

Likewise



**Our
Values**



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The Fundamentals

LEARNING, DOING, BELONGING

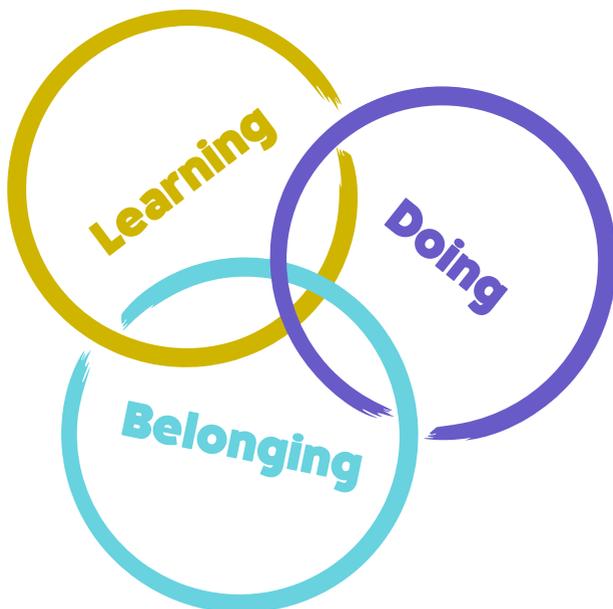
At Likewise, our social care is centred around a set of values and tools that help us reflect and continually develop person-centred practice. This includes three core values underpinning the rest: learning, doing, and belonging.

Learning summarises our entire approach to the work. We believe everyone – staff and clients alike – is engaged in a constant process of learning. This is not a case of knowledge being transferred only in one direction, as such an approach forms a relationship of inequality. Good social care rests on workers being willing and capable of learning from the complex reality of their clients, and on clients being able to learn from their own experience and from the support relationship. The learning frame of mind is an open one – for staff, it means we are always open to our clients rather than fitting them into our pre-conceived notions. It also means we can be open about mistakes – a learner is not tied to the expectation of expertise, and is more inclined to accept and build on their mistakes rather than hide or dismiss them.

Doing refers to the active role our clients play – not as passive recipients, but as doers themselves. We recognise our clients for what they can do rather than framing them by their problems. This doing is vital for change – we only learn and discover our capacity to feel and behave differently through the act of doing. We aim to be the scaffolding for our clients' 'doing', providing the space for them to explore the activities and experiences that might be stepping stones to new ways of being in the world.

Doing also refers to our approach to pragmatism – where we can do something we will. Many clients have told us how this is often not the case in the services they interact with due to rules, bureaucracy, or tightly–defined practice. We want to support people to take advantage of opportunity in all its diversity – if that means changing a lightbulb, attending a choir, or stopping by an unexpected art show, we do what we can to let it happen. Our aim is to enable a community of doers.

We do not expect this doing to always feel good – working through discomfort, difficulty, and the sometimes painful process of realising what doesn't work is a vital component of growth. This kind of change is most possible in the context of a community that values you for who you are, as you are, rather than a sense of what you could or should be. At Likewise, we aim to create a real sense of belonging: people feeling genuinely valued as they are so that they can better and more sustainably engage with learning, discovery, and opportunity. Such a sense of acceptance is fundamental to change.



Likewise Values

SERVICES AS INTERLOPERS

A community service, whether based on mental health, social isolation, or drug abuse, should always consider itself an interloper: a transient and in some ways unwelcome visitor for a struggling person. To want or need support can be deeply frustrating – it can be a symbol of something going wrong, of something failing or being broken.

It is very easy for services to forget this. They are set up with good intentions – to help, to support, to assist – and often do excellent work in improving people’s lives. The problem with forgetting their interloping nature is that they see themselves as a fundamental good rather than a contextual good. With this framing, people who don’t engage with services on the services’ terms can quickly become seen as ungrateful and uncooperative. As the service continues, it can easily build dependency and hold onto a person who might be better off doing something for themselves.

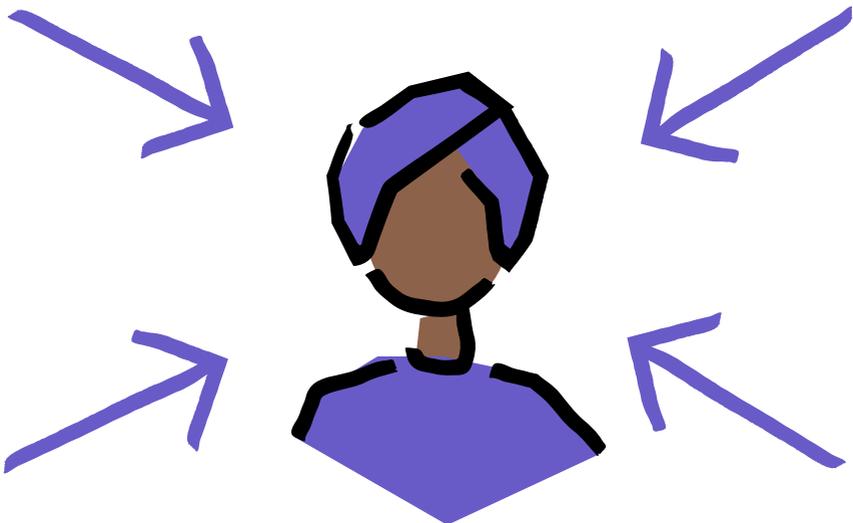
Forefronting the transient nature of the service – service as interloper – brings several benefits to Likewise staff:

- ✘ They recognise that their presence can be a symbol of things being wrong, and so can understand resistance and conflict without taking it personally.
- ✘ They enter a space from the perspective of what to do together rather than what to do for someone, building plans that recognise the long-term picture.

- ✳ They can support the people they work with to manage the inevitability of change.

A service that knows its interloping status avoids those accidental harms of other services – dependency, the jarring relationship between someone who sees themselves as a helper and another who sees them as yet another symbol of their brokenness, and the dismissal of seemingly unwilling participants.

An additional side effect of this is also the renegotiation of power in that relationship. Benevolence can be disempowering, setting up one person as the holder of solutions for the other. Shifting the dynamic to one that recognises transience actively transfers some of that power – the solution cannot be in the hands of the supporting service because the supporting service is not there forever. As such, solutions have to be developed together – the service is a catalyst for a person to develop their own solutions, rather than being itself the source of the solutions. As such, recognition of interloper status puts more power and choice in the hands of the client.



→ PERSON-CENTRED CARE ←

Many organisations will talk about person-centred care, but what does it actually mean in practice? On the surface, it means that the person asking for or receiving support is at the heart of decision-making about them, and that the care follows their wants and needs. At a deeper level, it means treating them as a person – respecting their perspectives, their experiences, and their dignity. They are not passive recipients but opinionated actors, and this is to be actively supported. However, treating someone as a person is also not passive – it means building real relationships with all the complexity, conflict, and blurriness this invites.

ACCEPTANCE

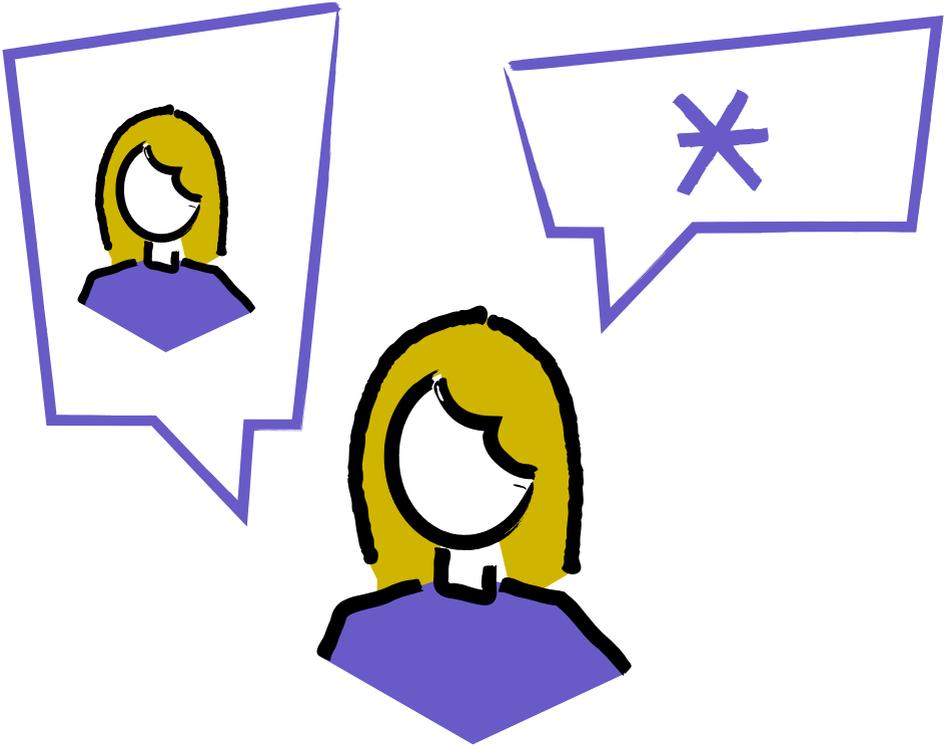
Acceptance requires understanding and valuing someone regardless of who they are and what they do. We sometimes talk about this as seeing people as ‘perfect’: that is, they do not need to change. Of course, people often join our service in the search for change – however, for us their value remains the same in success and in failure, in sameness and in difference. This can relieve the often intense pressure on staff and clients to make things different. It allows for adaptation to circumstance, for freedom and honesty in feeling, and for a more authentic examination of what is happening – clients do not have to play a role to satisfy their care worker. It allows for the fact that we all have bad days, meaning a difficult session or visit does not threaten the relationship. In reducing the potential for that sense of loss, the space this opens up is fundamentally safe. This safety is vital. It allows for deeper and more honest examination of what is going on. It allows for challenging conversations without feelings of judgement or loss of status. It allows people to reveal and explore who they are and what they want. It then enables clients to better take advantage of opportunity when it arrives. As such, acceptance can be a springboard for meaningful change.

CHANGE

At the heart of our mission is providing the opportunity for people to make the changes that are meaningful to them. But the notion of 'change' doesn't seem to fit comfortably with our emphasis on acceptance – how can we accept if we are working towards change? The answer to this lies in the way we conceptualise change emerging solely from the individual engaging in it. That is, we understand that we cannot force anyone to make changes they do not want to make – we can only provide structures that allow them to make the changes they want for themselves. Through accepting, honest relationships, we support people in exploring their feelings, accepting their realities, and considering alternative perspectives on the world. It is up to the people we work with how and what they do with this – we build a scaffold for change, not a catapult to it. At worst, this offers a space in which people are seen, heard and valued (often in stark contrast to other areas of their life). At best, it enables people to climb that scaffolding, realise the changes they want to make, and move forwards in acting on them.

AUTHENTICITY

This is how we describe the genuine nature of our relationships with each other and with clients. There is no expectation that someone should be anything other than who they are, staff and clients alike. For staff this means being honest and reflective about their actual feelings, and maintaining professionalism through neutrality, honesty and acceptance rather than pretending to have answers or expertise. This contributes to a more trusting and open relationship with clients, and so one more likely to be fruitful for them.

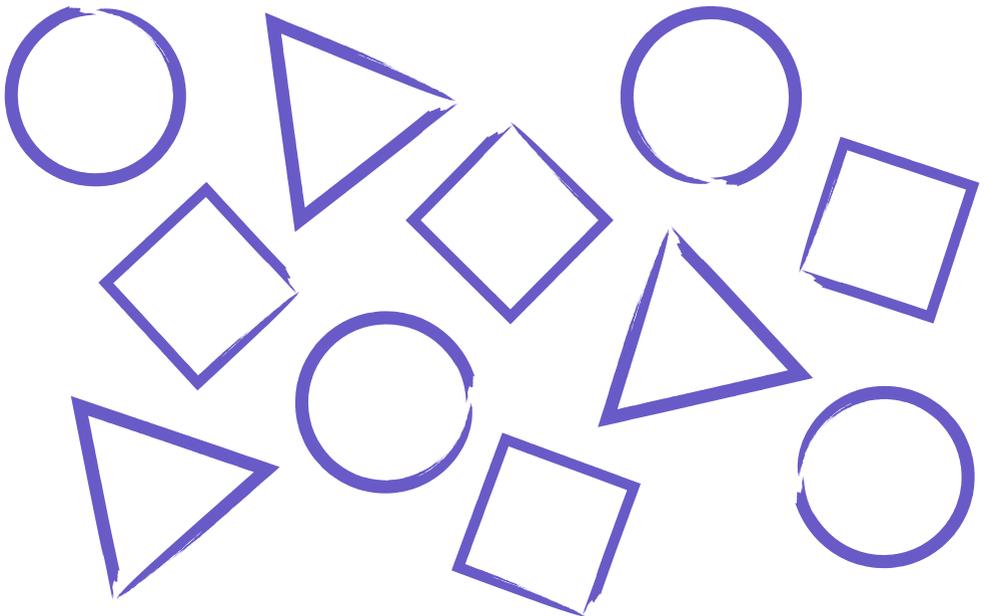


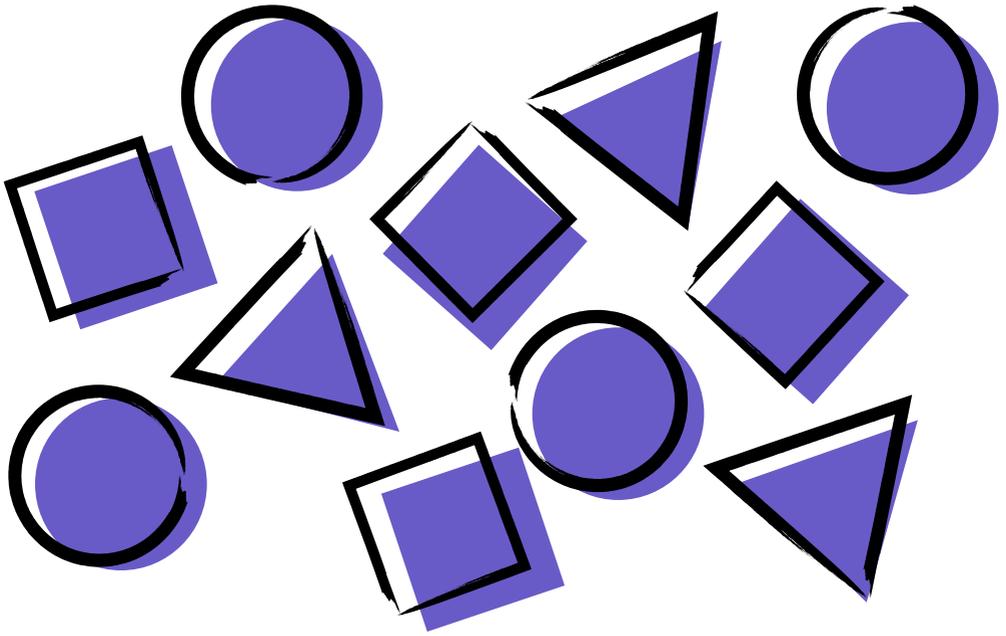
* EXPERTS IN THEIR OWN LIVES

Understanding clients as the experts in their own lives is vital if care workers are to hope to successfully support. An individual may not know the solutions to their problems, or even the details of what their problems are, but they do know what their experience is – and that is a vital piece of information for understanding both problems and solutions. A care worker, parachuted in from above, cannot hope to grasp the myriad and changing contexts, experiences, and beliefs of an individual – they need to learn them from that person in order to begin to understand what a meaningful outcome might be. Forgetting the expertise of an individual is both undermining of their integrity and an obstacle to good decision-making, clouding the reality of their world.

WORKING WITH DIFFERENCE

From our inception in the borough of Camden, our client base has always been culturally, economically and socially diverse. Operating around areas of mental illness, homelessness and addiction also means our clients are behaviourally diverse – we work with many people who have been denied access to services because of their behaviours. Indeed, when focussed on as part of a ‘problem,’ such difference becomes something to be avoided or to be ashamed of. In contrast, we do our utmost to recognise all of a person in all of their difference. This allows for genuinely person-to-person working, and tries to ensure that when working with us people feel that they, along with all of their strengths, flaws, and fragilities, are truly accepted. Challenges and issues that emerge can be dealt with relationally, safely and without shame.





SAMENESS NOT DIFFERENCE

Working with difference does not mean neglecting similarities. This is particularly important given that many people we work with, particularly those who have been in mental health services for some time, have spent a long time being 'patients,' being sick, and being in a different category of 'person' to the rest of the community. It is easy to unconsciously see such clients – burdened with diagnoses, labels, and stigma – as somehow qualitatively different from the rest of us, as somehow 'other' than our 'normal'. By focussing on sameness not difference, we hope to avoid some of that inclination. Someone may have an illness but this does not, of course, mean you do not have much in common. We all feel anxieties; we all laugh; we all have people we like and people we do not; we all want to belong. By focussing on that sameness, we hope to avoid the 'othering' that creates problem-focussed identity in the first place.

PROFESSIONALISM

Professionalism at Likewise means putting one's professional duties – person-centred care – at the forefront of one's actions. It is not about demonstrating power, but using it honestly; it is not about having expertise, but being open about what you do not know; it is not about hiding emotions, but about recognising their role in decision-making and in the relationship with a client; it is not about mastering the values, but is about continually reflecting on them in the work. Alongside the more traditional fulfilment of particular professional duties, 'professionalism' at Likewise requires maintaining acceptance, learning, and person-centred working.

MAINSTREAMING

Many community programs linked to mental health and social care involve getting groups of 'similar' people together – that is, people defined and grouped by their 'problem' – to do mainstream activities. However, entering mainstream society through a backdoor just for 'people like them' can be an actively othering experience (as one client reported to us after such an activity at a gym, 'I may as well have had "mental health" tattooed on my forehead'). For Likewise, mainstreaming is about genuine acceptance of difference within a community, rather than creating a community of difference apart from the mainstream.

Likewise Tools

RELATIONSHIP FIRST, OUTCOME FOLLOWS

At Likewise, the aim is to build a relationship first in the knowledge that outcomes will naturally follow. Through a relationship, we begin where people are in order to help them on their way to where they would like to go. We believe this has several advantages.

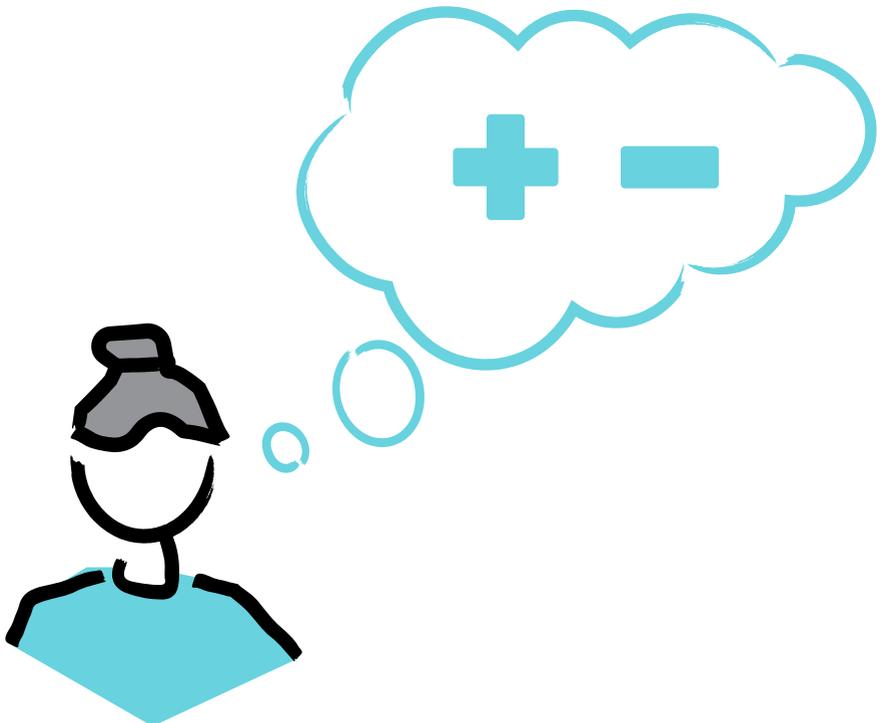
Firstly, focussing on the relationship means we are flexible to the outcomes meaningful to each individual. One person may want support returning to work; another may feel a significant achievement in getting out of the house once a week; another may need support in trying to think differently about accessing support for drug abuse after a series of relapses. By focussing on relationships rather than fixating on outcomes we are able to uncover and give all these goals time, space, and equal value.

Secondly, it minimises the sense of failure and damage to self-worth if goals are not achieved. It might be disappointing to miss these goals, but within the context of a broader relationship they weigh less heavy: the value of the person is within the relationship and not based purely on achievement. The relationship is the scaffolding to allow for these ebbs and flows, and clients maintain their value and sense of belonging with us regardless. Finally, such relationships lead to more sustainable change and better outcomes for clients – having the individualised support of a relationship makes outcomes more likely.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

As part of our work, being aware of emotion is fundamental to good practice. Social care can involve many situations in which the natural reaction is one of anxiety, fear, frustration, or panic. Being aware of our own emotional drivers opens up more space to make different decisions – it gives us options beyond our initial instincts. Emotional intelligence is also central to be responsive to client emotion and meeting them with calmness and compassion.

It may also involve opening up these feelings with clients to help them develop the emotional awareness to make better decisions for themselves – in this sense, we find that it is contagious. Emotional intelligence is actively cultivated through our learning program and our reflective structures.



WHAT'S IT FOR?

Complex scenarios in which the future is genuinely unknown make decision-making in social care particularly challenging. As humans, our instincts are often very feelings-led – given unknowns, we make decisions based on what allays our anxieties or feels ‘right.’ However, a feeling for what is ‘right’ emerges from a person with their own history, their own beliefs about the way the world works, and a range of conscious and unconscious agendas. Our instincts and decisions are thus a culmination of competing forces that are rarely visible.

At Likewise, we accept the inevitability of individuals making decisions based on who they are. However, to help cut through some of the melee of emotions and personal drivers, we ask all our workers and volunteers to continually consider the same question: ‘What’s it for?’ This question helps us place the core of our mission at the heart of everything we do, and is surprisingly effective for distinguishing between what matters, what is unnecessary, and where a situation has been clouded by feelings and agendas. From the politics of the multiple actors and agendas around a particular problem, to feeling that you are doing a good job just because you are having pleasant time (and thus forgetting what is actually valuable about your role), asking ‘What’s it for?’ reminds us of both our ultimate and immediate purpose, and keeps us oriented to our values and approach.





NEUTRALITY

It is very hard not to be loaded with judgement. We are brought up and evolutionarily prone to assess whether a situation is safe or dangerous, rewarding or costly, and right or wrong. In the context of supportive and honest relationships, such judgement can be problematic and simplistic. For example, anger might be a way someone stays safe in dangerous environments, or the only means someone has found to be listened to. To be told that such behaviours are 'bad' or 'wrong' is to place someone in a space where they feel misunderstood and judged, and thus creates a space where defensiveness, resistance, anxiety and low

self-worth is likely. Similarly, kindness and humour may be a way to deflect from engaging with more difficult emotions, or come from wanting to control others. To tell someone such behaviour is fundamentally 'good' or 'right' is to place expectation on such behaviour, to implicitly suggest that deviations from such behaviours are problematic, and can be immobilising or counter-productive.

Neutrality, then, offers a means of addressing an issue without that judgement. To engage people neutrally and non-judgementally allows for more objective reflection without it being tied to self-worth. With status not at stake, it offers a space for people to look at and act on things that might otherwise be difficult to face. 'Neutrality' does not mean being cold or distant – it simply means not imposing one's own beliefs about right or wrong onto a situation in order to give the other person the necessary space and freedom to explore it.

Much of this is about tone. Maintaining a friendly lightness is one means of neutrality, allowing for challenge without a sense of attack, a means of gliding onto rather than crashing into an issue. Open questions provide another means, enabling the other person to do the work of reflection without assumption. One of the most important and most challenging elements of neutrality is the self-reflection necessary to develop a more accepting, neutral lens and to ensure that where judgement inevitably raises its head it is recognised and not brought into the work. This is supported by reflection, and can be aided by the cultural lightness Likewise tries to foster in its organisational interactions, but each worker and volunteer has to work out their own feelings and biases in order to move towards neutrality. Of course, it is something to be strived for rather than something ever completed.

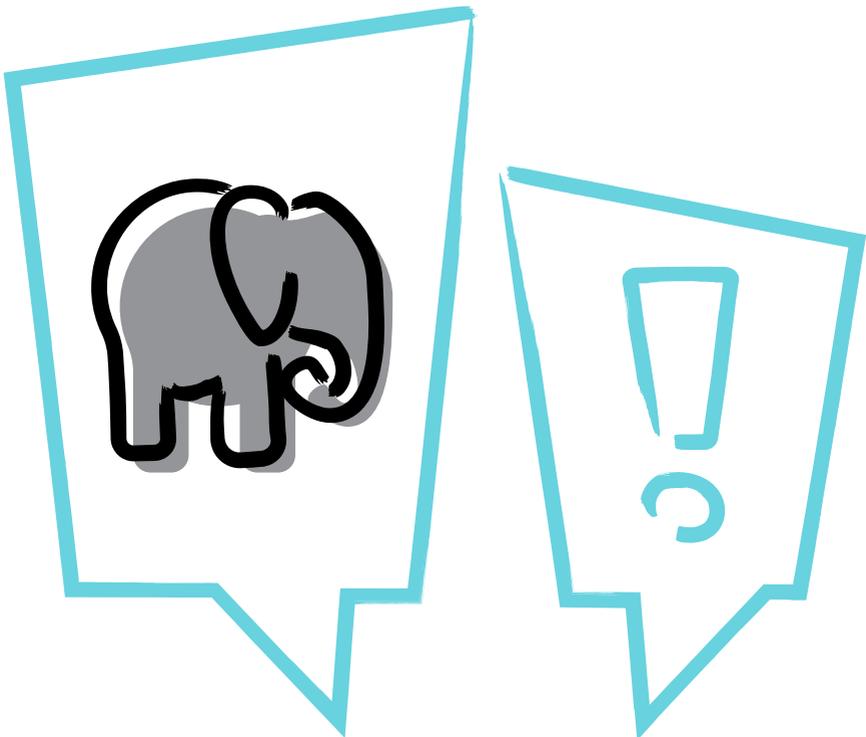
PRESENCE

Many staff working in social care, particularly when working with 'behavioural' illnesses, spend a lot of time trying to fix. They need to deliver on outcomes and support changes to rubber-stamp their quality and fulfil their desire to do good. As such, people using services spend a lot of time with people who are both implicitly and explicitly nudging them to be different. Presence, on the other hand, is a concept that undermines this set-up by allowing space and neutrality. By valuing presence, staff are given the opportunity to simply be with someone – not to force change or to continue the treadmill of attempting outcomes, but to accept and be with someone as they are. At times, this might mean a comfort with silence. At others, it might mean active listening as a person runs through their concerns. It might also mean committing to a task or activity simply because it needs doing rather than for any 'therapeutic' benefit. All of these are examples of acceptance-in-action, providing a space for people to simply be, without pressure or expectation. This is a space that has value in itself, a space where somebody is alongside another without judgement. It allows for staff to breathe, to consider and be aware of what is really going on for a person. As such, presence is also the acceptance-in-action that scaffolds those processes of meaningful change.

NAMING THE ELEPHANT

To encourage transparency and to avoid avoidance, we utilise a process we call 'naming the elephant' – calling out things as they are. This might be a colleague who seems to have particular feelings that are interfering with clear decision-making, or clients demonstrating behaviours that might be worrying or cause them problems – we want to open these things up rather than politely ignore them. We have a specific means of doing this

that enables us to challenge people in a way that is supportive rather than confrontational. This has three elements: tone, honesty, and normalisation. The tone is accepting, non-judgemental, and, where possible, light (lightness and humour can work to reassure people that they are not being judged). Honesty refers to being open and transparent about both what an issue might be and any decision –making processes: for example, ‘I notice you are quite angry today, and that might make this phone call difficult – I’m wondering what we can do about that?’ This involves the person in that process, creating mutuality in finding a resolution. Finally, normalisation is that process of reassuring people that whatever they are going through is okay. These three components of ‘naming the elephant’ create a safer space to explore challenges together.



NOT RESCUING

A fact of social care is that both staff and clients are bound to feel some powerful and sometimes painful emotions. Accepting this means not rescuing a person from a feeling; it means accepting the feeling and making that feeling okay. It can be difficult to see someone going through difficult emotions – it is natural to want to comfort, to reassure, and to put an end to whatever it is they are experiencing. To do so has strong implicit messaging, suggesting that whatever it is they are feeling should be avoided and stopped. If people think they need to hide or repress whatever it is they are feeling, they are not working with the reality of their experience. To not rescue someone does not mean ignoring their emotions, it means talking openly about those feelings, being alongside them when they are feeling it, and normalising the feelings so they can exist without shame or judgement.



LOWERING THE TIDE

This is a concept that makes clear the limitations of the 'I' we present to each other – an 'I' often formed around the task-at-hand. If the task is to fix a problem, we often present a picture of surety and power; if the task is to receive help, we often present our neediness and incapacity. In both cases, the larger potential of people is neglected. Considering what lies beneath the surface allows for a more curious approach – asking, 'what else is here?' rather than getting drawn into a problem-narrative – and therefore helps uncover the strengths and capacities of a person. It also discourages staff from hiding behind their professionalism and instead recognise the common humanity between them and their client.

Reflection and Supervision Tools

THREE REASONS

A simple way of disrupting the automatic decision-making pattern is to spend time thinking of three reasons for making a decision. The first reason will often be feelings-led – if you cannot think of two other reasons for a decision, it suggests more consideration needs to be given. Of course, it is more than possible to come up with bad reasons, but this process brings these reasons to light. It also brings in that space to really examine why we are making a decision, and this reflection can provide significant insight into what feelings and beliefs are informing someone's response.



WHAT DO YOU REALLY MEAN?

We spend a lot of time talking around things. For reasons of politeness, for wanting to appear a particular way, for wanting to hide motivations or feelings (both consciously and unconsciously), we are experts at avoidance in pretty much every aspect of our lives. This comes across in lack of clarity, in hesitance, or in tone – active listening often reveals a confusion or logical misstep that suggests something is amiss.

A useful tool for a supervisor when such an occasion occurs is to try to get to the heart of the issue – the question ‘what do you really mean?’ can cut through the noise and shine light on the feelings and motivations that drive an issue.

EVERYONE IS A CLIENT

Staff and volunteers develop real emotional intelligence working with Likewise, and are able to form excellent relationships with the people we support. What is forgotten, though, is that exactly the same skills needed in those relationships – honesty, authenticity, big-picture thinking, and acceptance – are the skills that support best decision-making in all aspects of life.

Colleagues need and want acceptance; care co-ordinators have complex and busy lives that need to be understood fully in order for productive work; funders see and value authenticity; line managers have their own emotional histories that will be played out in meetings. Seeing everyone through the same lens in which we see the client work enables for the same results in all aspects of working life: presence, neutrality, and decision-making that is more likely to lead to the results we want.

UNLEARNING

In many organisations, and for many individuals, the first six months of being in a new job is where you establish yourself, demonstrate your skill-set, and impose your personality and value onto an organisation. We recognise that this can be a very problematic pattern in our work as many of the traditional 'successful' skill-sets are the opposite of what works in social care.

As such, we give new members of staff a long period of time to grapple with our values and approach. Much of this involves unlearning. This includes shifting the idea that we have to feign expertise in our professional capacities; deconstructing the way we are inclined to label people and feelings; moving from an inclination to chase the outcome to having trust in the relationship; and transitioning from hiding those difficult feelings – such as boredom in aspects of the work or challenging emotions around particular colleagues – to being open and reflective about them. This process is vital for the fluidity and health of the organisation and the person-centred nature of the work.

DISCOMFORT

Real learning is inherently uncomfortable – it involves stretching what is already known, grappling with something new, and integrating this into future thinking and behaviour. As such, when we feel uncomfortable around something, we have to question why – is it because something is wrong, or is it because it is in conflict with our usual habits of behaviour and thinking? Is it because there is a real problem, or is it because we are still learning how to be different? Discomfort is a sign of that development, and so is something to be explored and opened up in reflective spaces to unveil the processes behind it and encourage the learning it involves.