

**Collaborative Care New Maudsley Skills Workshops for Carers
Additional Workshop Capsule
A of OARS – Affirmations and Supporting Self Efficacy**

Exhausted carers, bombarded with difficult ED behaviours and negative self-talk from Edi find it difficult to be positive. The exercises within this capsule help carers to seek out any green shoots, and to reframe seemingly negative situations, comments or actions in a more positive way, thus improving connection with their loved one and helping to boost Edi's self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Affirmations, or VIEW (very important encouraging words) are 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. Any family member can benefit from giving and receiving affirmations.

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief that he or she is capable of achieving a task, goal or outcome. Supporting self-efficacy through a warm shower of affirmations from carers and other close others can increase Edi's motivation to start to think about making their own changes and increase their self-belief that they can make changes. If Edi has little confidence in their ability to change their ED related behaviours, then they are less likely to make a change.

Rosemary Bravister – Expert at the Maudsley, recovered from Anorexia after 25 years explains how affirmations helped kickstart her recovery. When she was recovering, her nurse 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% she had achieved 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'

This table of affirmations might be useful as a prompt for carers who are struggling to identify positive character strengths in their loved one, or indeed other family members, because they have become so used to focusing their attention on the negative aspects of the illness:

| | | | | | |
|-------------------|----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Adaptable</i> | <i>Collaborative</i> | <i>Eloquent</i> | <i>Funny</i> | <i>Patient</i> | <i>Sociable</i> |
| <i>Amazing</i> | <i>Committed</i> | <i>Empathic</i> | <i>Hard working</i> | <i>Persevering</i> | <i>Sporty</i> |
| <i>Articulate</i> | <i>Compassionate</i> | <i>Energetic</i> | <i>Incredible</i> | <i>Popular</i> | <i>Strong</i> |
| <i>Artistic</i> | <i>Conscientious</i> | <i>Enthusiastic</i> | <i>Independent</i> | <i>Quirky</i> | <i>Talented</i> |
| <i>Attentive</i> | <i>Considerate</i> | <i>Expressive</i> | <i>Intelligent</i> | <i>Reflective</i> | <i>Thoughtful</i> |
| <i>Brave</i> | <i>Courageous</i> | <i>Fantastic</i> | <i>Kind</i> | <i>Resilient</i> | <i>Trust worthy</i> |
| <i>Calm</i> | <i>Creative</i> | <i>Fearless</i> | <i>Knowledgeable</i> | <i>Resourceful</i> | <i>Versatile</i> |
| <i>Capable</i> | <i>Determined</i> | <i>Flexible</i> | <i>Level headed</i> | <i>Responsible</i> | <i>Wild</i> |
| <i>Caring</i> | <i>Diligent</i> | <i>Fortitude</i> | <i>Loving</i> | <i>Sensible</i> | <i>Wise</i> |
| <i>Clever</i> | <i>Driven</i> | <i>Friendly</i> | <i>Passionate</i> | <i>Sensitive</i> | <i>Zany</i> |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |

Use the blank spaces to add some more of your own affirmations.

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 common ED traits such as

- Social isolation
- Avoiding any talk of emotions
- Black and white thinking and rigid rules
- Focusing on the detail

Some examples:

Connecting to others & the world rather than isolating themselves

- You were determined to go to your sister's baby shower even though I know you were really nervous about people looking at you
- It was so lovely to see you having such a lovely time with your baby niece and your granny on Sunday
- I realise it takes patience and thoughtfulness for you to explain your gut reaction to...
- You seem to notice my efforts to support you for trying to change.....

Because of COVID 19 lockdown, opportunities for many family and friend's gatherings have been curtailed for the time being. However, it is still possible to notice any attempts by Edi to resist isolating themselves:

- It was lovely to see you entertaining your granny on the phone with your description of the flowers in the garden

- I have noticed how determined you are to learn how to use Zoom and to organise the quiz with your friends yesterday to raise money for the NHS
- When we were all sad about extended lockdown you cheered us up by recounting some funny tales from your time as an in-patient. You helped us realise how lucky we are to be together as a family

Expressing rather than avoiding emotions

- Thank you for telling me how you are feeling
- It can't have been easy to be open about your feelings...
- Wow you really slammed the door, you seem angry/ upset/ anxious/ frustrated

COVID 19 lockdown examples:

- It was kind of you to pay your little brother so much attention yesterday, despite the fact you were feeling anxious about your meal plan
- You have been so open about your feelings since lockdown and it has helped the rest of the family to be just as open
- Thank you for explaining to me how lockdown is making you feel

Flexibility rather than rigidity

- You were able to cope well with dinner being unexpectedly ten minutes late – I know you find unexpected delays around mealtimes difficult
- You showed courage and flexibility when the restaurant had run out of the meal you wanted
- It is impressive that you have been flexible/adaptable/versatile/reflective enough to...
- It takes great strength of character to shift from your safe rituals....

COVID 19 lockdown examples:

- You have adapted so well to lockdown, accepting that some of your safe foods will not always be available
- I realise how difficult all these changes in your routines have been, and that you have allowed me to help and support you even though you would much rather be totally independent of the family right now

Going for bigger picture rather than focusing on the detail

- I can see that you are able to judge portion sizes just my looking at your plate, it must be a relief not having to weigh everything. You have come so far
- You were courageous to have a day off your fitbit, you seemed more relaxed and the dog walk was so enjoyable, going at a slower pace and not counting every step

COVID 19 lockdown examples:

- You have really embraced the spirit of virtual school without worrying too much about your performance in individual subjects
- You have coped so well with the change in your routine because of lockdown and maintained your daily routine without reverting to your previous ED safety rules that used to pop up when unexpected things happened

Exercises that we do in the workshops:

A) 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 which affirm something positive from a seemingly negative statement from Edi. Swap roles so that everyone has a chance to give an affirmation.

The suggested affirmations are grouped into common categories:

Group Affirmation Practice - there is nothing wrong with me – it is you that has the problem

- Edi “ It’s you that has the problem, I am just fine. F*** off “
- Carer “I am glad you feel fine right now and I’d like to know if you can help me sort out my problem”
- Edi – “I’m fine the way I am. I don’t need to change anything. You need to stop being so negative”
- Carer – “Thank you for sharing your feelings with me and I will think hard about what you have said and how I can approach things in a more positive way”

Group Affirmation Practice - the “I am fat” FEAR

- Edi “ You are just trying to make me fat”
- Carer “I can see that is a genuine fear. It is good that you are able to express your fears so openly”
- Edi - “I can’t have supper, I’ve binged today and not purged and I’ve eaten enough”
- Carer – “I’m really impressed you’ve told me that, it was courageous. I know you are really determined to get your eating under control”
- Edi – “I’m feeling really enormous today”
- Carer – “Thank you for sharing that with me and letting me know how you feel”

- Edi “ I will not eat this food “ and throws plate on the floor
- Carer “You have a good right hand throw” with humour
- Edi – “When the psychiatrist told me I was looking well, it must mean I am fat”
- Carer – “Thank you for having the courage to tell me that and I can see you are upset. I’m sorry you have taken that message from the meeting.”

Group Affirmation Practice - you don’t understand, you don’t care

- Edi “You never listen to me and it makes me so angry”
- Carer “It helps me to understand more when you tell me how you are feeling.”
- Edi – “RESULTS! What results? Why are you interested? You don’t care, leave me alone”
- Carer – “I can understand that’s very difficult and I’ll think about it and will come back to you another time if you want me to. I love you very much and will always be interested in how you are feeling”

Group Affirmation Practice - Self doubt and self loathing

- Edi “I can’t have dinner, you know I can’t eat after 1pm, I can’t do it”
- Carer – “I’m understanding that you are finding it difficult to eat after a certain time, it can’t be easy for you with all your rigid rules around food. I believe you can do it and I am here to help you in any way I can. Thank you for telling me”
- Edi “I’m finding it really hard now that my sister is having a baby and I know I’m not going to be able to do anything with my life”
- Carer – “Thank you for having the courage to tell me how you are feeling about this. You are such a loving person and will a wonderful aunt. I believe you will achieve many great things in your life.”
- Edi – “All my friends are going to uni, I am such a freak, a stupid useless failure ”
- Carer – “Thank you for being open and honest with me, I really appreciate you telling me how you are feeling. You have come such a long way in recent weeks and your time will come to go to uni when you are ready. You are such a talented, determined, strong and courageous boy and you have a positive future ahead of you”

Group Affirmation Practice – Hopeless/ Suicidal talk

- Edi “ I want to die, why don’t you let me die”
- Edi: My life is so miserable, I am such a burden, I can’t go on like this
- Edi – “I just want to die, you would all be better off without me, you want me to die”
- Carer – “We would be so sad if you weren’t here. You bring so much to our lives”

- Carer – “We love you unconditionally and will not let your illness take you from us”
- Carer – “Our family would be incomplete if you were not part of it”
- Carer - “I love you very much and would never willingly let you die”

B) Group Exercise: Animal Metaphors and Affirmation Practice

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

An Example:

Edi: “I hate therapy with a passion”

Carer instinctive rhino response might be: “Well you have to go I have paid for 10 sessions”
or 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.

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.....

Rhino response which is likely to elicit further resistance.

Alternative response: “Thank you for telling me how you are feeling, lets take a break.”

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 10 sessions” Which animal.....

Rhino response which is likely to elicit further resistance.

Alternative response: “I can see you are determined not to see him again. Talk to me about that.”

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.....

Jellyfish response which is likely to make Amy feel even more terrible.

Alternative response: “I am impressed with your courage and honesty. It really helps when you tell me how you are feeling.”

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.....

Jellyfish & kangaroo response which is likely to make Ollie feel even more sick and tired of how he is being treated.

Alternative response: "You make a very good point Ollie and I will think about that."

Learning

Affirmations are invaluable and provide carers with a way of giving positive attention to their loved one's efforts and intentions.

Noticing and commenting on the smallest achievements and character strengths can really help to boost the self esteem of Edi. You will be supporting their self efficacy.

A warm shower of affirmations can help to calm any highly anxious or angry person.

The ED voice hates affirmations as the carer is consciously connecting with their loved one in a positive and supportive manner, rather than being caught up in a highly stressful argument with the ED bully voice.