

## Worksheet 4.4.2: A of OARS – affirmations and supporting self-efficacy

Exhausted carers, bombarded with difficult Edi behaviours and negative self-talk from Edi, find it difficult to be positive. This exercise helps carers to seek out any green shoots, and to reframe seemingly negative situations, comments or actions in a more positive way, thus helping to boost Edi's self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Affirmation is a way of giving positive attention to a person's efforts and intentions. This is not the same as praise, where the 'praiser' is bestowing their views on the other person. The importance of noticing and commenting on the smallest achievements and/or the effort of trying helps increase confidence and improve self-esteem.

Rosemary Bravister – expert at the Maudsley, recovered from anorexia after 25 years – explains how affirmations helped kick-start her recovery. When she was recovering, her carer would notice and comment to her for achieving even 1% of a plan. She says that it was so very powerful to get that attention, because she could focus on that 1% rather than the 99% that she had not achieved. 'Little bit by little bit, I realised I could get lots of 1%. It was like pennies in the piggy bank.'

Sometimes it is very easy for carers to focus on tiny setbacks, rather than remembering to notice and appreciate the smallest achievements. When progress is made, carers need to try not to just affirm outcome – as this may appear judgemental and/or conditional. With practice, carers can quickly learn to affirm *process*, especially if it goes against ED traits, for example:

- Connecting to others and the world rather than isolating themselves.
- Expressing rather than avoiding emotions.
- Flexibility rather than rigidity.
- Going for bigger picture rather than focusing on the detail.

Examples:

- It can't have been easy to be open about your feelings...
- I realise it takes patience and thoughtfulness for you to explain your gut reaction to...
- It takes great strength of character to shift from your safe rituals...
- You seem to notice my efforts to support you for trying to change...
- It is impressive that you have been flexible/adaptable/versatile/reflective enough to...

## Group exercise – A of OARS

The facilitator will ask carers to split in to two groups and face each other in a line. If this isn't possible do the exercise around the room, or across the table.

One group represents Edi, the other represents the carer. The carer is seeking to respond to Edi with sentences that affirm something positive from a seemingly negative statement from Edi. Swap roles so that everyone has a chance to give an affirmation.

### Example:

**Edi:** I hate therapy with a passion.

**Carer instinctive rhino response might be:** Well you have to go I have paid for ten sessions.

**Kangaroo response might be:** Oh my poor darling, how awful, let me sort this out for you.

**Carer affirming response:** It is great to hear that you feel so passionately about this.

This is a real-life scenario and the carer reported back to the group that her daughter laughed (in a good way) at her mum's response. It was not the response the daughter had expected. They then proceeded to have a really useful discussion about the therapy session on the way home.

## Animal metaphors and affirmation practice

Which animal is the carer being in the scenarios below? Come up with an alternative affirming phrase.

**Sam:** Leave me alone Mum, I am simply too upset to talk to you right now.

**Mum:** For God's sake Sam. You know we have to talk about this and we need to do it right now.

*Which animal?*

**James:** That bloody therapist is useless and stupid and I will not see him again.

**Dad:** Now come on son, you know you have to see him and I have already paid for ten sessions.

*Which animal?*

**Amy:** I'm sorry Mum I self-harmed today and I feel really terrible about it.

**Mum:** Oh God Amy [starts crying]. So we are back at square one. I simply don't know what to say.

*Which animal?*

**Ollie:** You really need to back off and let me make my own decisions. I am sick and tired of you treating me like a toddler.

**Mum:** I am just so worried you will end up back in hospital and I can't bear to think about that.

*Which animal?*