

“How to get the most out of your treatment”

When asked to write an article on getting the most out of your treatment team I immediately turned to clients to see what they had to say about the topic. I find that clients are usually great at giving advice to others even if they are not always so good at following it themselves. They gave me plenty of ideas which I have incorporated into this article along with my own reflections. I hope readers will find these ideas useful in their own situation.

A treatment team may consist of any combination of professionals working with the client. The most common professionals included in a treatment team for an eating disorder client are the following:

Physician
Psychiatrist
Dietitian
Therapist
Group or family therapist

- 1) It is important to understand that all members of your treatment team are there to work for you. It is important to find people who are knowledgeable about eating disorders and that you feel good about. You are hiring them to work for you and it is a matter of finding the right match. Having said this, be sure you don't run from professional to professional rejecting everyone. If you go through a few and none seem right, you will need to look more to yourself as to your requirements and your resistance to treatment.
- 2) Allow your treatment team to communicate with each other. They need to collaborate to give you the best of all of them. It is hard if they all contain only a part of the picture. This does not mean for example, that your therapist needs to tell all of your personal secrets to your physician, but that they these two and all team members can discuss the pertinent things. In fact, be an advocate for yourself and make sure they communicate with each other.
- 3) When working with all members of your team be open, honest and truthful. Also allow yourself to be vulnerable. It does not help anyone to keep things hidden. If you feel like you cannot tell the truth to at least one person on your treatment team this is a problem. Some things are hard to talk about or admit but you have to find at least one person you can tell everything to. That person can help you share what is considered important information to the others.
- 4) Don't minimize your struggles or censor yourself. Try to say things as you experience them. Your team needs to know how hard things are for you. Don't put on a mask or an "act."
- 5) You are going to have to give up some control. Know that the treatment team is there to help you with this and they have your best interest at heart. Don't think you can hang on to some control or just get better enough to be able to "manage" your eating disorder.
- 6) If you are having a problem with any member of your treatment team or course of treatment, discuss it. Let any professional know when he or she is doing something that does not seem helpful. Tell the person how you feel about your sessions and what you like, don't like etc.
- 7) Be proactive. Take the position that you are responsible for getting what you need out of your treatment team, rather than expecting them to make you better. Come in with things to discuss. Do work between sessions. Ask for assignments and things to do.

- 8) Keep a journal of your feelings and your food intake and behaviors. Share this with your team.
- 9) Remember that you will have to push yourself beyond your current comfort level or there will be no growth.
- 10) Invite one or more family members or significant others into your sessions. It is best not to do treatment in isolation. Your treatment team can help your significant other(s) to understand you better and gain tools for helping support you.

Some extra thoughts if you are in a group setting or treatment program:

- 1) Be sensitive to others but do not lose yourself in their struggles. Speak up about it if and when you get triggered by others behaviors or comments. It is difficult not to be triggered by others, talking about it helps. However, be careful not to blame anyone else for your feelings. You have to say how their behavior affected you rather than judging them.
- 2) Take things one day at a time, do not focus on when you are going to get out of treatment. Recovery is a process.
- 3) Do not waste time delineating all the faults of the program and /or staff. There will be things you like and do not like. Do not get distracted from what you are there to do. Work around the things or staff members that are not your favorites. Whether at work or in school or elsewhere, this happens all the time in life and working with it will give you good practice for dealing with it in the future. It is all too easy to get distracted by the things you don't like rather than concentrating on your own problems and what you need to do.
- 4) Do not spend too much time talking to or e mailing friends or family members. It is fine to stay in touch but don't let them get all of your words, complaints or tears. The staff needs to know what you are thinking and feeling. Sometimes sharing too much with others who are not in treatment keeps clients from sharing with the staff or other clients. This prevents the individual from working through things in the moment with the people they are surrounded by, both staff and peers.
- 5) Do not take the attitude of joining with other clients against the staff or an "us against them" position that is often found in treatment settings. When this kind of attitude is taken up by clients they often try to see what they can get away with. This is a non productive and even dangerous attitude and will lead to you possibly siding with the eating disorder instead of recovery. You and the staff are on the same side, the eating disorder part of you is on the other. The staff is there to help you fight the battle between you and your eating disorder self. Be careful you don't forget which side you are on.

Whatever situation you are in be sure to set goals for yourself and honestly evaluate them from time to time with your treatment team. This will help everyone stay focused on where you are going and where you have been, especially you. Appreciate small steps, this is a long but worth it process.

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