Vetting and Sharing Information with New Providers

Get to Know Yourself

- Educate yourself on your mental health condition or disability. Having knowledge about yourself and your needs will earn you respect from the professionals. They will be more likely to listen if they understand that you know what you're talking about.
- Learn what rights you have as an individual so you can protect yourself.
- Create a one-pager describing you and what you want. This is a chance to let people know who you are and that you're not just your mental health condition or disability. Only give certain information until you trust the person.
- Consider what information you want the professionals to know about yourself, your culture, and your diagnosis.
- Who are all the people already on your care team, and do you want them to work together to coordinate your care?
- What are your hopes for your future and treatment?

Sometimes it can be hard to develop a trusting relationship and comfortably share personal information with a new provider. Here are some tips on how to confidently approach this!

Get to Know the Provider

- Research the professional and their credentials. Some may be reviewed online, so you can see what others have said about their services.
- Requesting to interview the provider before choosing whether you want to work with them may be helpful (and be cautious working with someone who will not be interviewed).

Potential Questions to Ask During an Interview

- What do you know about my mental health condition/disability?
- Do you have any experience treating other youth/young adults with similar needs?
- How would you treat my condition? (Note that any plans of action or treatment should be laid out transparently, so that any problem areas can be talked about easily.)
- What's your experience working with people from my culture?
- How long are you planning to be part of my care?
- What do you expect from me, and what are the consequences if I don't meet those expectations?

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After researching various providers, hold an introductory meeting with the one you feel best meets your needs. This will be your chance to ask a lot of questions. Make sure you have a list of questions and topics that need to be covered. Make sure they are actively listening to what you say and answering your questions. It may be difficult to speak with a new provider during an appointment, so emailing them or scheduling a phone call is an alternative. Determine if this provider meets your needs or if there are issues, such as rules the provider has that you disagree with and cannot compromise on.

If all goes well, you can begin sharing your information with them. You should also decide if you want to coordinate care with school staff (if you are in school and if it would be helpful to involve them), your primary care physician, and your behavioral/mental health providers.

Sharing Information with Professionals

- Know what type of information you're comfortable sharing with each provider. For example, there may be things you want your mental health provider to know that you don't want your psychiatrist to know.
- Understand which providers can help you with the different aspects of your care.
- Ask yourself if sharing this information is going to be helpful or harmful in the moment. For example, consider whether you are able to feel safe sharing certain information, or if you are not ready yet.
- You are allowed to say "no" to sharing certain information.
- When sharing records or private information, let the professional know the information is confidential and that they should keep it that way. However, it is important to understand that if you share, the professional may be a mandated reporter*, and they may be legally required to share certain information if it is deemed necessary. If you are concerned, you can ask if they are a mandated reporter and what information they are required to report.

***In Massachusetts, mandated reporters are legally required to report suspected child abuse or neglect to the Department of Children and Families (DCF) when they have reasonable cause to believe it is occurring.**

If a client is at imminent risk of seriously harming themselves or others, the therapist may break confidentiality to keep them safe.

Reminders:

- You may request records and review notes at any time, such as medical history from primary care provider, school files upon graduation, therapy notes (especially when transferring to a new mental health provider), or the paperwork relevant to sharing your information (request a list of everyone allowed to view it).
- Carefully read everything before you sign it and maintain a record of the forms you have signed.

PPAL
Parent/Professional Advocacy League, Inc.
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