be helpful in identifying competencies to be included on application forms for training courses or jobs.

By including techniques for exploring all 18 APIR factors, the guide is a comprehensive package for training and reference. The basis for the techniques suggested in the guide is explained with reference to theories of human behaviour. Importantly, the relationship between the 18 APIR factors is also explored. The training pack also covers skills and strategies for the following areas of PA work in detail:

- *Providing effective feedback*
- *Using facilitation techniques*
- *Action planning, including goal setting and review*

The Salt Pot

This technique is used by a PA working for Cornwall and Devon Connexions as a tool to facilitate change[22]. It was developed through shared practice and expertise, including discussions with a colleague working with young people with anger problems. It is used as an intervention technique, following assessment through using the APIR. It does not link directly to the APIR, because the young person may choose to discuss issues other than those identified as problematic in the APIR. Should this happen, the PA will aim to address these with the young person at an appropriate time.

The technique consists of two main stages: a card sort and the salt pot[23]. The card sort involves the young person selecting from around 20 small cards each printed with a subject or issue. These include 'anger', 'bullying', 'stress', 'no work experience', many of which are similar to areas included in the APIR. The young person is asked to pick five or six cards. One of these will often be a pressing issue for the young person and will be addressed first.

22 For further information on the salt-pot and time-line techniques used by Michelle Gardner at Cornwall and Devon Connexions, email michelle.gardner@connexions-cd.org.uk

23 Other introductory techniques are also used, largely aimed at developing self-awareness, including 'Johari's window' which consists of a window divided into four squares with each square representing information about the young person: the first area contains things that both the adviser and young person knows about them; the second has things the adviser knows about them but they don't; the third has things that the young person knows about but that the adviser doesn't; and the forth contains things that neither the adviser not young person is aware of (see Luft, 1984). Other techniques involve diagrams to explain the purpose of the intervention, for example a crumbling building without foundations is contrasted with a sound one with firm foundations to explain the need to build inner strength and confidence.

Taking each card, or issue, in turn the young person is asked to choose a colour chalk that represents it (eg red for anger) and are given a small pile of salt into which they are asked to begin rubbing the chalk. As they do this the salt gradually takes on the colour of the chalk. While the young person is rubbing the chalk into the salt they are encouraged to talk about the issue. At the end of the session the coloured salt is decanted into a small plastic bottle, like a souvenir from the coloured sands at Allum Bay, and given to the young person to take with them.

The PA uses a combination of techniques from CBT and SFBT to facilitate discussion. These include looking for evidence of previous successes with problem-solving, writing down key words spoken by them to use as prompts and to seek clarification. Goal setting is a key part of the process. Therefore, the salt-pot is essentially a technique to assist a young person to communicate the issues of importance to them, and could be used alongside a range of interventions, including Motivational Interviewing, SFBT, CBT and NLP.

One of the main benefits of the technique is that it minimises eye contact between the young person and adviser. This can increase the confidence of the young person and encourage greater openness, without risking excessive familiarity. In this respect it is similar to the Rickter Scale®. The PA using the technique finds it popular with young people because,

> *'They appreciate the fact that it is being done properly, that there is a technique and a framework. It has a flavour that is just about them - about seeing who they are and where you can help them to go '.*

It is not used at a first few sessions with a young person, where the emphasis is on establishing rapport and carrying out the APIR assessment and profile. It would not be used with young people who are uncommunicative or very resistant to being helped because it is unlikely to be effective in such cases.

Making a 'time-line'

Also applied by the PA using the 'salt-pot', the time-line is a technique aimed at assisting a young person to review progress and plan ahead. It involves writing a diary of events and steps taken since the young person's first contact with the PA, Connexions, or other suitable milestone. This is done using marker pens on one or more large sheets of paper, for example from a flip-chart. The list can include dates, decisions and steps taken, for example taking part in a training scheme, and the results of these. It is important that it is clearly laid out, using columns and even different coloured pens. The technique is seen as similar to the APIR in providing the young person with a picture of their current situation and, in addition, events leading up to it.

The time-line is intended to show both successes and failures and to acknowledge and record the reasons for these outcomes. In producing a time-line the adviser aims to help the young person to recognise when successes or failures were his or her own fault, and when they were not. They can therefore be encouraged to take responsibility, but also to recognise that they are not always to blame. This is important for those young people who are inclined either to cast blame for the problems they experience or, conversely to blame everything on themselves.

The technique involves both reaching an agreed version of events and planning future action. This includes agreeing action on the part of the PA. Because it is used after various options have already been tried, this is of particular importance. Therefore, when making a time-line, the adviser is thinking of how to move a young person forward in ways that would be both acceptable and feasible for them.

Bio-feedback

Bio-feedback uses stress measurement technology to help clients to increase their self awareness, particularly of their emotional state. It is popular in the United States and Europe, particularly in the treatment of pain and stress-related health conditions such as insomnia and incontinence.

The technique involves giving a client 'feedback' on levels of stress they experience in a controlled setting, in this case the Connexions intervention. This is then used as a basis for training in the control of muscle tension, breathing and heart rate and other biological functions. It is used in Connexions County Durham with a range of young people, including those who have experienced problems controlling anger. The Partnership has bought copies of the bio-feedback package and PAs have received training in its use by the Independent Psychological Service.[24]

The equipment consists of a lap-top computer, loaded with the bio-feedback programme and a small cuff which is fitted to the young person's finger. This uses electrodes to measure Galvanic Skin Response (GSR), the skin's conduction. When an individual experiences increased levels of anxiety, the conductivity of their skin increases, partly through increased activity in the sweat glands.

Feedback on their levels of stress is relayed to the young person either by a series of beeps alone, or in combination with a moving image. The PA can use one of a number of animated scenes which progress only as the young person relaxes. In one of these a fish metamorphoses into a mermaid, moving from the sea to land, becoming human and eventually an angel. The time taken to achieve this is dependent on the young person's level of stress or relaxation. The image even moves backwards when levels of stress increase.

The role of the adviser during this process is to assist the client to relax. This can include various techniques, including imagining various situations which have caused stress or presented barriers to progression. With the guidance of the PA and the bio-feedback, the young person can both recognise their stressed response and learn to control it through relaxation. The idea is that, once they have identified these sensations, they will be able to induce them when threatened by a stressful situation.

24 The Independent Psychological Service (TIPS) can be contacted at Swindon College: Regent Circus, Swindon, SN1 1PT. Ged Lomard, the director of TIPs, is the sole licensee for the provision of the system and training methods. He can be contacted by email: Ged.Lomard@btinternet.com.

The technique could be used with a number of approaches presented in Section 5. In Connexions County Durham it is used with motivational interviewing techniques. It is found to work well with a wide range of young people.

Life-coaching

Life-coaching is aimed at facilitating improvement in various areas of life, including work, learning and personal growth. It has been described as a hybrid of four more established approaches: mentoring, counselling, training and consulting, with the relative emphasis of these varying according to the setting and background of the coach. It is solution-focused and results-oriented, drawing particularly strongly on SFBT and NLP (see Section 5).
It originated in the United States where it is said to be the second largest professional growth area after IT[25]. Most practitioners train through private Life-coaching organisations, which may also advertise on their behalf. It has been used largely in the business world both to groups of employees in 'corporate coaching' sessions and to individuals. Its use within Connexions represents a departure from its usual application, but its techniques are equally applicable.

Life-coaching involves helping the client to identify issues which are impeding progress, setting goals, providing encouragement and helping to find new ways of tackling situations. Its advocates draw a distinction between life-coaching and counselling on the basis that Life-coaching 'works with those parts of our personalities known to ourselves and other people' (see Guardian, 2001). Therefore, it does not seek to probe into underlying reasons for an individual's motivation and behaviour. It aims to help an individual to identify what is important to them, where they want to go and how to get there. In doing so the coach emphasises choice and possibility of change.

There is no set format for life-coaching, but motivation and goal setting are described as key features of the approach. The coach's role is to help a client to focus on their goals and motivate them to achieve. Some life-coaches use paper-based or other exercises with clients, and encourage them to set their own 'homework' involving the achievement of particular tasks or goals. It is generally viewed as a temporary or 'brief' intervention, of up to ten sessions, rather than indeterminate.

Prospects, part of Connexions South London, has carried out two projects using life-coaching in nine Further Education colleges in South London and Surrey[26]. The aim of the projects has been to identify students experiencing difficulties which may lead them to drop out. The projects aim to help the student to do three things:

1. *Identify future goals and aspirations;*
2. *Identify the principal inner obstacles preventing them from achieving the success they desire;*
3. *Tap into their own potential to achieve that success.*

25 This assertion is attributed to Ben Botes, a director of the European Life-coaching Institute, Guardian, 13 November 2001

26 For further information on the projects and the development of life-coaching in Prospects email Angela Hill: Ange.Hill@prospects.co.uk

Coaching is carried out by PAs and by experienced coaches recruited externally. Training in Life-coaching is provided by Prospects managers[27]. This includes an introduction to coaching, coaching skills, typical coaching sessions, assessing an individual's coaching needs, boundaries of the coach-client relationship, setting goals, referral and confidentiality. As a college-based project, it is particularly important that coaches are knowledgeable about college welfare systems and training therefore includes this. Training also covers formats for coaching, including email and text-messaging.

Life coaches use their own techniques and tools for working with young people, based on their former training and experience. Therefore, the approaches used within the project vary in certain details. This includes, for example, whether coaches draw on techniques derived from other approaches such as NLP or SFBT (see Section 5) or use paper-based exercises.

In addition to regular meetings, the project uses tele-conferencing as a way of facilitating communication between PAs and coaches. Tele-conferencing is used to share good practice and for coaches to seek advice on aspects of their practice and work with young people. This might include cases which advisers find difficult or which present dilemmas. Sharing of ideas and practice in this way allows less experienced coaches to benefit from the expertise of others.

The project has established referral systems with the colleges to identify students who would gain most benefit from coaching. Students may also self-refer, although referral decisions rest with the college. Coaches working with young people have found their problems to typically include motivation, attendance, coping with course work demands and personal problems including lack of family support, excessive responsibilities including caring for siblings, and general unhappiness.

Prospects has found that best results can be achieved with young people experiencing specific problems and loss of motivation, described as 'wobblies', rather than those with pressing and multiple problems who are in imminent danger of dropping out. It has also identified potential benefits in 'top-up' sessions in times of stress, for example exam periods. Partnership with the college is seen as important to the success of the coaching project. In particular, Prospects has found it important that college management understands the aims and method of life-coaching. This includes accepting that it may sometimes result in a decision to leave the course or college where a preferred option is identified and respecting confidentiality between coach and student.

Group work

The survey of Phase 1 and 2 Partnerships found that the most usual format for the use of techniques and tools is face to face interviews. It is in such settings that PAs will carry out most of their work, and this guide has focused on techniques and tools for this purpose. However, ten Partnerships said that counselling approaches are sometimes used with groups of young people. Group work was reported to take place in schools, and also by specialist agencies within Partnerships in such areas as drug misuse. Where particular approaches were mentioned, these were Motivational Interviewing and NLP (see Section 5).

27 For further information about training in Life-coaching email Michael Larbalestier: Michael.Larbalestier@Prospects.co.uk

The research found indications that many Partnerships were interested in developing group work using techniques derived from counselling. The advantages of group work are in reaching greater numbers of young people than would be possible in one to one work; and reaching young people who would be reluctant to seek the help of a PA. However, such contact may raise or amplify issues of concern to young people and it is therefore important that follow-on support is offered to young people attending a group session.

Two of the approaches used with groups by Partnerships visited are drama therapy and Life-coaching (see above). Drama therapy has been used in Connexions West of England, which has also run training for other Connexions Partnerships[28]. Drama therapy uses techniques such as drama games, story making, role play, costume and masks to explore issues of relevance to young people. Therefore, participants are invited to raise issues of interest to them which can be explored within using the various techniques. 'Distancing' is an important feature of the approach, and refers to the opportunity to explore emotions in a non-confrontational way. This might include, for example, exploring an object, for example an ornament, or fictional character within an activity. The role of the therapist includes guiding participants and helping to raise their self-awareness [29]. Group work has also been carried out by PAs in a Coventry school using the 'breakthrough' training developed by the Pacific Institute[30]. This consists of personal development programmes for students to improve motivation and behaviour[31].

28 For further information about Dramatherapy training delivered by Connexions West of England email Dawn Miller: dmiller@connexionswest.org.uk

29 For a report on a drama and health project aimed at improving the mental health of teenage boys see the Humberside Partnership Website www.getting-on.co.uk

30 For information on courses offered by the Institute see their website: www.pacificinstitute.co.uk

31 See Making Connexions, Issue 9, March 2003, p7

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www.childline.org.uk Website of the charity for children and young people

www.connexions.gov.uk Website of the Connexions Service

www.getting-on.co.uk Website developed by the Humberside Partnership including details of techniques and tools used within Connexions

www.motivationalinterview.org Website with references to studies using Motivational Interviewing

www.rickterscale.com Website of the Rickter company

www.scotland.gov.uk/library3/education/ilsn-00.asp A 'digest' of assessment tools developed by the Scottish Executive

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