

CSAT TA Package

Improving Follow-Up Rates: Converting Resistant Clients

Your treatment program collects client data at intake, discharge, and several months after discharge. This data is an invaluable source of information about your program and your clients. It can help you to evaluate the effectiveness of your program and help to inform key decisions about programming and services.

One of the challenges that programs face is obtaining client data after clients leave the program. Of particular concern is obtaining follow-up data for clients who resist or refuse to participate in follow-up interviews.

About this Guide. This Technical Assistance (TA) Package was developed by the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT) to help treatment program staff enhance their ability to conduct follow-up interviews with clients who are resistant or refuse to participate in these important events.

What is in this Guide? The three sections of this TA Package represent three practical issues related to clients who resist or refuse participating in follow-up interviews:

- **The Importance of Follow-up Data.** This is a brief overview of the value of data obtained through follow-up interviews, ways in which resistant clients are different, and global strategies for difficult to reach clients.
- **Suggestions When Encountering Resistance.** This section provides practical strategies counselors can use when encountering resistance to follow-up interviews.
- **Suggestions for Addressing Refusals.** This section provides practical suggestions counselors can use when encountering active and passive refusals to follow-up interviews.

This guide includes instructional information, practical suggestions and strategies, and sample dialogue to illustrate the suggestions.

It was designed to be used by addiction treatment staff members who have a role in conducting follow-up interviews, as well as tracking and locating clients. Depending on the program, this may include follow-up interviewers, outreach specialists, tracking and locating specialists, and other counselors.

For the purposes of this guide, we will refer to the program staff member who conducts follow-up interviews as an interviewer.



CSAT TA Package

Improving Follow-Up Rates: Converting Resistant Clients

Part One: The Importance of Follow-up Data

Evaluation is essential to treatment programs. Evaluation data provides valuable information regarding the program, services, utilization, effectiveness, and clients. Some programs, such as CSAT grantees, collect data to comply with the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA). Other grantees collect data for other agencies or private funding organizations.

The difficulty of maintaining contact with clients after they leave treatment programs is a major concern for program evaluations. The value of an evaluation is enhanced when the proportion of clients who can be interviewed at intake, discharge, and follow-up is high. It can be challenging to interview some addiction treatment clients after they leave the program. Many are unemployed, move frequently, maintain poor contact with family, are periodically incarcerated, and may be homeless. Some have relapsed or may be experiencing other problems in their lives.

For these and other reasons, some clients are reluctant or resistant to participate in follow-up interviews. For such clients, there is a need for persistent and creative use of tracking and locating techniques. Such techniques may need to be used repeatedly and over extended periods in order to obtain follow-up interviews. But equally important is the need to use tools that help overcome clients' resistance to follow-up interviews. This guide describes such tools.

Resistant Clients are Different

Research and experience suggest that there are differences between clients who are easy to follow up and clients who are resistant or difficult to follow up. Clients who are resistant or difficult to follow up are less likely to have completed treatment than their peers. Clients who are among the most difficult to follow up are significantly more likely than their peers to be unemployed following treatment, using crack cocaine, and involved with the criminal justice system.

Global Strategies for Difficult to Reach Clients

Research and experience has shown that certain strategies can promote higher follow-up rates for clients who are difficult to follow up with. These include:

- Using aggressive follow-up and tracking strategies
- Using multiple follow-up and tracking strategies
- Using backup strategies when a primary strategy is not successful
- Using street outreach strategies
- Using strategies within the criminal justice system
- Using tracking approaches for longer periods of time and more intensely

Important Considerations about Follow-up Interviews

Follow-up interviews are not isolated events. Rather, they are part of a process that begins during intake, continues during treatment, and extends following discharge. For successful follow-ups to occur, critical elements must be embedded throughout these processes. These include making wise use of the locator form and tracking logs and continually updating them.

Equally important is developing genuine and respectful relationships between staff and clients. Staff should strive to create an environment and relationships that are accepting, respectful, nonjudgmental, and empathic. This environment and these relationships can help to enhance the motivation of clients to participate in follow-up interviews.

CSAT TA Package

Improving Follow-Up Rates: Converting Resistant Clients

Part Two: Suggestions When Encountering Resistance

Some clients will resist follow-up interviews. Some are weary of contact with the program, especially if this is the second or third contact. Others have changed their lives and don't want to be associated with things from their past. Certain clients may not want their new spouses to learn about their previous lives. Others may have had bad experiences with their treatment program or another evaluation. Still others may be distrustful of contact from authorities.

What is Resistance?

Psychological resistance is a phenomenon often encountered in clinical practice in which clients either directly or indirectly oppose changing their behavior or refuse to discuss, remember, or think about presumably clinically relevant experiences. Clients express resistance to a wide variety of clinical interventions and interactions, such as follow-up interviews.

Working with Resistance

Previously, addiction professionals tended to fight clients' resistance. Professionals now use tools to enhance clients' motivation to make healthy choices. The acronym FRAMES summarizes strategies that include feedback, responsibility, advice, menus, empathy, and self-efficacy. They were identified by research as being common to effective brief motivational enhancement interventions. They are easily used to encourage resistant clients to participate in interviews.

Provide Feedback. Clients who are resistant to interviews may be gently persuaded if interviewers provide feedback that is meaningful to them. Feedback can be persuasive if it is personal and individualized, constructive, not confrontational, and respectful. Confrontational feedback makes people feel defensive and unreceptive. Interviews are most effective when they include sensitivity, caring, and expertise. Present information to help clients make an informed decision to participate in the interview, not to accuse or shame.

Example:

From what you said, it seems like you are not looking forward to being interviewed again. I appreciate that. How would you feel if I told you that we don't have to go back to the treatment program to do the interview? And, if you participate in the interview, it gives me a chance to see how you are doing and offer services that you might need, and lets you tell me how you feel about the program.

Promote Responsibility. Motivational enhancement is based on the idea that people can choose to make their own decisions. It involves encouraging clients to take responsibility for decisions. When people feel free to make their own choices, they are less likely to resist or dismiss an expert's advice. When people feel responsible for changing, they also feel empowered and invested in the change process. Interviewers can enhance clients' motivation to participate in follow-up interviews by reminding them that this choice is theirs to make.

Example:

You have the choice whether to participate in the follow-up interview or not. It is your decision. I cannot force you to do the interview. But I want to tell you that your participation is a huge help to the program because it provides valuable information. In addition, your participation can be an important part of your recovery. It really matters.

CSAT TA Package

Improving Follow-Up Rates: Converting Resistant Clients

Provide Advice. Conversations with clients about follow-up interviews are opportunities to provide advice. Doing so can increase the possibility of their participating in the interviews. Research demonstrates that the simple act of providing advice promotes positive behavior change and good decisions.

Brief interactions in which counselors provide gentle suggestions can significantly improve behaviors. However, the manner in which this advice is provided is critical. Suggestions are most effective when sensitivity, respect, and caring generously supplement expert advice.

Advice can be suggestive, such as proposing a specific action. Advice can be educational, such as providing information or an explanation. Advice should be provided in a nondirective, gentle fashion, and it should be simple and matched to the individual's level of understanding, educational level, communication skills, and readiness for change. Interviewers can promote participation in follow-up interviews by providing simple advice that is helpful to clients.

Example:

You mentioned that you got cut in a fight the other night. It would be good to have someone look at your cut. I can bring you to the program and our nurse can clean your cut and put a fresh bandage on it. If you feel up to it, I can also conduct your follow-up interview and give you a free bus pass and a ticket for a free lunch. What do you think?

Provide a Menu of Options. People are more likely to take suggestions when given a few options. Interviewers can easily provide options, such as suggesting a few locations that are convenient for the client. Interviewers can elicit from clients what worked in the past and what they perceive as effective strategies. This encourages clients' buy-in and promotes personal responsibility for their choices.

Example:

If you would like to participate in a follow-up interview, I can suggest a few options. We could conduct the interview at your apartment, the lobby of the hotel across the street, or at our satellite program two blocks from here. Last time, we did it at your kitchen table in your apartment. Was that okay for you?

Express Empathy. To enhance the motivation of clients to take action requires empathy. Empathy involves such counselor characteristics as warmth, respect, caring, and active interest. Empathy is expressed as reflective listening or listening attentively to clients' statements and reflecting them back in your own words. It need only take a few minutes at a time. The underlying message to the client is: I understand where you are in this situation, I will be supportive and nonjudgmental, and I will help you.

Example:

I understand what you are saying. You would be comfortable doing a follow-up interview, but not here in your neighborhood. You would prefer to go somewhere else. I can understand that. Would you be more comfortable if we went to our satellite program two blocks away?

CSAT TA Package

Improving Follow-Up Rates: Converting Resistant Clients

Affirm Self-Efficacy. Clients who are resistant to interviews may feel unable to participate. They must believe that they have the capacity to participate in the follow-up interview and have the skills and confidence needed to do so. As an interviewer, you can foster hope and optimism by reinforcing your clients' beliefs in their own capacities and capabilities. Affirm small steps that clients take and provide positive reinforcement of steps in the right direction. Remind patients that change is possible, long-term success begins with a single step forward, change involves a series of small steps, and the follow-up interview can be part of their larger path for recovery.

Example:

Like most of our clients, you have taken important steps for your recovery. Participating in a follow-up interview can be an important part of your recovery. You have done this before. It can help you to take stock about how far you have come and where you want to go next.

Avoid Arguments. Clients who are resistant to interviews may feel unsure about taking action and may experience various emotional states. They may be scared, anxious, depressed, hostile, or defiant. During such times, the temptation to argue with clients can be great.

Trying to convince clients who are experiencing such emotional states to participate in interviews is likely to provoke resistance. Trying to prove a point is likely to meet with resistance. Arguments lead to power struggles. Arguments do not enhance motivation for change. Arguments are counterproductive. Defending breeds defensiveness. Interviewers who encounter clients in emotionally charged states are more likely to promote participation if they avoid arguments.

Example:

I understand that you are unsure about the follow-up interview. And I recognize that you are going through a lot right now. I don't want to add to your stress, so how about if I come back tomorrow and we can talk then? I can bring you that pamphlet about our stress reduction program we talked about earlier.

Roll with Resistance. When people resist, they may appear defiant. In motivational enhancement, resistance can be a signal that a client has a different viewpoint than you. Resistance indicates the need for a different approach, not stronger arguments for the same approach. Doing so requires paying attention to the client and viewing the situation from the client's perspective. To roll with resistance, express empathy, remain nonjudgmental, and be respectful. The following examples illustrate how to avoid resistance and divert, deflect, or defuse the energy the client is using to resist, and channel the energy toward the desired behavior.

Use Simple Reflection. The simplest approach to resistance is nonresistance. To do so, repeat the client's resistance to the interview in a neutral and non-emotional form. Doing so acknowledges what the client has said but can sometimes elicit an opposing response.

Example:

Client: I don't want to participate in the interview.
Counselor: You feel that the interview would not work for you right now.
Client: Yeah, I'm just not up for it right now. I've been up all night. I'm tired.
Counselor: Can I drop by tomorrow after you have rested?

CSAT TA Package

Improving Follow-Up Rates: Converting Resistant Clients

Use Amplified Reflection. You can reflect the client's resistance to follow-up interviews in a slightly exaggerated form, but without sarcasm. When an interviewer exaggerates a client's statement, the client may then disagree with the amplified reflection. This can help to move the client toward action rather than resistance.

Example:

Client: I can't do that follow-up interview.

Counselor: You are unable to do the follow-up interview?

Client: That's not what I mean. I can do it, but this is a bad time.

Counselor: When would be a good time?

Client: Okay, can we meet tomorrow? I have to do something today.

Shift the Focus. You can defuse resistance to follow-up interviews by helping the client shift focus away from obstacles and barriers. This offers the interviewer an opportunity to affirm the client's personal choices and decisions.

Example:

Client: If I do this interview with you, I won't be able to pick up my kids.

Counselor: I'm glad you mentioned that. I don't want to interfere with you picking up your kids. You can always stop the interview, but my experience tells me that we can finish in time for you to pick up your kids.

Agree with a Twist. This is a subtle strategy in which the interviewer agrees with the client but with a slight twist or change of direction. Doing so can push the discussion forward.

Example:

Client: Why are you guys so hung up on these interviews? At the last program, they didn't make me do this. It kind of seems unfair.

Counselor: You are right, it can seem unfair for our program to ask you for an interview when the other program did not. But if you think about it, these follow-up interviews really provide an opportunity to help you take stock of where you are and help us to see if there are any services we can provide you.

Reframing. Interviewers can use reframing to invite clients to examine their perceptions in a new light. This strategy helps to provide new meaning to what has been stated. In particular, reframing offers a new and positive interpretation of something described by the client as negative.

Example:

Client: You people are sure pushy about wanting to interview me!

Counselor: It's true that we want to interview you. Like we told you during treatment, we will work hard to stay in touch with you, even after treatment, because we care about you.

CSAT TA Package

Improving Follow-Up Rates: Converting Resistant Clients

Part Three: Suggestions for Addressing Refusals

There are many different reasons why clients might resist participating in follow-up interviews. Experts have noted that resistance to follow-up falls into two main categories: active refusals and passive refusals. Each type of resistance suggests a different approach.

Active Refusal

Some clients will directly state, "I do not want to participate." This is an active refusal. It is important to recognize that their resistance may reflect a range of issues, from worrying about confidentiality to simply wanting more information. By asking a few questions and providing some information, interviewers can often prompt clients who make active refusals to change their minds.

Provide Information. Clients who say that they do not want to participate in a follow-up interview may want more information before they proceed. Ask clients if they want more information about the follow-up interview, the purpose for the interview, or how the information is used.

Example:

I hear you say that you don't want to participate. Sometimes clients have important questions about the interview that help them to decide. Do you have any questions about the interview that might help you feel more comfortable?

Address Concerns. Ask clients if they have any specific concerns. For example, ask clients if they have concerns about confidentiality. If they do, explain your program's confidentiality procedures and the steps that your program takes to protect client information.

Example:

I understand that you don't want to participate. Do you have any concerns about the information that we collect during the interview or how we use the information? I can explain how our program keeps your information confidential if you like.

Provide Incentives. Provide resistant clients incentives, especially those that help to remove barriers to participation. Depending on your program's rules and protocols, incentives can include cash, bus passes, or cash cards.

Example:

I know that you said you don't want to participate. And you mentioned that it was a drag to spend your money to get to the program. I can provide you with a metro pass to get there and back, and our program provides a cash card for people who participate in follow-up interviews. Would that help?

Try Again. If clients refuse, wait a few days or weeks and try again. Consider trying a different technique, such as writing a letter restating the importance of participating and then reach out in person.

CSAT TA Package

Improving Follow-Up Rates: Converting Resistant Clients

Passive Refusal

Some people may not directly refuse to participate, but engage in behaviors that never lead to participation. This can be called passive refusal. Passive refusals can be divided into three subcategories: repeated no-shows, evaders, and “non-trusters.”

Repeated No-Shows. These clients schedule interviews but do not appear. They will not cancel or reschedule, but when contacted again, they set up a new appointment and no-show again and again. They may be busy or disorganized. You may spend time and effort to reschedule, but never get the interview.

Remove Barriers. Make it as easy as possible for clients to complete interviews. Suggest meeting clients at home or somewhere convenient for them. Rather than rescheduling no-shows, ask if you can meet them immediately wherever they are. Alternatively, leave the client alone for a while and try again a few weeks or months later.

Example:

You said that you couldn't participate because you have to take care of your daughter. Just so you know, our satellite program two blocks away has a child care center. They can look after your daughter while you do the interview. I would also be happy to do the interview at your apartment if that is easier for you.

Evaders. These clients never schedule an interview. They can be located, but they do not respond to calls or letters. If you call, they are never at home, or if they are at home, they cannot schedule the interview at that time but will ask you to call back later—at which time they are not available (either you repeatedly get an answering machine or a gatekeeper).

Rest or Replace. Too much pestering can turn a passive refusal into an active refusal and a client who is lost forever. If you think this is about to occur, let the file “rest” for a while. Alternatively, have another tracker make contact, which may convert the passive refusal into a completed interview.

Non-Trusters. Non-trusters are usually clients who are being contacted for the first time or who have not been contacted for several years. Thus, they do not know or have forgotten who you are. They are often in trouble with the law; they may be absconding from probation or parole, and will never let you know that your letters have reached them, fearing that it is a police trap.

Increase Trust. It is best to contact these people in person, going to their homes or finding them in jail or prison. Sometimes, convincing a relative or friend to trust you may make the difference.

Once they see that your interviewer is clearly not a parole/probation officer or child protective services worker, they are usually willing to complete the interview.



CSAT TA Package

Improving Follow-Up Rates: Converting Resistant Clients

Suggestions When Encountering Resistance

Some clients are resistant or refuse to participate in follow-up interviews. However, programs can use tools that help to overcome clients' resistance to participate in follow-up interviews. Rather than fighting resistance, interviewers can use simple tools to enhance clients' motivation to change.

Provide Feedback. Clients who are resistant to follow-up interviews may be gently persuaded if interviewers provide feedback that is meaningful to them.

Promote Responsibility. Interviewers can enhance the motivation of clients to participate in follow-up interviews by encouraging clients to take responsibility for changing.

Provide Advice. Conversations with clients about follow-up interviews are opportunities to provide advice, which can promote positive behavior change.

Provide a Menu of Options. Interviewers can increase the likelihood that clients participate in a follow-up interview when they provide a few options.

Express Empathy. Interviewers can promote follow-up participation by expressing warmth, respect, commitment, and active listening.

Affirm Self-Efficacy. Interviewers can promote follow-up participation by fostering hope and optimism by reinforcing clients' beliefs in their own capacities and capabilities.

Avoid Arguments. Arguments lead to power struggles. Arguments do not enhance motivation to participate in interviews. Arguments are counterproductive.

Roll with Resistance. Rolling with resistance involves expressing empathy, remaining nonjudgmental, and remaining respectful.



CSAT TA Package

Improving Follow-Up Rates: Converting Resistant Clients

Suggestions for Addressing Refusals

There are many reasons why clients might be reluctant or refuse to participate in follow-up interviews. Likewise, there are several simple strategies that interviewers can use when encountering clients who refuse follow-up interviews.

Use Motivational Enhancement. Use motivational enhancement techniques to increase the likelihood of turning a refusal to a successful follow-up interview. Use the FRAMES approach to provide feedback, promote responsibility, provide advice, provide a menu of options, express empathy, and affirm self-efficacy.

Provide Information. Ask clients if they want more information about the follow-up interview, the purpose for the interview, or how the information is used.

Address Concerns. Ask clients if they have any specific concerns and provide them with information that addresses their concerns.

Provide Incentives. Provide resistant clients with incentives, especially those that help to remove barriers to participation.

Try Again. If clients refuse, wait a few days or weeks and try again. Consider trying a different technique.

Remove Barriers. Make it as easy as possible for clients to complete interviews and make suggestions to remove barriers.

Rest or Replace. If there is a risk of losing an active refusal forever, let the file “rest” for a while or have another person contact the client.

Increase Trust. Sometimes convincing a relative or friend to trust you may make the difference, and helps clients to see that the interviewer is not a parole officer or from child protective services.

Leave the Door Open. Even when they refuse, leave the door open for clients to change their minds. Clients' circumstances can change, making them more amenable to the follow-up interview. Clients sometimes change their mind and agree to participate in follow-up interviews after getting incarcerated, being in a stronger recovery, or if on reflection, they decide they could use the incentive.

