

LO-5 Example Script Eliciting Goals

Sample conversation between a patient and BHSS helping the patient to elicit well-defined and doable goals

We elicit patients' own goals by introducing the following: "We will be working together each week [for xx weeks] to help you move towards your goals. To this end, what do you want to see happen for yourself? Some people call this a goal, a vision, or an intention."

Because HaRT goal setting is open-ended and patient-driven, you will have to help patients hone these goals. Be sure the patient has clearly defined them and set them for certain dates and times to concretize the goals and make them easier for patients to achieve.

Example of a poorly defined goal:

Patient: I want to reconnect with family.

BHSS: That's a great goal! I will write that down for next week.

This is a less-defined goal, because we don't know what exactly this goal entails (who, what, why), what the steps to achieving this goal are, whether it's imminently possible, and if so, over what timeframe. This can be discouraging for the patient when they do not accomplish that potentially huge task in the next week. *Note: This example is not recommended to use with patients and clients.*

Example of a well-defined goal:

Patient: I want to reconnect with family.

BHSS: Family is important to you. *[Affirmation.]* Tell me a little more about what reconnecting with family would look like for you. *[Elicit a narrative to better understand the key people, values, and potential barriers involved.]*

Patient: Well, my daughter lives really far away, and I haven't seen her in about 5 years. Sometimes, I think she doesn't really want to connect. She's busy with her own kids, and I haven't always been there for her in the past. I really want to have more of a connection, though.

BHSS: So, reconnecting with your daughter is an important goal to you. *[Affirmation.]* It's also a really big goal. *[Acknowledging potential barriers.]* What's one step you can take towards reconnecting with her in the next week? *[Break down into bite-size goal(s).]*

Patient: Well, I could text her to wish her a happy birthday? Her birthday is coming up.

BHSS: That sounds like a good first step. *[Affirmation.]* When do you feel most comfortable texting her? *[Set time and place of goal achievement.]*

Patient: Well, on her birthday would be good.

BHSS: What day is that?

Patient: Next Tuesday.

BHSS: OK, let's put down on your goals sheet to "Text daughter to wish her happy birthday on Tuesday." That's in service of your larger goal of reconnecting with your family. How does that

sound? *[By writing down the goal and the logistics, the BHSS is helping concretize commitment to a goal that occurs in a certain time and place and thus is more “doable.”]*

Patient: Sounds good.

BHSS: And what would you like to say in your text? *[Further honing the specifics to make the goal maximally achievable.]*

Patient: How about, “Happy birthday, Cindy! I am thinking of you and hope you have a great day.”

BHSS: How do you feel about that? *[Eliciting any potential barriers.]*

Patient: I think that would be really good. Low-key but nice.

BHSS: Sounds great! I will write that down for you, too. *[Affirmation, concretization.]*

After they have elicited the patients’ goals in this way, the BHSS follows up on how these goals went from week to week by eliciting a narrative from the patient about their experience with the goal. This should not be a checklist, but an inviting conversation, like coffee with a friend. For example: “Last week, you were going to text your daughter a happy birthday message. How did that go?”

This material appears in the UW BHSS Educator’s Guide chapter on Intervention, unit: Harm Reduction.