Program Ideas: HOW TO...

association for experiential education

...MONITOR PROGRESS

PROGRESS MONITORING

Client progress in achieving change is important to measure in experiential education (EE). The **progress monitoring** (PM) process is already accepted in therapy to maintain client health and wellness. So, PM can serve as a guide to measure ongoing client success for any program that sets goals for client change of feelings, thoughts, behaviors or resistance. PM is akin to using established valid and reliable instruments to measure clients' vital signs that determine whether they are well on track to recovery or deteriorating throughout the EE program. PM represents a personalized approach to enabling clients to reach their individual change goals.

THE VALUE OF PM

In therapy experiments, randomized controlled trials have shown that PM can significantly: increase client numbers experiencing reliable or substantial changes, double treatment impact, halve dropout rates, reduce deterioration risk by one-third, shorten treatment duration by two-thirds, and reduce mental healthcare costs.

HOW PM WORKS

PM is conducted routinely and periodically to evaluate, inform, and enhance the effectiveness of client pathways to change. EE programs may choose to measure clients on entry and exit, then periodically, as often as they determine is prudent, depending on program duration (once mid-week for week-long, biweekly for month-long, or monthly for year-long programs). The choice of when to measure also depends on the type of program: educational being less often and therapeutic being more often than average.

Instruments used to measure progress toward a change in feeling, thinking, behaving or resisting can include surveys, individual interviews, and group observations by experts or qualified staff.

An instrument variety can permit programs to freely develop feedback systems that work for their cultures and approaches. For example, in therapy, PM can shift the treatment focus away from a reliance on plans (that match presenting client issues with specific solutions) and toward detecting gains or declines so rapid adjustments can be made (based on emerging client needs).

PM regularly assesses a client's progress by tracking outcomes and then informing program decisions in a responsive and timely manner. These assessments are then discussed with the client and other stakeholders, in order to select a best course of action to reach desired change.

When discussed with clients, PM provides the opportunity to view, through their eyes, the programmatic factors and experiences that play a role in their change processes. Examining this change from multiple perspectives invites open staff and client conversations and gives both a chance to examine which program elements are facilitating change at specific times, thereby allowing their use of these elements to be more strategic, intentional, and client-centered.

PROGRAM BENEFITS

PM provides for the clients' voices in a program, empowers them in their change efforts, improves communication with their change supporters, informs funding decision makers of EE program effectiveness, and helps hold practitioners accountable to their stakeholders. When PM is successfully integrated into the culture of a program and becomes an integral part of the change process itself, outcomes are enhanced, and program fit is more easily and ethically determined. Costs of PM can be offset by EE programs developing their own unique tracking tools and using free or inexpensive, but also reliable, outcome tracking instruments.

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FURTHER RESOURCES

READING

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