

Think Around Corners: Plan Your Patient Conversations in Advance



You feel your heart beginning to race as she finishes asking her question. You don't know the answer and you're not sure how to respond. Your heart beats even faster and you can feel your face blushing. Shoot. What should I say? She stares at you, waiting for a response, and it feels like hours are passing by as she continues to stare. I just wish I knew that question was coming...

We've all been in the situation where we're not sure what to say. One of the reasons why

experience is so valuable is that you become familiar with more and more situations and how to respond to them. Even without experience, you can still equip yourself to avoid those uncomfortable moments with a little advanced planning.

When you are meeting with participants, how much work do you put into intentionally planning out your conversation? At the start of a meeting, you should know which topics you want to talk about, which topics you want to avoid, as well as which topics your participant may want to discuss. This [Agenda Setting worksheet](#) is a great tool for planning out your visit (fill in the circles with the subjects you will talk about). Within each of the topics, do a quick mental walkthrough of what kinds of tricky questions or comments your participant might have, and how you could respond to them.

After knowing which topics you will cover, plan out the order you want to proceed in. In general, it's best to start with the topics your participant is least likely to become resistant on, as these will help you build up rapport and trust before jumping onto more sensitive subjects. Proceeding in a very deliberate manner will help you to avoid some of the tense moments that can lead to a client becoming resistant or taking on a negative tone.

One area where this advanced planning can come into play is when you initially offer First Breath or My Baby & Me to a prospective participant. Going into this offer, it can be incredibly empowering to know exactly what you are going to say when the participant says "No." Even if your response is simply "I understand, you feel like you've got this under control. This is always on the table if you change your mind." You will go into offering the programs with more confidence if you know what you will say.

Other than when you offer the program, it is also valuable to plan ahead for atypical situations that may come up, and how you respond to these. What do you do when your participant says she has thought about hurting herself or her baby? Go through your standard questions, and be sure you know what to do no matter how she responds to any of the questions, especially if the question is going to involve a referral. Know what services are available and how to connect her to them.

Taking these extra steps in advance can take time at first, but it will help save you time when it matters, when you're meeting with your participants. You don't want to slip on a challenging question or comment when meeting with clients, as this damages your rapport. Taking these steps will also help

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make you more confident, as you know you're less likely to be caught off guard. This confidence will carry into other areas of your visit, making you a more effective provider.