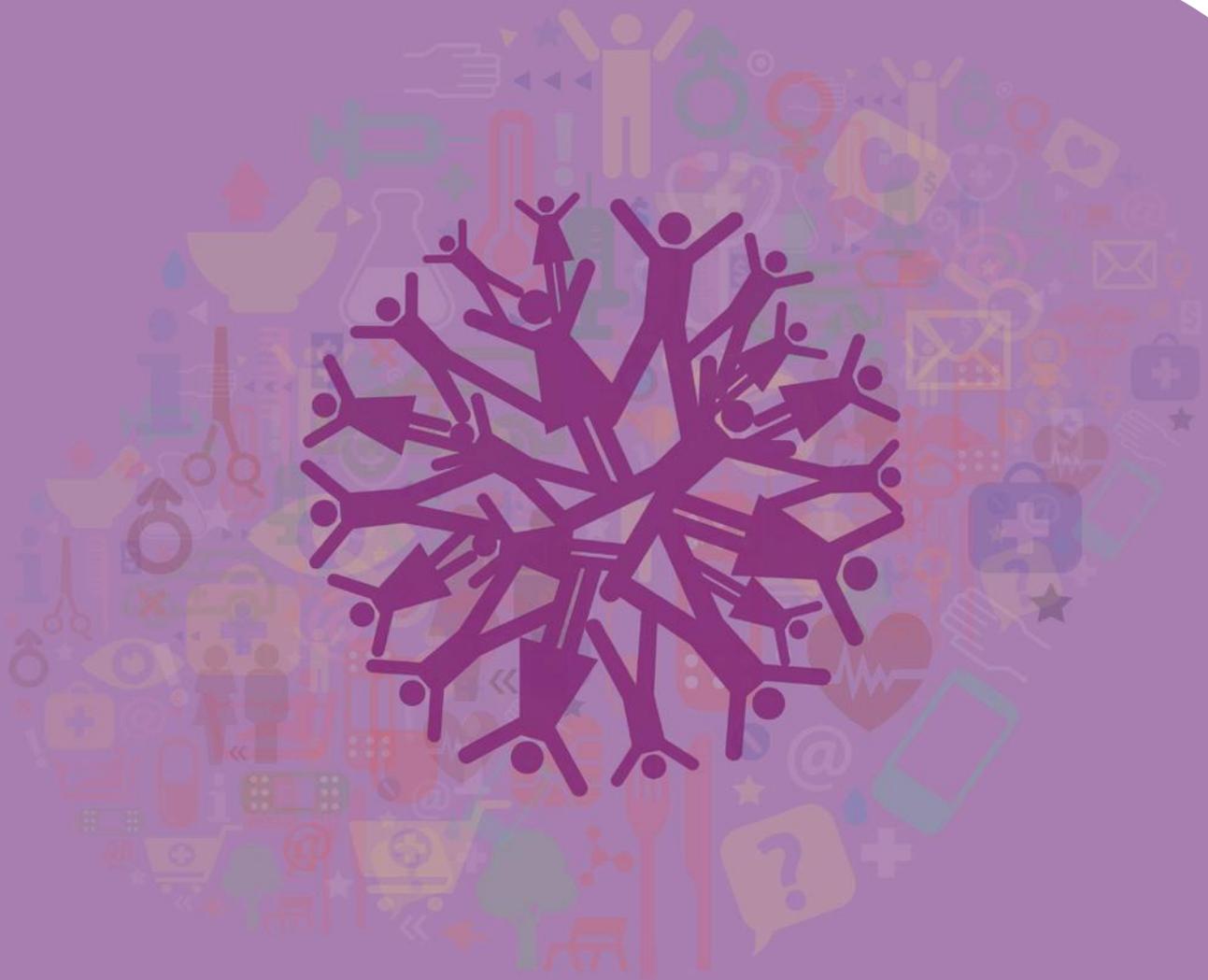


CHCPRP003

Reflect on and improve own professional practice

Release 1



Learner guide

CHCPRP003

Reflect on and improve own professional practice

Release 1

Learner guide

Aspire Version 1.2



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| Version | Release date | Modification |
|------------------------|---------------|---|
| Release 1, version 1.1 | April 2017 | First release. |
| Release 1, version 1.2 | December 2018 | Updated references to ACWA practice guidelines. Minor corrections as part of our continuous improvement program. |

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Before you begin

This learner guide is based on the unit of competency *CHCPRP003 Reflect on and improve own professional practice*, Release 1. Your trainer or training organisation must give you information about this unit of competency as part of your training program. You can access the unit of competency and assessment requirements at: www.training.gov.au.

How to work through this learner guide

This learner guide contains a number of features that will assist you in your learning. Your trainer will advise which parts of the learner guide you need to read, and which practice tasks and learning checkpoints you need to complete. The features of this learner guide are detailed in the following table.

| Feature of the learner guide | How you can use each feature |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Learning content | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Read each topic in this learner guide. If you come across content that is confusing, make a note and discuss it with your trainer. Your trainer is in the best position to offer assistance. It is very important that you take on some of the responsibility for the learning you will undertake. |
| Examples and case studies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Examples of completed documents that may be used in a workplace are included in this learner guide. You can use these examples as models to help you complete practice tasks and learning checkpoints. ▶ Case studies highlight learning points and provide realistic examples of workplace situations. |
| Practice tasks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Practice tasks give you the opportunity to put your skills and knowledge into action. Your trainer will tell you which practice tasks to complete. |
| Video clips | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Where QR codes appear, learners can use smartphones and other devices to access video clips relating to the content. For information about how to download a QR reader app or accessing video on your device, please visit our website: www.aspirelr.com.au/help  |
| Summary | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Key learning points are provided at the end of each topic. |
| Learning checkpoints | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ There is a learning checkpoint at the end of each topic. Your trainer will tell you which learning checkpoints to complete. These checkpoints give you an opportunity to check your progress and apply the skills and knowledge you have learnt. |

Foundation skills

As you complete learning using this guide, you will be developing the foundation skills relevant for this unit. Foundation skills are the language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills and the employability skills required for participation in modern workplaces and contemporary life.

The following table outlines specific foundation skills noted for your learning in this learner guide.

| Foundation skill area | Foundation skill description |
|-------------------------|--|
| Learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Understanding your job role, organisational procedures and legal responsibilities ▶ Managing your work and seeing how well you are going and making goals for yourself at work ▶ Seeking professional development opportunities for continuous improvement |
| Reading | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Understanding how documents are presented and being able to navigate through documents ▶ Understanding industry- and job-specific terminology ▶ Interpreting key information in relevant documents ▶ Understanding routine workplace checklists and documentation |
| Writing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Planning, drafting and writing reports and documents ▶ Communicating through written letters, email and online ▶ Recording progress; reporting incidents |
| Oral communication | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Clarifying instructions ▶ Providing information ▶ Supporting others through encouragement, negotiation and conflict resolution ▶ Using body language to model desired behaviour and responding to others' body language |
| Numeracy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Calculating costs, weights, measurements of height and distance ▶ Interpreting measurements |
| Teamwork | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Working well with other people by cooperating, collaborating, encouraging and building rapport |
| Planning and organising | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Planning your workload and commitments ▶ Implementing tasks ▶ Completing work on time ▶ Knowing how to deal with hazards and risks |
| Making decisions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Understanding and applying decision-making processes ▶ Reviewing the impact of your decisions |
| Problem-solving | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Identifying problems ▶ Working out how to fix a problem using problem-solving processes and reviewing the outcome |
| Innovation and creation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Recognising opportunities to develop and apply new ideas ▶ Generating ideas by thinking of new ways to do something ▶ Making suggestions to improve work |

| Foundation skill area | Foundation skill description |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Technology and digital literacy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Efficiently using digitally based technologies and systems correctly and safely ▶ Accessing, organising and presenting information ▶ Using equipment correctly and safely |

What do you already know?

Use the following table to identify what you may already know. This may assist you to work out what to focus on in your learning.

| Topic | Key outcomes | Rate your confidence in each section |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| Topic 1 Reflect on your own practice | 1A Undertake self-evaluation in conjunction with supervisors and/or peers | <input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident |
| | 1B Reflect on and recognise the effect of values, beliefs and behaviour in practice | <input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident |
| | 1C Share two-way, open and evaluative feedback with co-workers or peers | <input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident |
| | 1D Actively seek and reflect on feedback | <input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident |
| Topic 2 Enhance your own practice | 2A Determine improvements needed based on own evaluation and feedback from others | <input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident |
| | 2B Identify potential support networks both internal and external to the organisation | <input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident |
| | 2C Seek specialist advice or further training | <input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident |
| | 2D Recognise requirements for self-care and identify requirements for additional support | <input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident |
| | 2E Devise, document and implement a self development plan that sets realistic goals and targets | <input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident |

| Topic | Key outcomes | Rate your confidence in each section |
|---|---|--|
| Topic 3 Facilitate ongoing professional development | 3A Access and review information on current and emerging industry developments and use it to improve practice | <input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident |
| | 3B Assess and confirm own practice against ethical and legal requirements and opportunities | <input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident |
| | 3C Identify and engage with opportunities to extend and expand your own expertise | <input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident |
| | 3D Regularly participate in review processes as a commitment to upgrading skills and knowledge | <input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident |



Topic 1

In this topic you will learn how to:

- 1A Undertake self-evaluation in conjunction with supervisors and/or peers**

- 1B Reflect on and recognise the effect of values, beliefs and behaviour in practice**

- 1C Share two-way, open and evaluative feedback with co-workers or peers**

- 1D Actively seek and reflect on feedback**

Reflect on your own practice

Community services work can be very challenging, as it involves responding to complex human needs and difficult situations. You should be aware of your own limitations and seek opportunities to improve your skills and knowledge through development opportunities.

Practices that help workers assess their own skills include self-evaluation and supervision. Self-evaluation may take place in private periods of self-reflection, supervision sessions or group feedback exchanges with co-workers and supervisors.

To benefit from feedback, you must have a clear understanding of the protocols for giving and receiving open and evaluative feedback.

1A Undertake self-evaluation in conjunction with supervisors and/or peers

Engaging in regular self-evaluation has become an important element of professional development in community services work. Self-evaluation may occur through reflective practice or structured discussion and supervision with others. Self-evaluation involves thinking critically about what you do and how you can improve your practice. This can be done on your own or in conjunction with others such as colleagues or supervisors.

There are many different ways of reflecting and evaluating your own skills and performance, so it is important to use an approach that is a good fit with your own needs and the requirements of your organisation.

It may be a challenging process, as you need to be objective to assess your own performance, skills and knowledge against the requirements of your job and your future work and career goals.

Self-evaluation involves:

- ▶ identifying your strengths and weaknesses in the work environment
- ▶ participating in a range of opportunities to evaluate and develop your work skills
- ▶ developing an understanding your own traits, values, beliefs and behaviours
- ▶ seeking feedback and/or mentoring from others
- ▶ analysing and implementing feedback to improve your own work performance
- ▶ establishing goals and personal development plans
- ▶ identifying personal and professional development opportunities
- ▶ maintaining a sense of purpose and direction in your career and undertaking regular periods of self-reflection.

Models of professional reflection

The area of study and learning related to professional reflection has evolved and developed over many years, resulting in a number of theories and models that are available for use in reflecting on professional activities and learning from them. Most models involve the mindful and deliberate use of reflection to inform future practice. Essentially, the process of reflection helps you to do your job better next time.

Two useful models are Kolb's four-stage Learning Cycle, which links the elements of experiencing, observing/reflecting, developing ideas and testing ideas in practice; and Schön's (1991) 'reflection in action' and 'reflection on action' model.

Here is an outline of Schön's reflection model:

Reflection in action

- ▶ Thinking about what you are doing and what to do next as it happens, experiencing and acting immediately within the situation

Reflection on action

- ▶ Thinking about what happened and what you would do differently next time, considering past actions and taking your time to reflect on the situation that has occurred

Self-reflection

Taking time to reflect on your own practice helps you to become more self-aware and to identify any aspects of your job you find difficult or need to improve on. One of the most effective ways to engage in self-reflection is to use a journal to record and explore what is happening in your working life.

Using the Schön model, self-reflection happens best after a situation has occurred. There needs to be an event, situation or action that happens to provide a purpose and focus for the self-reflection. A practice or reflection journal is one way of reflecting on actions.

Here is some guidance on how to maintain a practice or reflection journal.

Monitoring development

Keeping written records helps you monitor your own development over time and identify areas of practice that you are confident in, as well as those you have difficulty with. The more you use your journal to reflect on and explore your role in the workplace, the better you will become at thinking in a critical way about your practice, solving problems, making decisions and being accountable for your actions.

Develop communication skills

You may find that regular periods of self-reflection and recording your thoughts in a reflective practice journal may enhance your ability to express yourself and use language appropriate to your occupation. By developing these thinking and use-of-terminology skills, you may improve your skills in providing and interpreting written and oral information about workplace requirements.

Use an appropriate space and format

A journal can be a book or electronic documents with enough space to write reasonably lengthy daily entries. The format of the journal is not important as long as it can be used specifically to record your reflections. It is better not to combine it with a personal diary, as a journal is essentially a tool for self-evaluation and development. Keep all your reflective notes together so they can be easily referred to in the future.

Maintain security of information

Your reflective journal must be kept secure at all times, as it may contain notes about clients' personal details. Your entries will also describe client behaviours and how you have dealt with them. Ensure others cannot access your entries. Be careful to never identify any clients or colleagues by name, to ensure their privacy and confidentiality is maintained.

Make regular entries

Write in your journal as often as possible. Self-reflection is most beneficial when carried out on a regular basis, as this reinforces the habit and helps you become more skilled at self-analysis. Your reflective practice journal notes can also be used as a means of identifying professional development opportunities and for raising points of discussion in evaluation sessions with your supervisor and/or peers.

Reflect on performance

A useful way to begin self-reflection is to have a series of questions that you ask yourself at the end of every day. These questions may include 'What did I do well today?', 'What could I have done better?', and 'What can I learn from the experience?'. When using it to reflect on your practice, acknowledge what you are doing well and where you are improving, as well as any difficulties you are having.

Supervision

Being provided with effective supervision can encourage you to develop your skills and knowledge and become confident and competent in your work roles. Effective supervision is a powerful tool for professional development, as it provides the opportunity to openly evaluate and explore your experiences at work and to receive guidance and support from others who have experienced similar issues.

In community services organisations, a supervisor is usually someone who is experienced in the area of work that team members are undertaking, and can provide appropriate guidance and support.

Here is how a supervisor can help you with self-evaluation:



Education

- ▶ Supervisors mentor members of their team and ensure they have access to professional development opportunities. They provide guidance about issues and problems that may prompt self-evaluation and encourage attempts at changes to work practice as a result of the evaluation process.

Administration

- ▶ Supervisors perform a range of administrative duties to ensure members understand their roles and can access required resources. They offer support in accessing organisational policies and procedures required for professional development and ensure time and space is available within the workplace for self-evaluation processes to occur.

Support

- ▶ Supervisors provide support and encouragement to members of their team when they encounter difficulties or problems. They suggest a format and approach for self-evaluation, provide guidance in developing evaluation skills and model necessary skills if required.

Develop relationships with supervisors

It is important to develop a good relationship with your supervisor and seek opportunities for supervision or mentoring when you require help. This may be during your daily work routine when you are unclear about something or need guidance in how to deal with a difficult situation. You may also organise specific times to discuss your work with your supervisor on a regular basis. This can occur as needed, via scheduled meetings or during formal performance appraisals.

A supervisor may also set aside time during regular team meetings for team members to engage in self-evaluation. This gives the team an opportunity to discuss any problems they are having and for team members to give and receive feedback from others, including their supervisor.

Peer supervision

Peer supervision is a process where a group of colleagues (peers) have regular meetings to engage in self-evaluation and discuss areas of practice. Peer supervision is usually carried out without a supervisor present, although peers may choose someone to act as the facilitator of the meeting. This person may be in an external supervisor role or be a professional practice supervisor.

Successful peer supervision allows workers to provide mutual support and constructive feedback to one another. Each participant has an opportunity to discuss their work by referring to particular experiences or issues and to receive constructive comments and feedback from their peers.

Participants benefit from reflecting with their peers, as they often feel less constrained and more able to talk freely than when a direct supervisor is present. They are able to discuss and evaluate situations and performance without fear of being judged or having their comments considered as a poor reflection of their performance in the eyes of their supervisor.

The process of collaborating and discussing problems, issues and potential solutions is a way of building a strong team culture within your organisation.



Identify areas of personal development

One of the main reasons for self-evaluation is to assess your own practice and identify areas where personal development is required. You can then determine what development opportunities will enable you to improve your practice.

No matter what options you choose to advance your skills and personal development, you need to integrate your learning into practice. This involves using the skills you are developing, and continuing to monitor your learning through self-reflection and seeking feedback from others.

The Kolb Learning Cycle is useful in helping understand this concept, as it places the elements of experiencing, reflecting, developing and then finally testing ideas in a cycle that continues in a circular fashion, with each element informing the actions of the next.

You need to consider the following to identify areas of personal development.

Identify what you do

When you engage in self-reflection or participate in supervision sessions, you should consider all the factors that influence your practice. These include:

- ▶ your ability to follow organisational policies and procedures
- ▶ how you measure your performance
- ▶ your ability to set goals and establish personal development plans
- ▶ your time management skills
- ▶ your functional literacy skills
- ▶ your own degree of self-awareness and understanding of how your behaviour and personality traits impact on your work.

Identify what you need

Through feedback obtained from others, your own insights and taking into consideration your plans and career goals for the future, you should have a clear understanding of what areas of practice and personal development you want or need to pursue. For example, you may realise that sometimes you have difficulty developing a constructive working relationship with some clients and decide you want to develop your skills and abilities in the area of communication, relationship-building and counselling techniques. The professional development options available to address these issues may include seeking advice and guidance from your supervisor and experienced colleagues, and participating in further training through workshops or formal study.

Recognise limitations

It is useful to be aware of your own current limitations within your field of work. Understanding limitations means you are less likely to overstep your boundaries and act inappropriately.

Your limitations can be a catalyst for prompting further training or professional learning if you focus on what is currently limiting you in your career development and consider what you can do to reduce these limitations. For example, if you work frequently with people from a particular linguistic group you may find it limiting to not speak the same language. This could be a prompt to seek training in learning the language yourself so you can communicate more easily.

Limitations can relate to the following areas.

Areas of limitation

Qualifications

Professional qualifications such as food handling, CPR, first aid or team leading related to your chosen area of work

Interpersonal skills

Learning to get along with others and build teams and groups that operate effectively and deal easily with change and challenge

Practical skills

Hands-on skills such as manual handling, meal assisting, art and craft or running a shared reading or exercise class for various age groups

Study skills

Learning how to study is vital if you are to proceed further with training or seek higher qualifications – study skills help you get the most out of studies

Management focus

Moving into a management area requires new skills, knowledge and sometimes new qualifications – without these, your management opportunities are limited

Example

Self-reflection

Here are examples of self-reflection and self-evaluation in practice.

Example 1: written self-reflection

Today I went blank when a client, S, became quite angry. It took me by surprise when I should have picked up on the signs (irritability and restlessness) earlier that all was not well with her. At least there were not many other clients around and I was able to stay calm enough to usher S into another room. I am disappointed in myself that I could not seem to remember the right things to say to quickly calm S down. Thankfully B (a co-worker) came in and helped me. No harm done. S was her happy self again within half an hour. I need to work more on my skills in dealing with behaviours of concern. Think I will request more training. Observing B manage this situation was also really helpful as she just took charge and knew exactly what to do. Next time this happens I will be more prepared.

Example 2: undertaking self-evaluation

Misbah has recently started work in an agency supporting refugees. She finds the work challenging and often confronting when she learns what some of her clients have endured. At the end of every work day she writes in a journal to help her improve her practice and examine her responses and emotions. She finds it a useful way to evaluate what she has done well and what she could have done better. Just writing things down helps her to think through issues and consider different options.

When Misbah attends her regular team supervision sessions, she takes her journal so she can describe the specific experiences she would like to discuss and obtain feedback about from her peers and supervisor. Misbah comes from a Pakistani background, but was born in Australia and has spent many years trying to be more Australian than Pakistani. The feedback she receives from her co-workers suggests that she should reconnect with and explore with her own family's immigration experience, as this may help her better understand and assist the people she works with.

Practice task 1

1. You have just begun a new role at work and you would like to evaluate your own performance after your first week. What are two ways you could do this?

.....

.....

2. You are working with a person who is showing some extremely challenging behaviour. According to the Schön Model, what is one thing you could do during this situation to help you learn from your experiences?

.....

.....

3. What are two advantages of using peer supervision as a part of self-evaluation?

.....

.....

4. According to the Kolb Learning Cycle, what happens directly after you develop an idea?

.....

Click to complete Practice task 1

1B Reflect on and recognise the effect of values, beliefs and behaviour in practice

As everyone has limitations of some kind, being self-aware and understanding your weaknesses as well as your strengths can assist you in becoming a more effective community services worker.

Community services work can be complex and demanding, as it involves working with people who have different value systems, beliefs, life experiences and personal circumstances.

In order to carry out your work effectively, you need to understand how your own personality, beliefs, values and behaviours impact on others and influence your practice. Any limitations you have may be highlighted in the close working relationships you have with clients and co-workers. For example, if you find conflict difficult to deal with, you may struggle to carry out your work effectively, as there will be many situations that require you to use effective problem-solving and conflict resolution strategies.



Values, beliefs and behaviour

Working effectively with clients requires you to have a high level of self-awareness. This means understanding how your values, beliefs and behaviour may impact on your clients, and seeking appropriate support or advice for your skills and cultural awareness if needed.

Values and beliefs, and their impact on behaviour, are described below.

Values

Values represent personal standards. We learn personal values from our families, social and cultural groups, religious beliefs, school and personal experiences. Values can vary between cultures and societies. For example, you may place high value on personal freedom and individuality; however, in some cultures it is more important, especially for women, to value conformity and duty to others.

Beliefs

Beliefs are based on what people believe to be true; for example, many people have religious beliefs that guide how they live their lives. Individual beliefs are not easily changed, as they provide a basis for a person's understanding of the world. It is important to examine your own beliefs and not assume that what you believe is right and logical or that the beliefs of others are incorrect and irrational.

Behaviour

A person's behaviour is influenced by their values and beliefs. For example, if despite all their training and experience, a community or health worker believes that depression is not really a serious illness, they may intentionally or unintentionally say something or act in a way that is disrespectful, or may cause harm, to a person who has depression.

Avoid negative impacts

In your work you will deal with people from a range of cultures and social backgrounds who have life experiences that are very different from your own. It is important that you adopt a position of respect and acceptance and avoid judging others based on any perceived or actual difference. If you are unable to do this, you risk alienating clients and making them feel judged, devalued, misunderstood and reluctant to seek the services they require.

Ensure your own values, beliefs and behaviours do not negatively impact clients and do not affect the way in which you view situations and actions when you self-evaluate your performance at work.

Avoid negative impacts

- ▶ Consider whether your own values and beliefs influence the way you reflect upon your own practice.
- ▶ Adhere to your organisation's guidelines regarding standards of practice and ethical conduct.
- ▶ Examine your own values and beliefs and work out how you can align these with your work.
- ▶ Engage in self-reflection and seek feedback when you experience value conflicts.
- ▶ Practise empathy, respect for others and maintain a non-judgmental attitude.

Work role boundaries and beliefs and values

Understanding your own work boundaries and the limitations of your role and being aware of your own beliefs and values is useful in ensuring you are able to review and improve on your professional practice effectively. Your position description, operational procedures, workplace documents and information from your line manager or supervisor can all guide you in remaining within your work boundaries.

In keeping with the person-centred contemporary approach to support provision, your organisation is likely to require you take into account individual circumstances, experiences and needs in your support role.

You should regularly check and update your knowledge of legal and ethical requirements that apply to your work area.

Here are some important legal and ethical areas where you should ensure your knowledge remains up to date to help you improve your own practice.

Legal and ethical areas to consider

Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)

This federal legislation covers fair and equal access for people with disabilities to buildings, programs and services in the community.

Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)

This federal legislation requires that people are not discriminated against because of their race, religion or background.

Duty of care

This legal and ethical concept acknowledges that in many situations you are likely to owe a responsibility to others to take care of their wellbeing and safety.

Workplace safety

This is a legal requirement to ensure people in a workplace are safe and well and not put at risk of harm. Your responsibilities under this legislation will vary.

Mandatory reporting

Depending on your role you may be required to report suspected or actual situations where a child is at risk of harm or has been harmed by someone.

Work with diversity

Community services work is based on a set of core values. These include that every person has a right to be treated with respect and dignity, to equal opportunity and social justice, and to be as self-determining and independent as possible; and that no person should be discriminated against on the grounds of race, ethnicity, colour, age, gender, sexual preference or disability.

Some points to consider when working with clients of diverse backgrounds and abilities are outlined below.

Social background

Be aware that clients' personal circumstances may influence their behaviour.

Treat all clients as equal and avoid making assumptions, either positive or negative, based on their social background.

Recognise social disadvantage and work to increase social justice and inclusion wherever possible.

Cultural background

Learn as much as possible about an individual's cultural and ethnic background so you can provide appropriate services.

Respect all clients' cultural and religious beliefs.

Use appropriate cross-cultural communication strategies and/or interpreters when necessary.

Physical abilities

Recognise that most people with physical disabilities do not have intellectual disabilities as well.

Work with a client-centred focus so the client has the opportunity to make decisions and choices about the services that best suit their needs.

Focus on what the person can do; not on what they can't.

Mental abilities

Treat people with intellectual disabilities with the same respect and courtesy as you treat others.

Avoid talking to clients in an overly simplistic and patronising way.

Encourage decision-making and self-determination.

Analyse culturally different viewpoints

One of the biggest barriers to building relationships with people from various cultures is a lack of understanding and knowledge. It is easy to judge others by the standards of your own culture and upbringing. This is known as ethnocentrism, and arises out of the assumption that your own culture is better or more correct than other cultures.

Often these assumptions are made unconsciously; however, they still limit your understanding of people from different cultures.

People who do not make the effort to examine their own cultural beliefs, biases and lack of knowledge about other cultures are most inclined to resort to discriminatory behaviour and to hold views that are based on stigma and stereotyping.



Sensitivity to other views

When working with people from other cultures, it is important to be sensitive to different cultural views so you can avoid misunderstandings and conflict. Sensitivity allows you to consider how the views of others may contain a particular bias or focus that influences how they provide feedback; make suggestions about your work practice; or offer their ideas about a situation on which you are both reflecting and evaluating. Built-in bias can make a big difference to how someone responds during and after an event has occurred.

You can demonstrate sensitivity by:

- ▶ being aware of your own cultural practices and biases and how they influence your behaviour
- ▶ learning as much as you can about your clients' culture, beliefs, customs, etiquette and ideas about what is acceptable behaviour
- ▶ attending training in cross-cultural awareness and communication

- ▶ being open to the idea that even within cultural groups there are many different viewpoints
- ▶ being willing to learn and clarify areas of misunderstanding
- ▶ adapting your work practices to suit client needs
- ▶ understanding how biases, discrimination and racism affect people's lives
- ▶ adhering to anti-discrimination and equal opportunity legislation and policies.

Understand context

It is important to understand the contextual influences on people's lives, which include experiences, circumstances and other influences that impact on the way others think and behave. For example, people who have experienced discrimination or other social injustices may be angry and find it difficult to trust others, including those who are working to help them.

Consider the following strategies to avoid conflict or misunderstandings.

Be willing to listen

- ▶ Sometimes you may work with clients with radically different world views from your own. For example, there may be people from some cultural groups who still prefer their daughters to marry at a very young age. This may seem unjust, but it is important that you do not directly challenge or confront their beliefs and values in a hostile manner. You should show a willingness to listen and, if necessary, to calmly explain how things are different in Australia, where a high value is placed on young women being educated.

Work with a cultural specialist

- ▶ Sometimes you may need to enlist the help of someone with specialist cultural knowledge. Role titles include cultural liaison officer, multicultural service officer or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander liaison officer. Ethno-specific services also help people preserve their own cultural values and practices in Australia and assist them to understand community services and activities.

Negotiation and conflict resolution skills

Your ability to negotiate and resolve conflict depends on your ability to communicate openly with people you support about their issues and concerns, and to collaborate with others in making decisions that address the needs of all parties. It is also important to listen carefully to other people's points of view.

Successful negotiation and conflict resolution involves working with individuals or groups to reach an acceptable outcome for everyone involved. It is important to establish the needs a person may have that are not being met. For example, if a person feels that their cultural needs are not being respected, it is important to establish exactly what cultural requirements they have and how these can be met by the service provider.



Resolve conflict

The main steps that can be used in negotiation and conflict resolution are outlined below.

Conflict resolution process

Clearly identify the issue or problem you wish to resolve. Then clarify the cause, issue or problem; for example, is it the result of a clash of values or beliefs?

Explore each party's ideas about what must be achieved to resolve the situation. Listen carefully without interruption. Establish needs the parties have that are not being met and need to be addressed.

Identify possible alternative solutions. Consider the advantages and disadvantages of each solution, and each party's feelings about possible solutions.

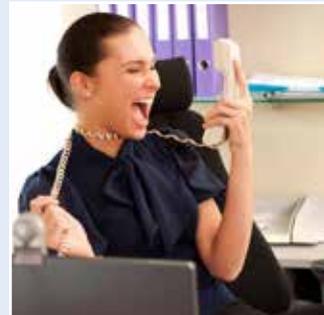
Reach agreement about the best option and put it into action. Recognise that agreement is easiest to achieve when neither party has to make greater compromises than the other. Then seek agreement about how the solution can be put into practice.

Evaluate the outcome. Be prepared to revise and renegotiate solutions to achieve a lasting outcome.

Example

Conflict resolution

Palu is a Maori man who has grown up in a strongly patriarchal society, believing that decisions, protocols and thinking should stem from the male perspective. His beliefs and values clash markedly with those of Mandy, who works several shifts a week with him. Palu constantly tries to tell Mandy what she should do and how she should do it, and Mandy is finding it increasingly difficult to hold her temper. One day she loses her composure and shouts at Palu who then complains about her conduct to their supervisor. The supervisor gives them both time to calm down and then invites them to sit with her in the quiet courtyard outside their office. She encourages them both to share the positives and negatives of working with each other and to express what it is that is causing their conflict. Once they have both had a chance to be heard, she helps them work towards a resolution where Palu agrees to keep his opinions to himself and Mandy agrees to take a walk if she feels herself becoming angry again.



Practice task 2

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Ricky works with families from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. Sometimes he feels his job is a bit like being the glue that helps two groups of people join together for a shared, common purpose. He helps people understand each other and to learn about the values, belief systems and ideas that influence their behaviour and feelings. He also acts as an advocate in situations where people have been treated unfairly or in a discriminatory or unethical way. One recent case involved a family that was asked to leave a rental property despite having caused no damage at all to the property and causing no problems at all. The landlord had said that the family had a child with a disability, which they had not told him about before they moved in, and that he was worried now that the child would draw on the walls and break things in the property. The landlord has been heard by neighbours making loud, highly derogatory comments about the family's Aboriginal background as he walks around the neighbourhood.

1. Identify two possible laws that may apply in this case study and explain how they are relevant.

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2. What is one concept that the landlord may not value very highly?

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3. What are two things that Ricky could do in this situation?

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Click to complete Practice task 2

1C Share two-way, open and evaluative feedback with co-workers or peers

Exchanging constructive evaluative feedback with co-workers is an important tool for improving personal performance. It encourages open communication between workers and helps build a supportive workplace environment. Giving and receiving evaluative feedback allows workers to learn from their co-workers and helps others improve their work skills.

To ensure feedback is provided in a constructive way, it is important that everyone understands basic guidelines for giving and receiving feedback. As a team member it is useful to have a common understanding of the purpose of evaluative feedback as well as expectations about how it should be given and received. Clear expectations help feedback to be effective within a team environment.



Guidelines for giving and receiving feedback

Learning the guidelines for giving and receiving feedback should help you feel confident about giving feedback and accepting it from others. The way you provide feedback affects the way others receive it. It is most beneficial when given in a respectful, sincere and courteous manner.

Always try to convey that you appreciate and value the person you are giving feedback to and that you want to support and help them. Accept feedback from others in the same spirit and try to learn from it.

One of the key purposes of feedback is to enable the person to evaluate their performance and improve upon it.

Here is some guidance on giving and receiving feedback.

Be specific

Make sure the feedback you give is specific. For example, saying, 'I appreciate that you always write your case notes promptly, but sometimes you don't explain what you mean. If you say you have noticed "behavioural changes" in a client, I need details of the types of behaviour changes you have noticed' tells the recipient what they need to do and offers positive feedback at the same time.

If a colleague gives you feedback and you are unsure what they are saying, ask them to clarify what they mean or to provide specific examples of the performance, actions or behaviour they are commenting on.

Be constructive

Avoid purely critical or negative comments and never give feedback as a way of humiliating or belittling your co-workers. Try to make positive comments before providing feedback about what they need to improve.

Constructive feedback allows the recipient to feel supported and respected. Always try to convey that you respect and value the person and are sensitive to their goals and needs. If a co-worker makes comments that are personal, you have the right to tell them that you will only accept feedback that focuses on your skills and performance and if it is given in a respectful manner.

Ensure feedback is timely

Try to give feedback as soon as possible following the time the behaviour or work practice you are discussing occurred. It is not helpful to say, 'Mrs Jones told me last month that you never follow up and get back to her about other services that she is eligible for. It's too late now because she has left'.

It is always best to point out problems or oversights at the time they occur so the feedback recipient can correct the issue themselves or make sure they do not repeat the same mistake.

Be clear and direct

Some people are uncomfortable giving feedback so they 'beat around the bush' and do not state exactly what they mean. This is very confusing for everyone. Work out what you want to say before you say it and give your feedback in a clear and concise way so the recipient can easily understand what you mean.

If you are not sure what someone means when they are giving you feedback, ask questions until you do understand. Seek clarification and examples of the behaviour or practice so you know what areas you need to improve.

Focus on behaviours and actions

Never make personal criticisms of a co-worker. If you need to provide feedback, focus on behaviours or actions rather than making personal remarks or attacking on the basis of a personal characteristic.

You need to avoid saying, for example, 'You're so full of yourself. You think you have a right to talk over everyone else all the time'. Instead, you could suggest that while it is important to make contributions, it is also important to listen to others.

Be fair

Always ensure you give feedback that is fair and balanced. For example, do not give feedback if you do not know all the facts of a situation, as you could blame someone for something that was beyond their control.

Always ensure you take into consideration other factors that may have influenced work performance. For example, a worker may not have been able to do everything they were supposed to do on a particular day because a number of colleagues called in sick that day.

Encourage open, two-way communication

Communication is based on sending, receiving and interpreting messages. We have all been in situations where we have said something only to realise that the person we are speaking to has interpreted the message in a completely different way from what we intended.

When giving feedback, choose your words carefully and give the feedback recipient an opportunity to respond to what you have said. If the recipient does not have a chance to talk about or clarify feedback, they may become resentful and feel they have been unfairly criticised.

Communication skills

Some important communication skills for giving, receiving and analysing feedback are outlined below.

'I' statements

When you use the word 'I', you are taking ownership of what you say and sending a clear message about personal responsibility. The use of 'I' helps you communicate in a direct and active way and allows you to clearly state what you feel or think about a situation.

Active listening

Active listening involves focusing all your attention on what another person is saying. Avoid interrupting until they have finished what they want to say. Ask questions or paraphrase what the speaker has said to clarify and check your understanding.

Observe body language

Observing a person's body language should give you an indication of how they are feeling and their level of comfort. If their body language reflects that they are upset by what you are saying, you may need to pause or change the way you are giving the information.

Respect difference

Be aware of individual differences when providing feedback. For example, some people find it harder to give and receive feedback than others. There may also be cultural differences in the protocols of giving and receiving feedback.

Be supportive

Avoid focusing only on negative aspects of a person's behaviour or performance. Acknowledge what they do well and what they are good at in addition to areas where they can improve.

Choose words carefully

Be careful of the words you choose when giving feedback. Do not use negative or critical words to describe a co-worker's performance. For example, avoid words such as 'hopeless', 'incompetent' or 'useless'.

Analyse feedback

When receiving feedback, take an active role in understanding the feedback you have been given. This may involve asking questions, taking notes and thinking about how the feedback applies to you. If necessary, follow up with the feedback provider to clarify your understanding and seek further guidance.

Teamwork

Good communication and sharing of evaluative feedback within a team environment requires careful planning and a clear understanding by everyone about what evaluative feedback is (and what it is not) and how it should be shared within your work team. There needs to be a focus on evaluating performance and improving outcomes.

Teams that are able to share feedback effectively and with a common understanding of how and why it is used are more likely to be able to deal with challenges and, changes and to grow and develop as effective operators.

Here are three elements that should be present when sharing feedback within a team context.

Shared purpose

A shared and agreed purpose that identifies the reasons for which feedback is given and received within the team

Shared understanding

A shared understanding of the reasons for using feedback and how it aligns with the purpose and direction of the team and the relationship to the broader organisational goals and vision

Agreed approach

A shared and agreed knowledge and acceptance of the approach to be used, which identifies how feedback is applied within the team environment – when it is used, who offers it, what is said and why

Provide written feedback

Take particular care when providing feedback in writing or as part of a report, as there is less opportunity to discuss and resolve misunderstandings. Written feedback can sound more harsh or abrupt than verbal feedback, so it is important to find an appropriate tone that is warm and contains relevant and specific feedback.



Example

Share feedback

Gemma and Tristan work in a small team. They have recently worked closely together to complete a project involving making significant changes to their program's service documents. Now they are discussing and evaluating their performance during the project and identifying strengths, weaknesses and goals for the future. They provide each other with evaluative feedback, ensuring they focus on positive elements as well as areas for improvement. Gemma explains to Tristan that she appreciated his ability to manage time so effectively and that his use of time lines and charts to keep the various tasks on track was useful. She also tells him that she felt sometimes he lacked confidence when speaking to their senior management team about their ideas and that this may have affected the response they received to their proposals. Tristan agrees that he needs to work on his confidence and ability to speak in high-pressure situations and tells Gemma that he thinks he may identify this as a professional learning goal during his next appraisal.



Practice task 3

1. During a team meeting a colleague suggests you pay more attention to your speaking manner when addressing senior managers. What could you say to them to obtain more useful feedback?

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2. You notice a new worker you are mentoring frequently arrives late to work and misses the start of your team briefing each shift, and then they work in a rushed manner to get their work done during the shift. Their behaviour is affecting your ability to get your own tasks done. What would you say to provide this new worker with feedback?

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3. A team member tells you they have seen a new computer booking system at a conference that they think would work really well at your organisation. You already know the system is very expensive and beyond the budget of your organisation. How would you provide feedback that is positive and informative?

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4. You are team leader and one of your team has refused to hand in their learning goals following their performance review. The team is now late in delivering all the review documents to management within the time line requested. You have asked for the goals several times but the person keeps telling you they are too busy to do them. You are considering giving them a written warning for misconduct. Is there another option you could choose instead? If so, what would you do?

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Click to complete Practice task 3

1D Actively seek and reflect on feedback

Most people are apprehensive about receiving feedback. You can improve how you respond to feedback by considering how it will benefit your practice and relationships with others.

There are many opportunities for obtaining feedback within your organisation, including supervision sessions, team meetings and when working with more-experienced colleagues. You may also participate in processes such as 360 degree feedback, which invites feedback from colleagues, clients, supervisors and others such as family members. You may also ask appropriate

people to give you feedback on an informal basis when the opportunity arises. These people may include your supervisor or manager, other workers you trust, or experienced workers who can help you learn.

In some organisations, clients and other sources such as colleagues or supervisors from other agencies are encouraged to participate in providing feedback by completing feedback or evaluation forms. Clients also have access to complaints procedures that can be used to provide feedback about situations or issues that concern them related to a worker.

When you ask for or are given feedback, make sure you reflect on and analyse the feedback they give so you can obtain maximum benefit.



Feedback from people with support needs

People you support or provide services for can provide feedback in a number of different ways depending upon your organisational policies and procedures, and also on the ability and preferences of the client. Some may prefer to provide feedback in an informal manner, simply by making comments or suggestions about your work. Clients may also participate in formal feedback methods such as completing surveys or evaluation forms.

It is important to consider the communication preferences of clients when they provide feedback and to encourage feedback in modes that suit their particular needs and abilities. This could include providing opportunities for feedback to be shared in another language, through an electronic communication device or via signing. Clients should not be limited in their ability to provide feedback as a result of their communication preferences or abilities.

Here are some important questions to ask yourself when seeking feedback from clients:

Consider the following when seeking feedback

- ▶ What feedback-seeking approach will best suit the person and their communication needs?
- ▶ What feedback-seeking approach will be practical and reasonable to implement?
- ▶ What feedback-seeking approach will inform improvements in practice and be actionable?

Feedback from organisations

Sometimes organisations may work in a collaborative arrangement to achieve particular goals or in order to combine their resources and skillsets more effectively. In these situations it is useful to seek and reflect upon feedback from these organisations in order to help you reflect upon your own professional practice and how this relates to the practice of your organisation.

Here is the process you can follow to seek feedback from organisations.



Agree on goals and outcomes

Meet and discuss shared goals and outcomes as well as any specific activities or tasks, and who will be accountable for delivering against particular outcomes and tasks. This will ensure the evaluation and feedback sought is relevant to specific people and tasks, and is useful and relevant.



Agree on the evaluation method

Discuss and agree on an appropriate evaluation method to use that suits the needs of the organisations and people involved and the activities, time frame and human and physical resources available. This could include questionnaires, surveys, feedback forms, guided discussion sessions or other approaches.



Plan delivery approach

Plan the delivery approach to be used for the project or specific activities and who will work on various elements. This will ensure that when it comes time to seek feedback and evaluate performance against stated outcomes and goals, it will be relevant and useful.



Complete all tasks

Work collaboratively to complete all assigned tasks identified as being needed at the planning stage. Update planning and delivery documents as required to take account of changes and challenges that arise along the way, and be sure to also carry this forward to the evaluation stage so that documents are current and feedback is relevant.



Seek feedback

Seek feedback on performance and achievements towards stated goals and objectives, and use this feedback to inform future collaborative activities and specific work within your organisation.

Feedback from other sources

Feedback can also be provided from other sources and this can also be used to inform and guide the development of your professional practice. Some feedback from other sources may be formal, whereas other feedback may be informal or anecdotal.

The type of feedback you receive depends upon the person offering it and the particular situation. For example, a volunteer may comment that they enjoy working at your organisation because they are offered regular opportunities to participate in professional development activities. A trainee worker may complete an evaluation form at the end of a training session you run to provide feedback about the session.



You should try to use any feedback you receive to help you reflect on your own activities and performance, and use the information to further develop your skills and knowledge.

Accept feedback non-defensively

Most people feel defensive if they think someone is being critical of them. This is a natural reaction. However, keep in mind that the feedback you receive from clients, organisations or others is meant to support and help you rather than make you feel incompetent.

You may appear defensive if you respond to feedback by:

- ▶ becoming angry
- ▶ being rude to the feedback provider
- ▶ interrupting and arguing with the feedback provider
- ▶ denying that the feedback applies to you and refusing to take personal responsibility
- ▶ failing to consider or act on feedback
- ▶ getting your 'own back' on the feedback provider by giving them negative feedback.

How to accept feedback

Seeking out and accepting feedback non-defensively shows that you respect your co-workers' opinions and are willing to learn from them. Clients, staff from other organisations and other sources will be more open to giving and receiving feedback from you if you accept the feedback they give in a gracious and respectful manner.

When you are able to receive constructive feedback in an open and non-defensive way, this can help you to provide it in the same manner, as you will be more sensitive to the needs of the other person.

How to show you are willing to accept feedback

- ▶ Listen carefully to what is said.
- ▶ Be courteous to the feedback provider.
- ▶ Listen to the feedback without interruptions or protests.
- ▶ Ask for clarification or examples if you are not sure what the feedback provider is saying.
- ▶ Think about how you can apply the feedback you have been given.

Analyse and interpret feedback

There is no point seeking feedback from others unless you are willing to listen and consider what they have said and be open to points of view that are different from your own. This applies regardless of who you are seeking feedback from – a client, another worker, someone from another organisation or others such as volunteers, advocates or visitors.

Here is some guidance on analysing and interpreting feedback.

Note reactions

It is important to note your reactions to any feedback you are given. If it is given in a constructive way, you should feel supported and encouraged rather than criticised. If you feel yourself reacting strongly to feedback, consider why this may be. For example, it could be because you know what is being said is true, or it could be because you feel the feedback you have been given is unfair. Remember that all feedback should be fair, objective and constructive.

Destructive feedback

Be aware that people can be hurt and humiliated by feedback that is not communicated in a respectful way. Destructive feedback or comments that seem more like a personal attack are not useful feedback. You can recognise unhelpful feedback because it feels like a 'put down' rather than being constructive. This type of personal and destructive feedback may actually say more about the person giving the feedback than you because some people use feedback as an opportunity to meet their own needs or vent their frustrations.

Listen carefully

In most cases, you will know immediately whether the feedback you have been given is accurate and helpful. Other feedback may come as a surprise, and you may need to reflect on and analyse it to see how it applies to you and how you can put it into practice. For example, a supervisor may advise you to take care in maintaining client confidentiality in all situations. You may think that you already adhere to it conscientiously, but then remember when you are having lunch with your co-workers, that you often start talking about clients.

Improve performance

Even if you think there is only a grain of truth in the feedback you receive, you can still use it to improve your performance. Seek further clarification if you are unsure what the feedback provider means and ask for examples of how the feedback applies to you. Once you have analysed the feedback, you can decide what changes you can make. This usually involves self-reflection, continuing to seek feedback and undertaking training. You can also model your behaviour on that of an experienced and competent colleague.

Example

Feedback from volunteers for goal setting

Jason runs a shared reading session for a group of older people at a community centre. The reading sessions provide a chance for people to share poetry and short stories together and to talk about what they have read. Several volunteers support the sessions and Jason is keen to evaluate his performance running the sessions with input from the volunteers. He knows his organisation highly values the work of volunteers and works hard to train and retain them, so it is important their opinions and ideas are sought and acted upon where appropriate.

He asks the volunteers to fill out a short questionnaire about various aspects of the program and his own performance and encourages them to share positive comments as well as suggestions for things he could do better. He uses this feedback to help him evaluate his own performance prior to participating in his organisation's regular cycle of performance reviews and goal setting for the following year.



Practice task 4

Read the case study, then complete the task that follows.

Case study

Magda has asked her supervisor for detailed feedback about her performance as a group leader in a community support setting, as she wants to use the feedback to help her develop skills to enable her to become a team leader in the near future.

Her supervisor agrees to observe Magda running a session. The session begins well as Magda greets all the clients by name at the door and quickly helps them settle in. The session goes rapidly downhill after that, with equipment problems, a near-miss incident and challenging behaviour from participants all creating problems.

Magda's supervisor provides her with written feedback, focusing on group management, leadership skills, communication, safety, risk management and creativity. All of the supervisor's comments contain criticisms and suggestions for improvement, as she feels Magda did not perform at a level that the supervisor would have expected for someone in her position. She says the session was poorly run, boring, involved poor equipment choices and Magda's actions caused several participants to leave part-way through. The supervisor does not make any positive observations about Magda's performance.

Magda is very angry when she reads the feedback, and offended that the supervisor has criticised her performance. She throws some of her work equipment across the room and storms out of the office. She then rings the supervisor and yells at her over the phone, telling her she does not know what she is talking about.

1. What would have been two better ways that Magda could have responded to the supervisor's feedback?

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2. Who else could provide feedback to Magda about her performance in the sessions?

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3. What could Magda's supervisor have done differently when providing Magda with feedback?

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4. Give one example of something the supervisor could have said to Magda that would have made her feel more receptive to receiving feedback?

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Click to complete Practice task 4

Summary

1. Engaging in regular self-evaluation is an important element of professional development in community services work. Self-evaluation may occur through reflective practice or structured discussion and supervision with others.
2. Everyone has limitations of some kind. Being self-aware and understanding your weaknesses as well as your strengths will help you become a more effective community services worker.
3. Sharing two-way, evaluative and constructive feedback with co-workers or peers is an important tool for improving personal performance. It encourages open communication between workers and helps build a supportive work environment.
4. Feedback is most effective when it is given in a respectful and courteous manner and according to clear guidelines. Feedback can be sought from clients, organisations and other sources such as volunteers and advocates.
5. Most people are apprehensive about receiving feedback. You can improve how you respond to feedback by considering how it will benefit your practice and relationships with others.
6. Values, beliefs and behaviour can affect professional practice. Reflecting upon how these elements are seen in different people is useful when reflecting upon your practice.

Learning checkpoint 1

Reflect on your own practice

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in reflecting on your own practice.

Part A

1. Imagine you are the new supervisor of a work team who do not usually participate in self-evaluation. They think that a supervisor is someone who tries to catch them out making mistakes. How would you explain to your team the benefits of self-evaluation and self-reflection, and the role of supervision in improving personal performance?

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2. Discuss why it is important for community services workers to understand how their values, beliefs and behaviours can impact on their work practice. Give examples to support your answer.

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3. What are three benefits of using peer supervision in a community services workplace?

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4. You wish to seek feedback from someone who is a member of a shared reading group that you run at a local community centre for people who are living with dementia and their families/carers. You know the person's first language is Italian and you are unsure if they read or speak in English. What are three factors to consider when seeking feedback from this person?

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3. How might Jana's values and attitudes affect how she responds to this feedback from her co-worker?

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4. Comment on Jana's work role boundaries, including responsibilities in relation to the complaints made by the people she supports.

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5. How could Jana apply Schön's model of reflection to Jana's work with people who use the service in the future?

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Topic 2

In this topic you will learn how to:

- 2A Determine improvements needed based on your own evaluation and feedback from others**
- 2B Identify potential support networks both internal and external to the organisation**
- 2C Seek specialist advice or further training**
- 2D Recognise requirements for self-care and identify requirements for additional support**
- 2E Devise, document and implement a self-development plan that sets realistic goals and targets**

Enhance your own practice

Community services work can involve challenges that cannot be resolved by one person alone and it can be a field that is physically and mentally stressful. To meet challenges, it is important that you build support networks and know where you can obtain specialist advice. You also need to know how to take care of your own mental and physical health and be willing to seek additional support when it is required.

You should take advantage of opportunities to help you develop your skills and knowledge through training, performance reviews, supervision and mentoring. In many organisations, this information becomes a part of your self-development plan, which guides your actions and professional development choices during the year.

You can promote your own development by keeping up with industry developments, applying these in your practice and taking action to stay abreast of trends.

2A Determine improvements needed based on your own evaluation and feedback from others

You evaluate your own skills whenever you take part in a professional review or performance evaluation. This process allows you and your manager or supervisor to identify areas where improvements are needed as well as areas of strength. Examples include skills related to a particular task or a change in work practices that is expected in the future. You may want additional skills to help you move your career in a particular direction. You may receive feedback that suggests you need to make some changes in how you carry out your work practices.

A strong problem-solving approach can be helpful in working out exactly what improvements are needed within your existing skill and knowledge set. It takes time and careful thought to work out what improvements are needed and what you are going to do to make these improvements. Making these decisions well is an indication of high problem-solving abilities – always a useful skill in community services work.

The elements within most performance reviews include the following.

Performance review areas

Areas of responsibility and the major tasks and activities performed currently within existing role

Performance competencies that have been identified as being important for someone in your position, including general and specific skills

Areas of existing strength where you believe your skills and knowledge are already high, evaluated against performance competencies

Areas for improvement where you feel there are opportunities to grow and develop your skills and knowledge, evaluated against performance competencies

Performance goals for the next period that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, timely, ethical and recorded (SMARTER goals)

Other areas where you feel discussion and support is needed in relation to your work performance and opportunities for improvement

Improvements based on own evaluation

When you are evaluating your own performance against specific competencies, it is important to think carefully about what you currently do well and how you think you may improve in the future.

Some competency areas relate to many different jobs, while others are quite specific and relate more to how you carry out particular aspects of your job. Specific competencies tend to be more focused on your interactions and work with people who

use your services, and often include technical skills such as conducting assessments, running groups, providing targeted support, intervening in challenging situations and carrying out personal care, health or manual-handling tasks.

Here are some areas of performance competency where you may evaluate your performance and decide on areas for possible improvement:

Problem-solving

- ▶ Community services work presents many opportunities for using problem-solving. This includes resolving issues related to work tasks, dealing with situations, interactions with colleagues and time and resource management. Being good at problem-solving takes time and practice, and there are some specific skills such as using technology and adopting clear thinking practices that can assist you in becoming a better problem solver.

Communication

- ▶ In many community services jobs you need to communicate with different groups of people in varying contexts. Sometimes you have time to plan and consider your communication in advance but in some situations you need to respond rapidly and ensure your communication is precise, clear and well received. Good communication is a skill that can be taught and developed over time.

Technical skills

- ▶ Your day-to-day tasks often depend on technical skills. Depending on your level of responsibility, technical skills may include those related to the care and support of people requiring support, as well as how you work alongside or lead groups of people. Technical skills need to stay current and sometimes require regular updates, particularly in health and emergency management areas.

People-focused skills

- ▶ Having the skills to work directly with people is vital in community services fields. It takes skill and knowledge to be able to think in a way that places the person seeking or using support and assistance at the centre of your focus and ensures you operate from a person-centred viewpoint. Ongoing professional learning, reading, attendance at training sessions and conferences, mentoring and participating in networks all help build people-focused skills.

Improvements based on feedback

Within a performance review process your direct manager or supervisor has an opportunity to share information about how they think you could improve your performance against stated performance goals and competencies. You may also receive feedback from people using your services, family members, advocates, network members or other workers within your organisation. In some organisations this is known as a 360 degree feedback process because you are collecting feedback from all around you.

Considering feedback from others can be useful when you are completing your own evaluation of your performance in preparation for a performance review. You can use information and specific suggestions from others to inform your own decisions about

how you want to improve. Feedback that is specific and uses precise language such as ‘your introduction to the group was friendly and welcoming and helped everyone relax’ is more useful than general feedback such as ‘you did a good job today’.

The following shows some discussion prompts that could be used during a performance review to guide improvement and provide feedback on performance.

- Discuss these elements and provide feedback**
- ▶ Main job role and responsibilities
 - ▶ Specific tasks completed regularly
 - ▶ Agreed objectives or goals from any previous reviews
 - ▶ Achievements against goals and objectives
 - ▶ Highlights and significant achievements of the previous year
 - ▶ Changes to work role and responsibilities during the year
 - ▶ Current capabilities and knowledge

Problem-solving

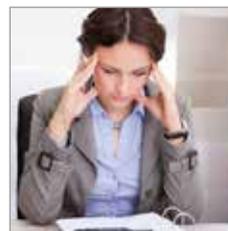
Problem-solving is a vital skill in community services work but it can take considerable time and practice to become a good problem-solver. People in a community services environment often present with complex and significant issues, and it requires excellent problem-solving skills to be able to help people work through these issues and plan for possible solutions or develop strategies for their management. The community services workplace itself can also require excellent problem-solving skills to deal with situations and issues when they arise.

Here is a comparison of two workers in community services – one who is excellent at problem-solving and one who requires some feedback and support to build their skills.



Jack

Jack is quick to identify a problem early on. He is able to seek specific information and suggestions from others in the office to identify possible solutions. He then brings the problem and his recommendation to the group for approval before quickly moving the process forward and acting upon the best solution.



Eliza

Eliza often does not seem to see a problem coming before it reaches crisis point. She tends to avoid addressing a problem in its early stages, preferring a ‘wait and see’ approach. This has led to major situations developing in the office several times, which have then required quick decision-making and intervention from senior management.

Example

Eliza rates her problem-solving skills

Eliza is completing her performance appraisal documents prior to meeting with her manager to complete her review. She thinks about some comments she has received from several of her co-workers:

- ▶ ‘I wish you had told me the room booking for the trade show had been cancelled earlier. We could have easily switched rooms if we had known in advance.’
- ▶ ‘Why am I only hearing about this now, Eliza?’
- ▶ ‘What are we going to do to support this family now that the discretionary budget has run out? I should have known there was no funding available before we met with them so we could have focused on other support options.’

Eliza decides to give herself a score out of 10 for several aspects of problem-solving. Later she asks her supervisor to give her scores on the same aspects of problem-solving. Eliza then compares the scores.

| Aspects of problem-solving | Self-score | Supervisor's score |
|---|------------|--------------------|
| Identifying a problem | 5 | 2 |
| Identifying options to resolve a problem | 4 | 6 |
| Communicating problems and possible solutions with others | 3 | 5 |
| Selecting the best solution | 7 | 5 |
| Informing others of the solution chosen | 6 | 4 |
| Acting to avoid problems where possible | 8 | 7 |

Practice task 5

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Eliza often does not seem to see a problem coming before it reaches crisis point. She tends to avoid addressing a problem in its early stages, preferring a 'wait and see' approach. This has led to major situations developing in the office several times, which have required quick decision-making and intervention from senior management.

Eliza is asked to project manage a trade show, which will involve agencies from across the state attending to network with each other, showcase their programs and services, meet with people who may want to use their services and attend training workshops. Eliza receives an email informing her that because of a double-booking the large conference room where they were planning on holding the trade show is not available.

Eliza knows her manager is very busy and most of her co-workers are tied up with organising presentations and liaising with other agencies. She sends back an email asking for the double-booking decision to be reassessed and pleads their case as a not-for-profit organisation.

She emails again a week later, and much to her surprise, discovers that the booking person has not received her email and there is no possibility of changing the booking at this late stage. Eliza rushes to her manager in a panic and tells her the conference room is not available. Her manager calls an emergency strategy meeting and quickly assigns tasks to all the team members to relocate the trade show to another more expensive venue and contact all the attendees to let them know.

1. What are two poor decisions that Eliza made in dealing with the double-booking problem?

.....

.....

2. What would have been a better decision for Eliza to make once she realised there was a double-booking?

.....

.....

3. What feedback could the manager provide to Eliza about her ability to solve this problem?

.....

.....

4. What areas of performance competency need improvement?

.....

Click to complete Practice task 5

2B Identify potential support networks both internal and external to the organisation

Community workers benefit from seeking support and feedback from their own team members and others outside their team and organisation. Creating professional networks ensures you have a wide range of expertise and resources to support you in your work.

It takes time and practice to become comfortable building a sound network, but it is worth the effort, as the rewards are the ability to construct a ready group of people and contacts who are able to offer support, guidance and opportunities to help you and your organisation.

Industry networking events such as conferences, networking meetings, social media interactions and trade shows can help you build a good network within and outside your organisation. Spending time interacting with others who work in your industry sector is the best way of learning to identify potential support networks.

Support networks can help you:

- ▶ tap into expertise outside your own area of work or experience
- ▶ learn more about the work of colleagues in other areas of community services
- ▶ provide access to specialist advice
- ▶ work collaboratively with others
- ▶ provide personal and professional development opportunities.

Professional networks

Professional networks involve individuals and groups working together to share information, ideas and resources to help meet common goals. The word 'networking' is often used to describe the process of making contacts with others to foster mutually beneficial and supportive relationships.

Networks can be internal to an organisation or external to it, and may be either formal or informal.

Here is an explanation of formal and informal networks.

Formal networks

Formal networks include professional associations and groups that have membership requirements and rules. They may meet on a regular basis to address specific objectives; for example, you may belong to a local network that provides seminars for workers. The network may include individuals and groups from government departments, health services, and other community services organisations. The Australian Community Workers Association (ACWA) is an example of a professional association.

Informal networks

Informal networks include links and relationships you may make as part of your regular work or training that do not depend on a formal agreement or membership. They are based on sharing information and providing mutual support. Examples of informal networks include contacts within your own organisation, in other organisations and government departments who you communicate with regularly to obtain or provide information. You may also meet socially with colleagues to exchange ideas and information.

Identify networks

The networks you develop depend on the type of work you do and your own professional interests and needs. Over time you will build networks that relate to your own field of work as well as to interest areas you may have for future career directions.

Some networks are based on a cross-section of organisations within a particular community or exist to advocate for or represent particular causes or groups of people.

Early in your career you can ask people such as your supervisor or manager, mentor or experienced workers about the networks they find useful. You can also interact through social media within various online groups to help you identify networks of people who can form part of your network.

When joining a network, consider:

- ▶ which networks best support you in your job role
- ▶ your career interests and goals
- ▶ your organisation's requirements
- ▶ what you can contribute to the network
- ▶ whether you have the time and level of commitment to be an effective participant.

Join formal networks

Formal networks may require you to attend regular meetings and participate in network projects. You may need to meet particular eligibility criteria to be able to join a formal network, such as showing evidence of a qualification to be able to apply for membership of a professional association. If your organisation has a policy of encouraging workers to join professional networks, seek advice about which networks they consider most appropriate and whether they wish you to actively participate in network activities.

Try to join networks that provide opportunities to develop your skills and knowledge and help you meet your organisation's objectives. For example, you may have a professional interest in advocacy and find a network group that undertakes advocacy and lobbying for increased funding in your area of community services. Joining a network such as this has the potential to help you develop your own skills and interests and also benefit people using your services and organisation.



Develop informal networks

Developing informal networks can be a natural process that occurs when you make contacts through the course of your work or attending meetings. People who become part of your informal network may be part of your own organisation or external to it. They may include those who you have helped in some way and those who support you to carry out your work effectively.

They may include people and groups you maintain contact with online to help build professional skills, learn from each other and solve problems. Online discussions about particular topics can be a great way of learning about areas of work that interest you and also gaining insight into the practices, ideas and activities of people who live in other places.

Informal network contacts may include people from the following areas.

| Informal network contacts |
|---|
| Workers in your own area and other areas of community services work |
| Service user group representatives and advocates |
| Health professionals such as doctors and psychologists |
| Cultural liaison officers or workers from ethno-specific services |
| Teachers and trainers |
| Personal mentors |
| Online contacts and groups related to your industry or sector |

Cultural groups

As Australia becomes increasingly culturally diverse, the number of people who have needs related to culture, customs, language and religion will increase. To understand and address these needs in a sensitive and professional manner, you may need to establish contact with people who can provide you with accurate information, such as representatives from different cultural groups or cultural liaison workers.

Take the time to research the demographics of your region or area and learn about the cultural groups who live there. Find out how many people from different cultural backgrounds use your services and whether there is an under-representation compared to your total number of service users. You can then make some informed decisions about how to build a cultural support network that can help you provide services and supports in an appropriate way and meet the needs of everyone in your region.



Professional networks

There are many opportunities for participating in professional networks. You need to be aware of a range of areas in which opportunities may be identified.

Tips for identifying networking opportunities

- ▶ Networks can be diverse rather than just linking up with others who work in the same occupation as you or come from the same background.
- ▶ Join professional networks that help you reach your personal and professional goals.
- ▶ Volunteer in other organisations if you have time, as this will bring you into contact with a range of possible network contacts.
- ▶ Social media such as LinkedIn provides opportunities to identify and participate in professional networks.
- ▶ When you attend a conference or network meeting, move out of your comfort zone so you do not just talk to people you already know.
- ▶ Observe and learn from experienced and successful networkers.

Example

Pete joins a group online

Pete is a new worker in the community services sector. He works in a small rural office providing services to people who are geographically isolated. Pete himself often feels very isolated in his work, as his nearest colleague is located about 30 minutes drive away. Although they meet up once a week for a planning meeting and to discuss specific issues, Pete is really feeling the effects of his isolated workplace.

Pete decides he wants to build his network of contacts within his industry sector so he can learn and develop his skills, and gain an understanding of how specific issues are dealt with by other more experienced workers. He joins several LinkedIn discussion groups and begins participating in regular weekly chats on Twitter.

He is careful to avoid breaching privacy and confidentiality directly or indirectly, as he knows his rural location would make it easy to identify particular people simply from descriptions. He instead focuses on asking questions about how other people do their jobs, what they see as challenges and how they feel about particular issues in the sector.

Pete soon has a regular schedule of discussion groups and chats, and an informal network of people to exchange ideas with online. He finds this is an extremely useful way of building his knowledge and reducing the feelings of isolation he once had in his work.



Practice task 6

Conduct some online research and use your own knowledge to locate formal or informal networks that could be useful for your own interest areas in community services.

Write your ideas into this table.

| Formal networks | Informal networks |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

[Click to complete Practice task 6](#)

2C Seek specialist advice or further training

Nobody can expect to know what to do in every situation or have answers to all questions. It is important to seek advice, support and additional training, if needed, to meet your work role and professional obligations. Specialist advice and further training may include accessing on-the-job mentoring, professional supervision, peer supervision or training.

You need to determine the type of specialist advice or training you require. Consider your own career goals and future work preferences as well as your current job as you plan how to get to where you want to be. Writing a five-year career plan can help you make sound decisions about what advice and training to access, and when and how to complete it. For example, you may have a five-year plan that sees you working in a management role and so make decisions about whose advice you should seek and what training you need to help you achieve your goal.



Training requirements

Training requirements can relate to your existing work as well as future directions for your career. Look for training providers that are reputable and well regarded in your industry sector and seek advice from others who have completed training with the provider.

If you have a mentor, they may be able to advise you on what training they have completed themselves and what they think you should do to further your career.

Consider the practical aspects of undertaking further training so it fits easily within your life and still allows you to have time to achieve a good work–life balance.

Here are some types of training that may help you enhance your own practice in the community services sector.

Types of training available

- ▶ Online training – webinars, accredited and non-accredited training courses
- ▶ Conferences – lectures, panel discussions and workshops on a central theme
- ▶ Workplace – training for specific work tasks or career development

Mentoring

Mentoring may occur as a matter of course when a new worker joins a team and more-experienced workers help guide their learning. It can also be part of an organisation's formal policies and work practices to assign a mentor to new or less-experienced staff to promote personal and professional development.

Mentors are useful for providing specialised advice about specific issues and also guiding career development. They can help with achieving both short-term and long-term goals.

Consider the following.

Who a mentor may be

- ▶ A mentor may be a supervisor, but may also be an experienced co-worker or someone outside the organisation who can provide guidance and support based on their knowledge and experience. For example, if you work with people who have mental illness, you may be allocated a mentor who is a clinical mental health professional, such as a psychologist or psychiatrist; or if you work with youth who engage in behaviours of concern, you may choose a mentor who is a behaviour management specialist.

The role of a mentor

The mentoring role includes:

- ▶ providing support and encouragement
- ▶ fostering personal and professional development
- ▶ guiding workplace learning
- ▶ providing feedback and advice about particular situations.

When seeking out a mentor, make sure you choose someone you can trust and respect, and with whom you can build an honest relationship.

Professional supervision

Professional supervision is becoming an increasingly common practice in community services work. A professional supervisor's role is different from that of a workplace supervisor who carries out a number of roles such as administrative and line manager duties.

The focus and role of a professional supervisor is explained here.

Focus

A professional supervisor focuses purely on practice issues and the personal and professional development of the person they are supervising. Professional supervision may also occur in a group setting; for example, a professional supervisor may facilitate peer group supervision. Professional supervisors may work independently of the organisation and usually undertake additional training and accreditation processes. Organisations usually assign a professional supervisor and the worker meets with the supervisor on a regular basis such as weekly or monthly to discuss practice issues.

Role

A professional supervisor's main role is to:

- ▶ ensure workers have the level of practice supervision that workplace supervisors do not have time to provide
- ▶ provide evaluative feedback
- ▶ encourage self-evaluation and reflection
- ▶ help workers become aware of and deal with limitations in their work
- ▶ suggest personal and professional development opportunities
- ▶ guide workers when dealing with complex practice issues.

Peer supervision

Peer supervision involves participating in personal and professional development with co-workers or colleagues working in a similar field or occupation. It is important to remember that some of your peers may only have the same level of skill and experience as yourself and so may not be able to offer more-specialised advice on specific work tasks or problems. More-experienced peers, however, may be able to provide more-specialised forms of advice and support to help you enhance your own work practice through peer supervision.

Peer supervision enables workers to:

- ▶ share experiences and provide mutual support
- ▶ discuss issues they may not want to discuss with a supervisor
- ▶ exchange ideas for personal and professional development
- ▶ set up buddy systems that foster skills development.

Training

All workers should have access to training that promotes personal and professional development. Your supervisor should inform you of workplace policies regarding training and professional development, and work with you to identify relevant programs and opportunities.

You can also suggest areas of practice that you wish to improve and request relevant training. Often this is achieved through a formal review process completed each year. During this process you may be able to identify training requirements that align with your own career goals and ideas for future career directions.

There are many ways you can participate in training or personal development to enhance your skills and knowledge.

Here are some examples.

Opportunities for training

Attend workshops and formal training sessions

Undertake further study including short online courses

Work with a mentor or experienced colleague

Volunteer with organisations that can provide opportunities to learn new skills

Research, read professional journals and texts, and have discussions with experienced practitioners

Seek advice and support

You need to seek advice and support when necessary from experienced colleagues, supervisors or others who have specialist knowledge. This can help you identify possible ways you could approach a situation and work out the best solution. It can also help you build your own skills and knowledge for the future.

Advice and support can be obtained from internal or external sources and may be sought on a formal or informal basis. It is vital that you always respect confidentiality requirements when seeking advice and support, particularly when you do so from an external source.

For example, if you are working with a person who demonstrates behaviours of concern and does not respond to behaviour management strategies, there are several options, as described here.

Advice and support options may include:

- ▶ seeking advice from your workplace supervisor or professional supervisor
- ▶ discussing the matter with co-workers with a shared support load or who have relevant experience
- ▶ networking with contacts who may work in a similar area or have specialist knowledge (while maintaining confidentiality)
- ▶ obtaining advice from appropriate specialists and professionals such as psychologists or behaviour management specialists
- ▶ conducting private research and reading professional journals to ensure you are aware of the latest developments in this area
- ▶ seeking and attending relevant training sessions.

Example

Seek specialist advice and training

Marjorie works with people who have a wide variety of issues, and recently the profile of people seeking support seems to have changed significantly. Marjorie is finding it more difficult to identify appropriate support mechanisms and plan actions that are meaningful and relevant. She discusses the issue with her supervisor and they both agree that Marjorie is lacking current knowledge in some very specific areas. Increasing her knowledge will assist the people using their services and will also help provide ongoing training and mentorship within their organisation. They agree that Marjorie will be able to apply for some time release to attend a training course that is being held shortly. The training course will give Marjorie the information she currently lacks and she can then share the information with other colleagues within the organisation.



Practice task 7

1. Describe two ways a mentor could help you in developing your skills at work.

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.....

2. What are three examples of training that could help you build your skills?

.....

.....

.....

3. The knowledge needed for your job seems to have changed recently. What should you do?

.....

.....

4. Is it appropriate to talk to a person from outside your organisation to seek specialist advice or support?

.....

Click to complete Practice task 7

2D Recognise requirements for self-care and identify requirements for additional support

Working in community services can be challenging, so it is important to think about how you can look after your own self-care and mental health. Acknowledging that self-care is important is the first step in making sure you are able to continue working in the sector for many years to come. Failing to recognise the need for self-care can lead to stress, burnout and emotional fatigue as well as to high levels of absenteeism, turnover and claims for workers compensation.

If you feel you need additional support it is vital that you identify your needs and know who you can approach for assistance. Getting support from others is helpful in meeting your self-care needs early on, before a small problem becomes a major one.



Self-care needs

Self-care means taking positive steps to look after yourself in your workplace. Generally it refers to areas related particularly to mental health and wellness; although it can also refer to physical health parameters such as avoiding infections, staying safe when interacting with others and avoiding injuries when performing manual handling or other tasks.

You can identify self-care requirements in two ways. Firstly you need to know that the community services sector has high levels of mental stress associated with it. Secondly you need to be aware of your own personality, characteristics and tendencies. This will guide you in knowing when you are showing signs of stress or burnout – significant areas of risk for community services workers.

Self-care actions need to be acted on promptly after identifying that you are experiencing stress or are close to burnout.

Indicators of stress and burnout:

- ▶ Frequent headaches or muscle aches and pains
- ▶ Clenching your fists or tightening your jaw muscles
- ▶ Over-reaction to small problems
- ▶ Frequent irritability
- ▶ Difficulty winding down at the end of the day
- ▶ Difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep
- ▶ Difficulty making decisions or remembering details

Take care of yourself

Taking care of your own physical and mental health care needs is an important part of making sure you can continue to do your job well now and into the future. There are lots of different approaches to take, so it is useful to think about what suits you and your own preferences. There is no-one way to take care of your own self-care needs.

Here are some ideas to help you think about the best way of taking care of your needs.

Strategies for taking care of yourself



Exercise

Exercise increases physical fitness and promotes mental wellbeing. It is a great stress reliever.



Work-life balance

Give each work day a clear start and finish point so you can spend time on other parts of your life.



Short-term stress busters

Listen to music, do some yoga or play a team game to reduce stress.



Employee assistance programs (EAP)

EAPs that provide professional counselling and support services to staff are handy when workers need more expert help.



Build a resilient workplace

Sharing responsibility for work tasks and issues and collaborating on decision-making in teams helps build resilience.



Talk about mental and physical health

Put mental health on the agenda rather than avoiding the topic.

Further indicators that additional support is required

Behavioural, physiological and emotional factors can indicate you need additional support. Accessing additional support early on is far better than ignoring a problem and hoping it goes away. Failing to recognise additional needs for support usually just means the problem becomes worse rather than better.

Here are some ways you can identify whether you need additional support.

Do you need additional support?

Physical changes

Increases in blood pressure, changes to weight or sleeping patterns and problems such as headaches or muscle pain can indicate a need for support.

Negative approaches

Excessive use of alcohol, caffeine, other drugs, smoking, over-working or avoiding people or situations are unhelpful ways of trying to cope.

Mood changes

Feeling isolated, bored, frustrated or angry a lot of the time can indicate problems with stress or burnout.

Behaviour changes

Changes in behaviour such as being aggressive, grumpy, snapping at others or being sarcastic can suggest a need for action.

Absenteeism

Needing to take time off frequently for physical or mental needs can mean stress or workload are problem areas.

Example

Recognise the need for some support

Peta works around 45 hours per week and travels frequently as part of her job. She visits many families, completing support plans and attending meetings. She often does not have time for a lunch break and is known at work as the 'go-to girl' whenever there is a problem. Lately the problem has been Peta herself! She is grumpy, irritable and experiencing frequent headaches. Peta has been reading a book about stress and burnout and realises she is showing many of the classic signs of someone who is experiencing stress.

She decides to take some action and seek support from her supervisor. They meet to discuss Peta's workload and develop a plan to help her complete more of her paperwork from the office and to have a flexible start and finish time. This allows Peta to adjust her weekly schedule and start later the next day after she has attended a family meeting the night before. They also agree to hire an administrative assistant to complete some of the basic tasks that are taking up so much of her work time at present.

Peta's ability to recognise when things are going wrong and take appropriate action to seek support means she now goes home at the end of a 38-hour working week feeling content, satisfied and ready to enjoy her weekend.



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Practice task 8

1. Identify three indicators that you may notice about yourself that could suggest you are experiencing stress.

.....

.....

2. What is an employee assistance program? Describe how it may help if you require some extra support or assistance.

.....

.....

.....

.....

3. You are working overtime each week and spending many hours driving each day. You often skip lunch just to get your work done. What may happen, and what actions should you take?

.....

.....

.....

Click to complete Practice task 8

2E Devise, document and implement a self-development plan that sets realistic goals and targets

Self-development is an ongoing process that requires the ability to plan how you want to develop your personal abilities, skills and knowledge. To create an effective personal development plan, you need to establish realistic goals and targets.

Personal development plans describe the actions you will take to develop your skills and knowledge. The plan should clearly establish what you want to achieve and how you will achieve it within a specific time frame.



A structured approach is the best way to complete self-development requirements within your workplace. There may be systems in place to guide you through the process, which will form a regular part of your tasks each year. Learning to plan your schedule so you can set aside time regularly to think about your goals and career direction is useful, and reduces the work you need to do when it comes time to write your personal development plan.

SMART goals

Setting goals encourages you to prioritise areas of self-development and maintain focus and direction. It also helps you find purpose and motivation and measure progress in your personal development program. When you are developing personal goals, the SMART acronym may be helpful – every goal should be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely (have a deadline).

The following describes the main attributes of SMART goals.

S

Specific:

Target and clearly define a specific area that you want to improve.

M

Measurable:

Suggest an indicator of progress; quantify if possible. Determine how you will know the goal has been achieved.

A

Attainable:

Agree what the goals should be and keep them achievable in the time frame.

R

Realistic:

Identify what results can realistically be achieved given the available resources, knowledge and time.

T

Time framed:

Specify when the result can be achieved; make sure there is enough time to achieve the goal, but not too much time.

Professional development guidelines

Community services organisations must provide training and professional development opportunities to staff to meet legal and regulatory requirements. Professional development should be targeted and deliberate in order to fit within the requirements of the organisation's vision, mission and values and to ensure that it is offered in a fiscally responsible way. Professional development can be costly, so it is important that it is only used to help workers achieve goals that are clearly identified, planned and documented.



It is important for workers to follow organisation guidelines and participate in professional development opportunities to improve their skills and knowledge, to meet the objectives of the organisation and to provide quality services. A self-development plan is often used as part of an ongoing cycle of performance reviews or appraisals and invites workers and their direct supervisors to collaborate and develop appropriate goals for the following term, usually 12 months.

Specific goals

Specific goals are required for a personal development plan written as part of a performance appraisal or review process as a way of informing progress and development of future skills and learning.

You need to take your time when writing goals and ensure they are written in a way that states specifically what is going to be achieved. You may need to write a first draft of your goals then seek some input and advice from your supervisor or others and then discuss with your supervisor what should form the final version of your goals.

As you do this, reflect upon your own practice and consider what you have achieved already against existing performance competencies and role expectations and what you hope to achieve in the future.

Here are some ways you can make sure goals are specific.

Write specific goals

- ▶ Use precise language.
- ▶ Use numerical terms if relevant.
- ▶ Avoid general, vague phrases.
- ▶ Consider who, what, where and how.
- ▶ Ask another person to read the goals.

Measurable goals

A measurable goal is one that allows you to record your progress towards its achievement by documenting what you have done and when the goal has been attained. Writing measurable goals takes some practice.

Your supervisor will be able to support you in writing measurable goals as you work through your first appraisal or review process together. For example, you could have a goal that states, 'I will be able to process documentation for all casual workers' time sheets and shift reports within three days of receiving them'. This is a measurable goal that states precisely what you will be able to do, and can be measured simply by the fact that you will either be able to do this or you will not.

This checklist shows you some of the questions you can ask to determine if a goal is measurable.

Questions to determine if a goal is measurable:

- ▶ What will success look like?
- ▶ Can I measure this goal in a numerical way?
- ▶ Can I collect data about this goal?
- ▶ Does this goal relate to specific outcomes?
- ▶ Does the goal include information about who, what, where and how?
- ▶ Can the goal be achieved independently?
- ▶ Do I need any special support or supervision?
- ▶ Have I used clear written expression?

Attainable goals

Your goals should be achievable. It is no use setting goals that are beyond your reach or that you do not have control over, as this will only serve to demotivate you and make you lose confidence in yourself.

Sometimes it is better to break your goals down into small achievable steps so you are not too daunted by bigger long-term goals that seem unattainable.

For example, instead of setting a goal of getting a job promotion within three months, start thinking about the steps that you need to take to obtain a promotion and establish these as goals.

Realistic goals

It is important that you set goals for yourself that are able to be achieved with the resources and time you have available. If you are dreaming of grand things in your community services career, it is sometimes useful to break these ideas down so you can work towards some smaller, more realistic goals.

You can make goals realistic by thinking carefully about what you include now and what would be better left until you have developed some more skills and increased your knowledge. For example, it is realistic for a new worker in the sector to set a goal of being able to confidently access and work with an interpreter during a face-to-face meeting, whereas it is not realistic for the same worker to master a person's preferred language in order to speak with them directly.

Timely goals

Goals should be written in a way that describes when they are going to be achieved, so that progress towards or achievement of the goals can be documented. For example, a goal within the area of technical skills may state that the person will learn to lead a group of trainees in performing safe manual-handling tasks when working with people who require physical support at home for personal care tasks. The goal may state that they will achieve this goal by completing a training program with a physiotherapist and writing a training plan by the end of June.

Create a self-development plan

Creating a self-development or personal development plan encourages you to think carefully about the goals you set and what you can do to achieve them. This plan focuses on expanding your skills and knowledge to achieve personal and professional growth.

Your organisation is likely to use templates and have a specific policy and procedure to guide you through writing a self-development plan.

The plan is usually prepared in conjunction with your direct manager or supervisor; although you may be asked to write your draft your goals first, before you meet. Then you can discuss your goals and consider their feedback and ideas before finalising your self-development plan for the next 12 months.

What to include in a self-development plan

- ▶ What you want to achieve (goals)
- ▶ When you want to achieve them by (time frame)
- ▶ How you will know when you have achieved them (measurement)
- ▶ What you will do to reach these goals (your actions)
- ▶ What help you need to reach these goals (support/mentorship/professional training)
- ▶ What aspect of your job these goals relate to (professional accountability)

Benefits of developing a plan

The process of developing a self-development plan can generate benefits to you and your organisation.

Benefits

Creating written plans make goals seem tangible and significant, meaning you are less likely to forget or ignore them.

Plans do not need to be purely work-related or task orientated; for example, increased self-knowledge will help you in all areas of life.

Online research can assist you in identifying professional development opportunities and keeping up to date with industry developments.

Having confidence in using the internet and conducting research will assist you in your work and preparing personal development and work plans.

Writing skills

One of the most important writing skills that is applicable to self-development plans (sometimes called personal development plans) is the ability to write clearly and concisely. These plans do not need to be lengthy documents. They simply need to state exactly what you want to achieve in the future and how you can tell when you have achieved this. Practising writing goals can help you become more confident with the writing style that is needed.



Keeping a journal or diary during the year is also useful. This uses a less formal style of writing and can be written using any approach you find comfortable. A journal or reflective diary will help you remember what you have achieved during the year and can assist in making links between what you set as goals in the previous year and what you have done to achieve them. It helps by highlighting themes or trends in your professional learning needs that emerge so you can think about whether there are some common goals that will help you manage these trends more easily.

Technology and digital literacy skills

Personal learning documents such as self-development plans or appraisals are often complex documents that require considerable time and effort to complete. They are usually Word files, although they may be saved as PDF documents as well. In many workplaces they are available via an online intranet or similar system. It is important to think about how you manage these documents over time and the process you use to share versions with others within your workplace.

The following is a checklist to guide you in using appropriate technology and digital literacy skills when developing your self-development plan.

Using digital technology to complete your personal development plan:

- ▶ Use the latest version of any documents.
- ▶ Read relevant policies and procedures for document management.

- ▶ Clarify any questions with your supervisor.
- ▶ Use an appropriate file name.
- ▶ Date drafts when they are created.
- ▶ Work on the latest draft of a document each time it is opened.
- ▶ Save documents securely and back them up.
- ▶ Comply with any privacy or confidentiality requirements.

Example

Reflective diaries

Jazmin is writing a reflective diary entry about a significant event in her work day. She uses the following template to guide her thinking and writing.

| | |
|--|--|
| What happened? | A team briefing went wrong and ended in a major argument among several team members, with me trying to continue chairing the meeting but eventually giving up and declaring the meeting closed. |
| Why did it happen? | A clash of personalities among team members and everyone trying to talk at once. No-one would listen to me as meeting chair. |
| How do I feel about it? | I felt frustrated and angry that I could not get control of the meeting. I was upset that my role was not respected. |
| What can I take away from this experience? | A realisation that sometimes different personalities can clash and that not everyone shares the same opinions or values in our team. |
| What could I do differently in the future? | I could learn to get control of meetings and be more authoritative and respond more quickly when things are getting out of hand. |
| Do I need any help or support to guide my learning? | Yes. I need to build some skills in managing meetings and dealing with personality clashes in a work team. |
| What will future success in this area look and feel like? | I can picture myself running a meeting where people can share their opinions and be heard easily and where questions are asked and statements made in a respectful way. I think this will make me feel more confident as a leader and more in control rather than feeling nervous and stressed about chairing a meeting. |

Practice task 9

Use this table to enter your own ideas about some goals that would be relevant for your own learning interest areas or the career direction you would like to follow in the future. Remember to think about writing clearly and concisely, and reflecting on your own professional practice and experiences. You can use a reflective diary to help with this if you prefer.

| | | |
|------------------------------------|--|--|
| Goal | What you want to achieve | |
| Time frame | When you want to achieve it | |
| Measure of success | How you will know you have achieved it | |
| Actions | What you will do | |
| Support | What you need | |
| Professional accountability | Link to specific areas of your job/role | |
| Storage details | Where this document will be stored (file name, date, location) | |

[Click to complete Practice task 9](#)

Summary

1. Feedback from others as well as your own reflection on your skills and achievements can help you improve on your professional practice.
2. Formal and informal networks located both within your organisation or external to it can help you build your skills and knowledge.
3. Community services workers benefit from seeking support and feedback from their own team members and others outside their team and organisation. It is important to seek advice, support and additional specialised training if needed to meet your work and professional obligations.
4. Self-care, stress management and meeting your own mental health needs are important when working within the community services sector.
5. It is important that you are familiar with guidelines in relation to professional development and seek opportunities for further learning and skill development that meet organisation requirements, including the appropriate storage of digital documents and files.
6. Review mechanisms are designed to evaluate staff performance and identify training needs. They also give workers an opportunity to consider their career goals and create self-development plans.

Learning checkpoint 2

Enhance your own practice

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in enhancing your own practice.

Part A

1. You are a recently qualified community services worker and have just started your first job. What could you do to develop support networks both within and outside your organisation?

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2. You are preparing for a performance review. Should you focus on areas of weakness, areas of strength, or both? Give a reason for your answer.

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3. You have a long-term career goal to move into a management position after working for several years providing direct support to adults. What are four approaches you could take to help you achieve this goal?

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4. You are becoming increasingly stressed at work as your hours of work become longer and your tasks become more challenging. What are three strategies you could use to improve this situation?

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5. What does the acronym SMART stand for?

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.....

6. Write one example of a short-term career goal that is appropriate for your interest, level of experience and situation. Write your response as a single sentence and include a time frame for your goal.

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7. What evidence could you provide that would show you can meet the goal you have written in Question 6?

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Part B

Use the following template to write four goals – one related to each of the following areas of work:

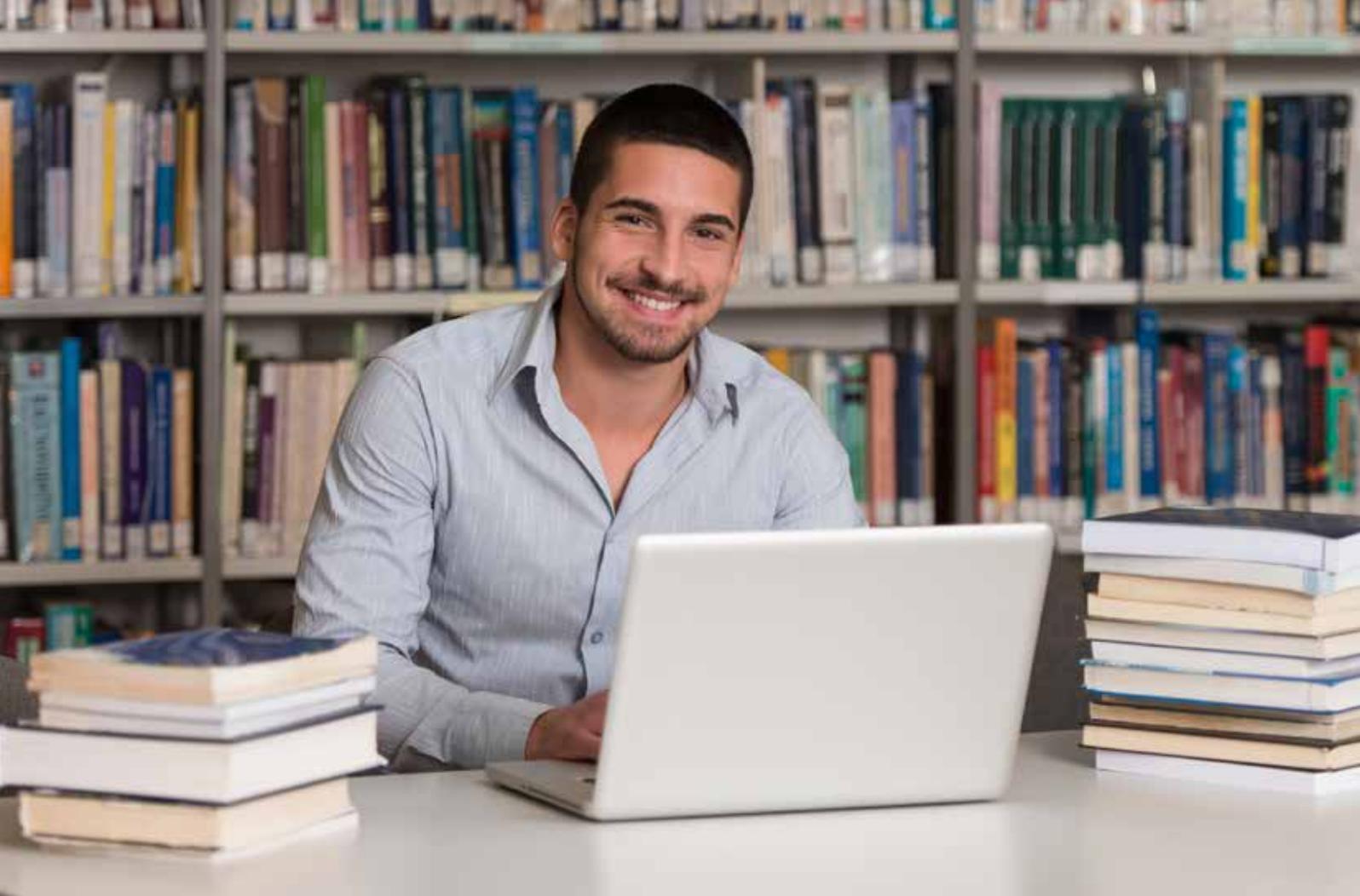
- ▶ Digital literacy and technology
- ▶ Stress management/mental health self-care
- ▶ People-focused skills
- ▶ Technical skills

| | | |
|------------------------------------|--|--|
| Area of skill: | Digital literacy and technology | |
| Goal | What you want to achieve | |
| Time frame | When you want to achieve it | |
| Measure of success | How you will know you have achieved it | |
| Actions | What you will do | |
| Support | What you need | |
| Professional accountability | Link to specific areas of your job/role | |
| Storage details | Where this document will be stored (file name, date, location) | |

| | | |
|------------------------------------|--|--|
| Area of skill: | Stress management/mental health self-care | |
| Goal | What you want to achieve | |
| Time frame | When you want to achieve it | |
| Measure of success | How you will know you have achieved it | |
| Actions | What you will do | |
| Support | What you need | |
| Professional accountability | Link to specific areas of your job/role | |
| Storage details | Where this document will be stored (file name, date, location) | |

| | | |
|------------------------------------|--|--|
| Area of skill: | People-focused skills | |
| Goal | What you want to achieve | |
| Time frame | When you want to achieve it | |
| Measure of success | How you will know you have achieved it | |
| Actions | What you will do | |
| Support | What you need | |
| Professional accountability | Link to specific areas of your job/role | |
| Storage details | Where this document will be stored (file name, date, location) | |

| | | |
|------------------------------------|--|--|
| Area of skill: | Technical skills | |
| Goal | What you want to achieve | |
| Time frame | When you want to achieve it | |
| Measure of success | How you will know you have achieved it | |
| Actions | What you will do | |
| Support | What you need | |
| Professional accountability | Link to specific areas of your job/role | |
| Storage details | Where this document will be stored (file name, date, location) | |



Topic 3

In this topic you will learn how to:

- 3A Access and review information on current and emerging industry developments and use it to improve practice**

- 3B Assess and confirm your own practice against ethical and legal requirements and opportunities**

- 3C Identify and engage with opportunities to extend and expand your own expertise**

- 3D Regularly participate in review processes as a commitment to upgrading skills and knowledge**

Facilitate ongoing professional development

Ongoing professional development is a vital component of building a long-term professional career in community services. Although it can be tempting to believe you have learnt everything you need to once you have completed your initial training, in fact learning continues throughout your career.

As the industry changes, you will find there are new and emerging developments to consider, and many opportunities to identify new learning areas and expand your expertise in various ways. It is important as you do this to assess your daily work practices against ethical and legal requirements and to participate as required in the review and professional development processes that happen at most community services workplaces.

3A Access and review information on current and emerging industry developments and use it to improve practice

The community services industry is constantly undergoing change and development. It is important to keep up to date with these developments and evaluate how you can apply them to improve your own practice.

Examples of changes to practice over recent years include ageing in place, positive ageing, person-centred practice; creative art therapies such as bibliotherapy and music therapy; assistive and communication technologies; pet therapy; and Montessori approaches to aged care and community care. Changes have also occurred in staffing practices, with an increased focus on planned use of volunteers, mentoring approaches and shared decision-making and planning as a strategy for building resilience within a team or work group.

It is important to consider how well researched and widely accepted practices are in Australia and internationally. Sometimes changes to practice may seem innovative and creative but lack in-depth, large-scale peer-reviewed research evidence that they should be adopted without question.

Consider the points below.

Keeping up to date with developments

- ▶ Discuss industry matters with your peers, co-workers, supervisors or mentors.
- ▶ Network with others within your own organisation and external to it.
- ▶ Attend conferences and training sessions.
- ▶ Be an active member of a professional association.
- ▶ Read professional journals and literature.
- ▶ Conduct research and visit websites that report on the latest developments in community and social services.
- ▶ Visit government websites to check policy developments.
- ▶ Use social media, blogs and other online forums to learn about new developments and trends in Australia and overseas.

Research using the internet

The internet provides a range of resources that can help you stay current with new developments in every area of community services. However, you should only use websites that are professionally endorsed or otherwise known to be reputable and accurate to ensure all information is up to date.

Take the time to read widely and bookmark sites that you find particularly useful. An RSS feed can alert you to new information on a website that you visit frequently, so you know when there is something new to read.

Here are some areas and sites for you to explore.

Government and independent publications

- ▶ In the aged care sector, for example, the Australian Government provides comprehensive information about the industry. Access this information from the Department of Health. There are also independent online publications that focus on current issues in the sector. Three examples are the Community Care Review, Australian Ageing Agenda and Aged Care Insite.

Community services bodies

- ▶ Each state and territory has a community services industry body that reports on developments in all areas of social services. Websites contain a range of state, territory and national information on community services and social issues for industry workers and the people who use the services. The national industry association is the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) and state and territory bodies are similarly named; for example, WACOSS (for Western Australian), and QCOSS (for Queensland).

Appraise and apply current developments

Industry developments may include changes to legislation, regulations and industry standards. These changes can directly impact on your work.

Some guidance to help you appraise and apply developments is provided here.

Identify developments

Your supervisor will update you regarding industry developments, but it is important that you have the skills to research and monitor relevant industry trends. Industry developments may include:

- ▶ changes to legislation and regulations
- ▶ changes to government policy
- ▶ changes to standards, accreditation and ethical practices
- ▶ evidence-based research that suggest new approaches to professional practice.

Assess impact

To assess the impact of changes, you should:

- ▶ discuss issues with colleagues and supervisors
- ▶ ask your supervisor if there are any training sessions you could attend
- ▶ check information on community sector or professional association websites for new developments and how they impact on work practices.

Adapt practice

Staying current with evidence-based practice helps you stay abreast of new developments and adapt your work practices accordingly. Evidence-based practice means using the best current evidence, research and knowledge to guide your work.

Never attempt to implement changes without consulting others and fully appraising the value of any new practice. Your supervisor and team members must discuss and decide whether the practice is relevant and how it can be used to benefit people receiving support services.

Adapt to new practices to suit the workplace and users of its services

Innovative and creative developments do not usually happen overnight in the community services sector. Most are the result of careful research to determine the benefits and potential risks associated with a change in practice, followed by consideration of how best to implement changes on a practical level.

Within your organisation you may need to work with others to consider and evaluate innovative practices. You could visit other workplaces, join in network meetings or be a part of forums and discussion panels to find out more. You will need to consider how any changes will affect the people who use your services and whether the changes will have a positive, negative or neutral impact. You need to weigh this up against human, physical and financial resource limitations and decide whether a change should be implemented.



Professional associations

Professional associations provide a forum for members to learn from each other. They serve members by communicating information to benefit the profession, which includes information about changes in the industry.

Some professional associations have restrictions on who can be a member. They may limit membership to people who have completed a particular qualification or have certain types of experience. Professional associations sometimes have categories of membership that allow people to begin to learn and gain membership benefits before they apply for full membership.

Professional associations are useful for gaining further knowledge and finding out about trends, activities and upcoming events.

Here are some benefits of joining a professional association:

Benefits of joining a professional association

Access to more-experienced professionals in the sector

Professional development activities such as conferences

Social media interactions through various platforms

Reputable and accurate information

Updates and trends shared through articles, posts or webinars

Special interest groups for information and representation

Example

Appraise industry developments and apply them

Marina has recently returned to community services work after a break of several years. She has heard that changes to work health and safety (WHS) legislation mean that workers now have more responsibility for ensuring they adhere to safe work practices. Marina conducts online research before discussing the matter with her supervisor. She visits her state WHS website to gain an overview of the changes made in her region and to read about the legislation. She also does some research on industry websites and forums.

At the next team meeting, she raises the matter with her supervisor and co-workers to find out how they have implemented changes to the legislation. The supervisor tells her they all attended training so everyone is up to date with the changes and aware of their responsibilities. The supervisor says she will book Marina into the next available training session and, in the meantime, will provide her with information about some of the changes the team has made to their WHS practices since the introduction of the new legislation.



Practice task 10

Conduct some research using the internet. Find and record the name of an organisation, association or information source that can provide you with information about each of the areas listed in this table.

| Area | Organisation/information source |
|---|---------------------------------|
| Research to support the use of pets as therapy | |
| Reputable health or disability information | |
| Research on changes or innovations to supporting a person who is experiencing memory loss | |
| A relevant professional association | |
| A useful social media chat group, forum, blog or discussion page | |

[Click to complete Practice task 10](#)

3B Assess and confirm your own practice against ethical and legal requirements and opportunities

Understanding how your own practice aligns with ethical and legal requirements and opportunities is an important part of your ongoing career development. You need to stay up to date on changes that occur to legislation and frameworks that relate to ethical requirements of your work. For example, you need to be aware of changes to responsibilities of workers and employers under work health and safety and discrimination legislation; mandatory reporting requirements; updates to funding and support arrangements such as the NDIS; duty-of-care requirements for particular tasks and situations; and changes to codes of conduct and position statements from peak bodies in your industry sector.



Assess your own practice

One way to assess your own practice is to gather evidence about how you meet your organisation's objectives, which are underpinned by a range of practice standards and legal and ethical obligations.

To work within this legal and ethical framework, organisations establish a range of principles and objectives that guide their work. These are outlined in their mission or value statements and are also reflected in codes of ethics, policy documents and position descriptions.

It is important to consider your own daily work practices and ensure they are a good fit with the objectives and direction of your organisation.

Here is the process for assessing your own practice against your organisation's objectives by gathering evidence.

Gathering evidence to assess practice

Identify your own job role and work tasks.

Identify your organisation's vision, mission and values.

Identify relevant codes of conduct and legal and ethical requirements of your work area.

Read and summarise relevant information from all sources.

Locate evidence that demonstrates how your current work practice aligns with the vision, mission and values as well as legal and ethical requirements and codes of conduct.

Legal requirements

Your community services job role requires you to have an understanding of the legal obligations that underpin your job role. This helps ensure that you carry out your work safely and in a manner that addresses needs and rights. You should be aware of your legal obligations, how to apply them to your work and where you can find additional information and support. State and territory legal requirements can change, and it is important to check whether any changes apply to your obligations.

Here are some examples of legal requirements where ongoing professional development may be required.

Legal requirements

Check the legal requirements that exist currently and use professional development strategies to ensure you remain up to date with any changes.



Work health and safety

Legislation varies depending on your work location and role in the workplace.



Mandatory reporting

Ensure you know what to report, how and to whom, depending on your role.



Discrimination

Legislation applies across Australia and affects many areas of work and daily life.



Qualifications to do the job

Ensure you hold appropriate and up-to-date qualifications for the job you do.

Manage complex ethical issues and dilemmas

If you work in a position that requires that you comply with ethical requirements, it is quite likely that from time to time you will experience dilemmas about how to manage a particular situation or problem. It is often necessary to seek advice and support from others when you are managing ethical issues and dilemmas. An ethical dilemma is a situation in which there is no clear-cut solution or obvious course of action. Ethical dilemmas can occur when ideas or actions conflict with what you believe to be ethically correct.

Your workplace is likely to have a code of ethics to help you deal with ethical dilemmas. While this document will not tell you how to make a decision, it should provide principles that you can use to guide your actions.

The Australian Community Workers Association (ACWA) code of ethics and the associated practice guidelines are available at: <http://aspirelr.link/acwa-code-of-ethics> and <http://aspirelr.link/acwaguidelines>

Approaches to managing ethical issues:

- ▶ Be aware of the ethical obligations of your role and profession.
- ▶ Refer to relevant ethical codes of practice and conduct.
- ▶ Use ethical decision-making strategies.
- ▶ Seek advice from your workplace or professional supervisor.
- ▶ Discuss the matter with experienced colleagues and co-workers.
- ▶ Ask for advice from a person who has specialist knowledge in the area.

Decision-making

In your work, you may often face situations that represent an ethical dilemma. It is important that you take time to recognise the ethical principles involved, treat each situation as unique and seek advice when required.

There are a number of decision-making models, including ethical decision-making processes. One example is the PLUS ethical decision-making model, which includes the steps of identifying the problem PLUS its alternatives, then evaluating the alternatives PLUS making a decision, implementing it PLUS evaluating it. The six-step PLUS model is an easy-to-implement approach to making ethical decisions.

Here are the steps involved in the process of decision-making.

The decision-making process

- 1 Reflect on and assess the situation to determine the circumstances and facts.
- 2 Refer to a code of ethics, establish the ethical principles relevant to the situation and consider the potential harm the situation may cause if not resolved.
- 3 Examine options for responding to the situation.
- 4 Consult with others who can provide guidance or specialist advice.
- 5 Choose a course of action based on the information you have gathered and advice you have received.
- 6 Make sure you can justify your decision based on standards of practice or ethical principles.

Sector-specific legislation

There are laws and regulations that are directly relevant to different areas of community services work. It is important that you understand the legislation and related standards governing the community services sector you work in.

To research Australian legislation you can access the Australasian Legal Information Institute (AustLII) database at: <http://aspirelr.link/austlii>.

For example, the primary Act underpinning residential aged care in Australia is the *Aged Care Act 1997* (Cth). This Act provides guidelines about how residential aged care services should be delivered, including the standard of care that services must adhere to, who is eligible for government-subsidised residential care, and residents' rights.

Laws governing other sectors include:

- ▶ state and territory child protection legislation
- ▶ state and territory domestic violence legislation
- ▶ state and territory mental health legislation
- ▶ Commonwealth legislation relating to the use and supply of drugs and alcohol
- ▶ Commonwealth legislation relating to disability services.

General legislative requirements

Besides legislation that is specific to your area of community services work, you should be familiar with other legal requirements related to your work role. A range of state, territory and Commonwealth laws are relevant to all types of community work.

Some of the most important legislation is described below.

Privacy laws

Organisations must have privacy and confidentiality policies and procedures in place. Depending on the organisation, these policies and procedures must be based on either the *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth) or state and territory privacy laws.

Privacy laws are designed to:

- ▶ protect how people's personal information is collected, used, maintained and stored
- ▶ prevent unauthorised access to personal information
- ▶ underpin ethical and policy directives associated with confidentiality; that is, do not share personal information or what others have told you unless you have obtained permission for this to occur.

Anti-discrimination legislation

There are Commonwealth, state and territory laws dealing with discrimination.

Commonwealth anti-discrimination legislation includes the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth), *Age Discrimination Act 2004* (Cth), *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth), and the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth).

Anti-discrimination legislation seeks to:

- ▶ protect the rights of people by making it illegal to discriminate against individuals or groups on the grounds of race, age, gender, sexuality or disability
- ▶ ensure equal opportunity
- ▶ promote access and equity in service provision.

WHS legislation

Work health and safety (WHS) legislation is designed to protect the safety and wellbeing of people in the workplace. You have a duty of care to ensure the activities you undertake do not expose others to unnecessary risks. This may involve:

- ▶ checking for hazards in meeting rooms and premises
- ▶ ensuring equipment and electrical appliances are safe and used according to WHS requirements
- ▶ providing individuals and groups with information about safety and emergency procedures
- ▶ attending all WHS training as required.

The *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (Cth) regulates workplace health and safety for the Commonwealth. WA and Victoria have their own Acts.

Codes of ethics

Meeting your organisation's objectives and the professional standards of your occupation requires an ability to operate within a relevant code of ethics, conduct or practice. Your organisation may have its own code of ethics or you may refer to an external code such as the ACWA code of ethics.

Codes of ethics outline the ethical principles and standards of conduct expected of a worker in their specific industry. This includes the responsibilities you have towards other workers and to your organisation.

If you maintain appropriate links within your industry through networking and membership of a professional association or peak body, you can assess and confirm your own practice against the current ethical requirements of your sector and also identify any emerging opportunities, such as the chance to participate in steering committees, become a member of an industry board or participate in professional associations and bodies.

Ethical principles include:

- ▶ maintaining confidentiality
- ▶ respecting the rights and dignity of individuals
- ▶ promoting self-determination and decision-making
- ▶ keeping the best interests of people using a service in mind
- ▶ treating all people who use the service equitably
- ▶ adhering to professional standards for maintaining professional boundaries and avoiding conflicts of interest
- ▶ refraining from any conduct that may damage the profession or the reputation of the organisation.

Organisation policies, procedures and plans

To meet organisation objectives, you must adhere to policies, procedures and plans, and consider how respecting the rights of other workers and your employer underpins your professional actions and behaviour.

Continuous improvement plans are one way an organisation makes sure it develops and improves how it meets industry standards and carries out work practices. You have a responsibility to participate in improvement cycles. This process should take account of any changes to legal and ethical requirements, and may mean that policy and procedure changes are also needed.

The purpose of policies and procedures is outlined below.

Policies

Policies are directly linked to the legal, ethical and professional requirements and standards that govern the operation of an organisation. You may be given your own copy of organisation policies or told where you can find them. They are usually found in a manual as a hard copy, or electronically on the organisation's computer network. Policies provide information about how an organisation addresses specific issues related to privacy, complaints management, access and equity, staff development and work health and safety. As an employee, you should be able to demonstrate how you follow your organisation's policies and to clearly explain them to anyone who asks.

Procedures

Procedures consist of practical and clear step-by-step instructions of how a task is to be completed. These should also be available in hard copy or on the organisation's computer network. It is important that you follow your organisation's procedures consistently to carry out common practices and provide services to the required standard. For example, organisations have specific procedures for conducting assessments. If you do not follow these correctly, you may miss some important information about a person that may impact on the services provided. Written documentation that you use in assessments should demonstrate that you have followed the required procedures accurately.

Examples

Organisation procedures may include:

- ▶ work health and safety procedures, such as those for manual handling and conducting risk assessments
- ▶ privacy procedures – private information must be maintained according to privacy guidelines; for example, after use, files must be secured in a locked filing cabinet or password-protected database
- ▶ reporting procedures, including writing case notes and making incident reports
- ▶ meeting procedures
- ▶ grievance or complaint procedures – all people using a service should be given verbal and written information about the complaints process, and assisted to lodge complaints if required.

Opportunities

There may be situations where you have the opportunity to act or advocate for a person or respond to a situation in a particular way that supports the concepts of social justice and fits within a legal and ethical framework. It is useful to distinguish this from an obligation (something you are bound to do as part of your work).

For example, you may have the opportunity to write a letter complaining about discriminatory conduct that you observe in a restaurant at a time when you are not working. You can choose to write the letter, as you believe it is the right thing to do in the situation, but you are not under a legal or duty-of-care obligation to take any action at all. In these situations you have a choice about how you respond.

Opportunities to act within the legal and ethical framework that apply to all citizens represent a chance to make a difference to society, but you should recognise that you need to assess each situation on its merits and consider your views and values in deciding what decision to take.

Work to increase social justice

Social justice refers to the concept that everyone should have the same opportunities and the right to live their lives without having to deal with discrimination or inequality. Here are some ways of understanding social justice and discrimination in community services work.

Addressing social justice

As a community services worker, you can help address social justice issues by:

- ▶ ensuring people have access to the services they need
- ▶ following organisation policies regarding access and equity
- ▶ being familiar with and adhering to the requirements of anti-discrimination legislation
- ▶ providing information and educating people using a service about their rights
- ▶ providing flexible and person-centred services to address individual needs
- ▶ respecting the rights of people, including co-workers.

Dealing with discrimination

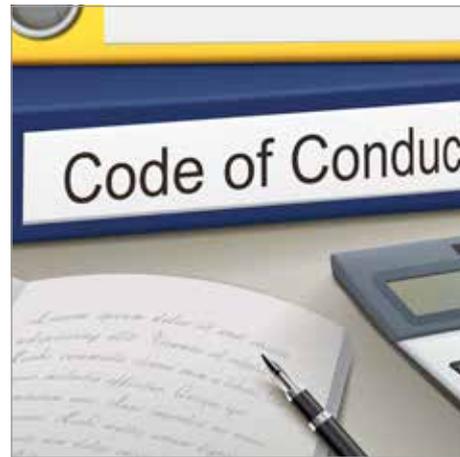
- ▶ Discrimination can take many forms. It can be explicit when a person makes racist remarks to, or about a colleague; or it may be less obvious, such as when an employer overlooks a colleague for a job because they have a physical disability or because they are pregnant. If you observe discriminatory behaviour, it is important to take appropriate action. For example, you may tell the person directly that their remarks or behaviour are discriminatory, or you may make a report to your supervisor, the Australian Human Rights Commission or relevant state or territory anti-discrimination authority.
- ▶ For more information about social justice, refer to the Australian Human Rights Commission website at: <http://aspirelr.link/human-rights-commission>.

Codes of practice

Many industries and work sectors have codes of practice that govern the way they conduct their work activities. Codes of practice can be voluntary or compulsory and they may change from time to time.

Some professional associations have agreement with the code of conduct as a condition of their membership. By joining the association you are also agreeing to comply with the code of conduct. Joining a professional association allows you to remain up to date with any changes to codes of practice that may impact upon your work.

It is important to read the code of conduct carefully and make sure you are happy to agree to its terms before you sign your application for membership of an association.



Duty of care

You have a legal and ethical duty to take reasonable care to avoid acts or omissions that may cause foreseeable harm to someone to whom you owe a duty of care. For example, you would owe a duty of care to a young person who you were taking on a community activity as part of your work program. By contrast, you would not owe a duty of care to a friend you happened to meet while you are on the activity and who is not a part of your program.

The standard of care required is the care that any reasonable person would be expected to take in a particular situation; for example, a worker taking reasonable care would be expected to think ahead about possible risks and ensure they always adhere to ethical standards and their organisation's policies and procedures.

Upholding your duty of care

- ▶ Identify physical, emotional or financial risks or potential for injury when these are foreseeable.
- ▶ Consider the risks associated with the environment and activities.
- ▶ Consider the impact of any illness, disability or other issues on the potential for risk or harm.
- ▶ Provide appropriate care and support.
- ▶ Maintain appropriate confidentiality and privacy to prevent harm resulting from a breach.
- ▶ Follow your organisation's policies and procedures.
- ▶ Adhere to the standards, ethics and principles of your profession.
- ▶ Record information accurately.

Example

Observe legal parameters

Aaron works in an aged care residential service. One of his jobs involves organising recreational activities and excursions for the residents. He takes this role very seriously, as he likes to see residents enjoying themselves and trying different activities.

One of his primary concerns is to ensure that residents are not put at risk in any way. This means he has to plan carefully to ensure he addresses all of his duty-of-care and WHS obligations. Before conducting any new activity or excursion, Aaron carries out a full risk assessment. He also provides guidelines to make sure everyone is fully informed about any possible risks and are prepared for them. For example, when going on a picnic, to avoid sunburn, sunstroke or heat exhaustion he always makes sure there is easy access to plenty of shelter, fresh water, hats and sunscreen.



Practice task 11

1. What are two examples of Commonwealth legislation that may apply to your work in community services?

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2. Is it an ethical or legal requirement to ensure your qualifications are current and up to date?

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3. Do you owe a duty of care to a child you are looking after during a flexible respite activity in the community?

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4. During a visit to your local pool with your family, you notice an external door is particularly hard to open and you think about whether you should complain to the management about how hard it would be for someone using a wheelchair to open the door while sitting. Do you have an obligation or an opportunity to respond?

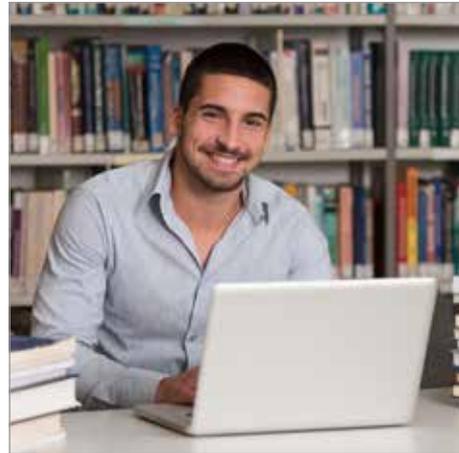
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Click to complete Practice task 11

3C Identify and engage with opportunities to extend and expand your own expertise

There are many opportunities to continue to build your expertise and skills when working in community services. The concept of lifelong learning applies to your own continuing development in community services. Some opportunities may be provided through your own organisation and others may be activities that you seek out independently. It is useful to always be on the lookout for new experiences that can help you learn more, either through formal learning or in a less formal situation.



To get the most out of further learning opportunities it is useful to reflect upon how you learn best. Most people can plan approaches will help them take in new information and learn to apply it to their work practices. Knowing how you prefer to learn and understanding how to access extra support when it is needed are important skills to master in lifelong learning.

Learning styles

One area of self-understanding that may help you in getting the most out of professional development opportunities is to understand how you learn best and to know what strategies work well for helping manage any learning issues or concerns you may experience.

Sometimes if you have not studied for a while or you are not used to formal learning situations it can feel quite daunting to have to try and remember, plan, write clearly and discuss your ideas with others.

Here are some ideas about learning strategies.

Ideas for learning

- ▶ Discussing ideas and concepts with others can help make them easier to remember.
- ▶ Drawing an image or taking a mental photo of a task can be a great visual prompt.
- ▶ Talking to people about learning differences such as dyslexia can be useful, as often they can share information in other ways that are easier for you.
- ▶ Thinking about where, when and how you can study most easily can maximise your study time.
- ▶ Using technology tools such as reminder apps, spelling support tools and audio notes makes life easier when you are trying to learn something new.

Informal and formal learning

Informal and formal learning are quite different and both can be useful in gaining skills and knowledge in community services.

Formal learning involves a structured, planned approach with a curriculum or stated learning outcomes that need to be achieved to reach a level of competency. Formal learning is used for attaining qualifications or achieving certificates of competency.

Informal learning can be made up of a variety of activities and these can often be undertaken according to individual preferences for learning and skill development. Informal learning is useful because it can often be completed in a flexible time frame and can be done in a very individualised way.

Some people find it much more motivating and interesting to learn in a formal situation whereas others are more motivated by informal learning. Think about which approach works best for you and which is most suited to what you are hoping to learn.

Here is a comparison of formal and informal learning approaches.



Formal learning

Formal learning involves a structured approach to teaching and learning and may be conducted face to face, online or through a blended learning method.

Instruction is guided by a teacher or facilitator and includes a variety of methods, including small and large group sessions and individual consultancy as required. End output is often a certificate or formal qualification such as a diploma.



Informal learning

Informal learning does not use a structured curriculum or specified outcomes. It can be used face to face or in online learning environments and is a method well suited to learning on the job, as it can be combined with regular work duties. Examples include reading social media content, observing the work of others, visiting facilities or programs, or receiving feedback from colleagues.

Widen your experiences

Widening your experiences in community services is very useful in continuing to build skills and expertise. Where possible, try to spend time observing or working with others who may be able to provide you with a different insight or approach that you can apply to your own work. For example, you may choose to spend an afternoon visiting a service that supports people who are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. This could help you understand strategies and approaches used to meet specific outcomes with this group of people. You could then analyse and interpret what you have observed and apply it to your own practices.



Some organisations actively encourage workers to collaborate across workplaces to learn about each other's jobs. They are able to find out about how to perform effectively in different environments with people who have different support needs. Widening experience in this way helps create a wider set of skills across the organisation, assists in covering staff absences or job changes and promotes a deeper understanding of roles within the organisation.

Example**Return to study**

It has been many years since Jason has set foot in a classroom, and he is nervous. School was not a happy time for him and he is worried that formal learning to upgrade his qualifications will be similar. Fortunately, before he begins classes he meets Cynthia, a learning skills adviser. She talks to Jason about his previous difficulties with studying. She finds out that Jason has dyslexia, which makes it harder for him to read, write and spell, particularly when he is under pressure or feeling rushed.



Cynthia organises a meeting with Jason's class teacher and Jason, and together they plan what can be done to help Jason's learning experience be a positive one. Jason begins using some new assistive technology tools to help with note taking and writing, he is given extra time to sit tests and he is encouraged to complete his assessment tasks verbally rather than in writing. These strategies all help Jason complete his course and gain new and valuable skills that he can apply in his job.

Practice task 12

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Samantha has worked in her current role for several years and she is keen to learn some new skills. She has always been interested in management and would love to move into a more senior position in her own organisation or in a new workplace. She worries that she has been out of school for so long that she will have forgotten how to study or learn new material.

Samantha is a hard-working team member, and is frequently heard encouraging others and sharing ideas and information with new team members. Her manager encourages her to think about her goals when she prepares for her next performance review, as she believes Samantha could be a valuable asset to the management team in the future. She wants to encourage her to achieve and continue to extend her skills within the organisation.

1. Give an example of one formal and one informal learning opportunity that Samantha could use to increase her skills in management.

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2. What are three things Samantha could do to address her concerns about returning to study?

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3. What is one advantage of formal learning?

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Click to complete Practice task 12

3D Regularly participate in review processes as a commitment to upgrading skills and knowledge

Review mechanisms help evaluate staff performance and identify training needs. They create opportunities for workers to think about career goals and create personal development plans. Review mechanisms occur on a regular cycle, such as once or twice per year, and participation in the process is typically a requirement of your job. During a review you can identify areas where you would like to upgrade your skills and knowledge and work towards future career goals.

The review process involves setting goals, comparing performance against indicators and identifying opportunities for skills development. Reviews are based on the principle of shared responsibility for career development.

The following outlines a general approach in organisations to review processes.

The review process

- ▶ Most workplaces conduct performance appraisals every six months. The process is designed to review your work against key performance indicators, including required skills and knowledge outlined in your position description. The person conducting the appraisal, usually your supervisor, gives feedback on your performance. This feedback should not only focus on areas for improvement, but also on what you do well.
- ▶ At the end of the review, both you and your supervisor should have a clear understanding of what you will be doing over the next six to 12 months and how you will be working to develop your skills and knowledge.

Review discussions

During the performance appraisal you may discuss the following points with your supervisor:

- ▶ Your job role and organisation requirements
- ▶ Your performance in relation to the key criteria in your position description
- ▶ Areas that need improvement and professional development
- ▶ Training and professional development activities opportunities
- ▶ Your career goals and pathways

Participate in review mechanisms

When an appraisal is carried out in a structured and supportive manner, it should be a positive and constructive experience. Make sure you are well prepared and willing to accept the feedback you are given. It will also help your supervisor if you have already identified your strengths, weaknesses and professional goals.

Being willing and prepared to participate in review mechanisms shows your commitment to improving your skills and knowledge. To carry out your role effectively and make the most of a review mechanism, it is important that you can demonstrate competence in the areas below.

Goal setting

Creating personal goals is one of the most effective ways to enhance performance and help you focus on improving your skills and knowledge. During performance appraisal meetings, discuss your goals with your supervisor and how you plan to achieve them.

You should be able to show how you have achieved past goals. For example, if one of your goals last year was to become more comfortable using negotiation and conflict resolution strategies, you can outline how you have achieved this. Your explanation may include training and other personal development strategies you have undertaken, and examples of how you have applied professional development to your work and how your confidence and skills have improved in this area.

Personal development plans

Creating a personal development plan is a way of identifying and mapping the skills, knowledge and personal attributes you wish to focus on and develop over a specific time frame. The plan should contain an action plan of how you will work to develop skills, knowledge and personal attributes.

The plan should not be limited to learning specific skills or knowledge directly related to your work; it should also consider the personal qualities that would help you carry out your work more effectively. For example, if your lack of assertiveness is a problem when dealing with people in your service and co-workers, you may decide to undertake assertiveness training to develop your skills in this area.

Measuring performance

One of the key elements of performance appraisal is evaluating your performance against industry standards and organisation criteria such as your position description. Key criteria usually include specific job-related tasks in your work role as well as more general skills such as the ability to work as part of a team and high-level written and communication skills.

You should be able to accurately assess your own performance against these key criteria and accept feedback. When preparing for a performance appraisal, consider how you perform on each criterion and think of specific examples that demonstrate how you meet each criterion in your work.

Time management

No matter what your job description is, you will be expected to have organisational and time management skills. If you have problems in these areas, evaluate the key issues and consider how you can improve your skills. This may include attending training or making better use of organisational tools such as diaries and personal organisers.

Good time management and organisational practices include planning your day in advance and creating work plans for a specific period (for example, a fortnight or a month), and using a diary or personal organiser to keep track of appointments and tasks. They also include establishing priorities for completing the most important tasks, and avoiding activities that waste time and are not productive.

Personal behaviour, self-awareness and personality traits

Self-awareness and self-knowledge are important in any community services work. Many people who are drawn to this kind of work are naturally empathetic and have a strong desire to help others. Ideally, this should be coupled with an ability to be objective, maintain professional boundaries and avoid stress-related conditions such as burnout.

One aspect of self-awareness in community services work is having a clear understanding of your own values and beliefs. When you understand these and how you acquired them, it is easier to accept the belief systems and values important to others. You will also be more likely to realise when you need to set aside your own beliefs or ideas to carry out your work effectively.

Literacy skills

Literacy skills enable individuals to understand the written and oral information needed to carry out their work effectively. For example, community services workers are expected to be able to read policies and procedures to interpret what they are saying. They also need to be able to write reports, use verbal communication skills to understand the needs of clients, and exchange information with co-workers.

If you need to improve your literacy skills, there are a number of ways to do this. For example, you could attend relevant training, work in a buddy system with another worker, and practise your literacy skills as much as you can by reading and analysing workplace information.

Demonstrate commitment to upgrading skills and knowledge

It is important that you show a commitment to upgrading your skills and knowledge as a part of the performance review process and as you work to develop your future career direction. For many people, the job they begin their career in is unlikely to be the one in which they finish. Careers grow and change, and new opportunities arise. If you make sure your skills and knowledge remain up to date, you are in a better position to take advantage of changes when they occur.

If you are planning on a long and fulfilling career in the community services sector, it is important that you commit to upgrading your skills and knowledge whenever and wherever the opportunities present themselves. You owe it to yourself as well as to your future employers to ensure you are the best possible worker in the sector that you can be.

Here are some ways you can demonstrate your commitment to upgrading skills and knowledge.

Commit to upgrading skills

Initiative

Show initiative in finding out about training activities or undertaking professional reading or learning tasks. Ask questions of others and remember what you learn.

Enthusiasm

An enthusiastic approach to learning and skills development is a good indicator of someone who is committed to improving their skills and building their career.

Attitude

Look for chances to say 'I can' or 'I will try' rather than responding negatively to problems or issues at work. A positive attitude to learning is a useful attribute.

Positive association

Associate with others who have a positive attitude to learning. Look for people who you think are going places in your organisation and associate with them.

Opportunities

Opportunities don't just happen – you make them happen. Find out what opportunities exist to build your skills and show you are a person who wants to achieve and learn.

Example

Participate to increase skills and knowledge

Max is looking forward to meeting with his manager to reflect on his first year of work. He has loved every minute of his work and is excited to share some of his successes and talk about what challenges may come up next. He has already completed a review document to give examples of how he believes he has performed against the performance indicators of his role and against the values statement of the organisation.

When they meet he is pleased to discover that his manager has also given him a very similar evaluation for most areas of competency. Together they discuss what Max has achieved and talk about some professional development opportunities that may be useful. His manager suggests that he may like to consider doing some business writing training to help develop his ability to write reports. This is one area where they both agree that Max needs some more skills.

His manager compliments Max on his realistic approach to his review and the development of his new goals for the upcoming six months. She says that with his commitment to increasing his skills and knowledge she is sure he has a long and positive career ahead of him.



Practice task 13

1. What are three things you can do to show your commitment to improving your skills and knowledge?

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2. Identify four areas that may be evaluated during a performance review.

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3. What are three things that are important when participating in a performance review?

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4. How could you use your initiative to show you are committed to improving your work skills and knowledge?

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Click to complete Practice task 13

Summary

1. Community services work is an industry that is rapidly expanding and evolving. It is important that you take steps to keep abreast of developments in the industry and develop your skills and knowledge accordingly so you can apply new knowledge and skills to your work.
2. Community services workers benefit from seeking support and sharing feedback with team members and others outside their team and organisation. Creating professional networks ensures you have a wide range of expertise and resources to support you in your work.
3. Feedback from others is a useful way of determining your own need for improvements in performance in various aspects of your work.
4. Support networks within and external to your organisation can help you build your skills and maintain currency in your work practices.
5. You may need to seek specialist advice related to particular skills areas from people who hold specialist qualifications or roles.
6. It is important that you are familiar with guidelines in relation to professional development and seek opportunities for further learning and skill development that meet organisation requirements.
7. Review mechanisms such as appraisals and self-development plans are designed to evaluate staff performance and identify training needs. They also give workers an opportunity to consider their career goals and create personal development plans.
8. Self-development is an ongoing process that includes the writing of personal development plans or related documents with clear and realistic goals and time frames, and requires an ability to plan how you want to develop your personal abilities, skills and knowledge.
9. Community services workers must have an understanding of the legal and ethical requirements that underpin every job role. This helps ensure you carry out your work safely and in a manner that addresses the needs and rights of the people who use your services and helps you make appropriate decisions.
10. It is useful to think carefully about how you learn best and what sort of learning activities or approach suits your own needs and the needs of your organisation.

Learning checkpoint 3

Facilitate ongoing professional development

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in facilitating ongoing professional development.

Part A

1. You supervise a work team. How can you make sure your team members stay current with industry developments and apply them to improve work practices where necessary?

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2. What do you think are the benefits of establishing goals and personal development plans as opposed to just going with the flow?

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3. What are three ways you could you access information to help you remain up to date with requirements for duty-of-care responsibilities in your community services work?

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4. Where could you locate the code of ethics for community workers?

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5. You are considering introducing a Montessori model to your facility in a significant change to current practice. What are five things you should do prior to making this change?

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6. What does the term 'duty of care' mean and why is it important in community services work?

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Part B

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Petra has been working in an aged care home as a recreation team leader for several years now. She heads up a small group of dedicated staff who work tirelessly to support the people who live at their facility. She is aware that their recreation program is becoming quite dated and that other facilities are introducing changes and new activities that they have not considered at her facility. She is keen to help her workplace remain up to date and to introduce some new ideas.

She reads an article in a community services magazine about a new program idea called shared reading, where participants read short stories and poetry and then discuss what they have read or participate in guided activities. She decides this could be something that is useful and interesting for her facility. Although she is keen to take the initiative and learn more about shared reading, she is also a little nervous as it has been a long time since she studied and she has a reading difficulty that makes written communication challenging.

Over the years Petra has developed a learning that is highly verbal and interactive, and she much prefers to talk and discuss ideas than to write them down on paper or read on a screen.

1. What are three sources of information that Petra could access to help her find out more about shared reading and help her decide if it is a useful, innovative program?

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2. How could Petra show her manager that she is committed to building her skills and knowledge in relation to shared reading?

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3. What could Petra do to access learning in a way that will suit her particular needs and style?

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4. What could Petra do to identify opportunities for professional development in shared reading, and how could she share the information she gains with other staff?

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5. What are two advantages for Petra in writing a clear and specific goal about shared reading as part of her self-development?

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6. Should Petra be obliged to share information from training in shared reading with other staff? Why or why not?

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7. What is one legal requirement that Petra should consider before introducing shared reading at her facility?

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