

Exercise Three: Weaving resources (done during module 5 or 6)

Our ability to navigate to the resources we need to survive and thrive is always a reflection of the quality of the social and physical environment that surrounds us. Want to get people outdoors to exercise? Provide sidewalks, safe crosswalks, a well-lit dog park, or strategically placed park benches that let people rest periodically.

Of course, our resources are also social. All of us have some connections to someone, even if that is simply the memory of someone from our past who we no longer see. Resources are many and varied. From pets to coaches, from our homes to the police, our interactions with environments around us can be supportive or fraught with challenges. Helping people navigate effectively requires understanding the many resources available to them which can be used to help them overcome both everyday hassles and far fewer regular threats. Keeping track of these resources, however, is challenging. This activity is meant to make the task simpler.

Using the instructions below, develop a weave (ecomap) of resilience-promoting resources for your client. This intervention is especially helpful for clients who feel stuck with problems they can't seem to change.

To do a weave, a structured conversation is held which asks a series of questions regarding the resources that are realistically available and accessible to your client. The weave is a visual representation of these conversations. To begin, the client (or you as the helper) draws the client (or a symbol that represents the client) at the centre of a piece of paper (flipchart paper taped to a wall works very well as an animation tool). One by one, a client's many resources are named, with a word or symbol drawn on the flipchart paper to represent each resource. Lines are drawn between the client and the resources with the colour and style of each line used to represent the client's experience of the resource that is identified. Different lines represent positive or negative experiences (e.g., solid straight lines can mean a helpful, secure relationship with a resource; wavy and dashed lines can represent conflicted or weak relationships). Expect some resources to have multiple lines from the client to the resource to reflect complex relationships over time. As the weave grows, questions can be repeated and adapted to expand the number of systems accounted for during the exercise.

The Questions

A pattern of questions is used to identify resources that promote and sustain resilience. These can include the many aspects of resilience identified in the course. Factors that contribute to disorder are less relevant to the weave (it is assumed most interventions with clients already review evidence of psychopathology and disordered functioning), though barriers to accessing resources are always explored as part of the weave. Where barriers are identified, they are mapped onto the weave but the emphasis remains on understanding how the client, when exposed to atypically high levels of stress, adapts in contexts where access to resources appears strained.

Part 1: Resource Audit

Starting with people and institutions that are most significant to the client, ask:

- “From your perspective, what has been one of the most significant relationships in your life?”

- “In your experience, has this relationship been a source of support? Or has it been harmful or stressful? Or perhaps it has been both? Can you explain what you mean by your answer?”
- “From your perspective, what is another significant relationship in your life? Again, has it been supportive and helpful, or a source of conflict or stress?”
- “Thinking beyond people, are there other sources of support or stress in your life? Maybe a place you spend time, like school, or work?”
- “Do you have activities in your life that bring you support, or cause you stress? Like a sport that you play, or maybe a habit like substance abuse? Do these activities add positively to your life, or create more stress? Do they help you cope? When are they most useful?”
- “How are these people, places and activities related to each other? Do these interactions make other resources more available or accessible, or do these relationships and resources place barriers in your life or prevent you from coping with life’s challenges?”

This part of the exercise can take less than an hour, or it can go on for several meetings, with each resource being discussed at length. The point is to identify the client’s strategic use of resources that improves their ability to cope under stress, even if these coping strategies appear to be maladaptive. The more resources and relationships between resources that are identified (the more lines in the weave that connect the client to each resource and connect resources to one another) the more opportunities there will be to build resilience. When considering which resources to ask about, consider as many aspects of resilience (both internal and external) as come to mind.

Part 2: Interpretation

Once the weave is rich in detail, it is useful to shift the conversation from the audit of resources to interpretation of what the lines mean all together. Ask your client:

- “Looking at the weave, is there anything that catches your attention the most? Anything that surprises you?”
- “Are there more/fewer positive supports than you would have expected?”

From this review of resources, it is critical to next look for patterns in the resources and which are being used most effectively. Just because a coping strategy appears to be maladaptive (e.g., an abused child socially withdraws from her caregivers, as represented by a weak, dashed line) each pattern should be discussed from the perspective of the client. Does the client find this relationship with the resource useful? Does it improve the client’s sense of safety? Does the client experience their coping strategy as functional?

Once these questions are answered, it is possible to look at where else the client has found positive and supportive resources and whether these connections can be strengthened.

The interpretation should also challenge negative relationships with resources by asking the client whether these resources are always helpful and if there are alternative resources that might be just as useful if they were made more available and accessible. In this way a helper can assist a client explore possibilities to change the color or style of lines connecting them to each resource, perhaps “breaking” lines that sustain a client’s problems or removing the client from negative relationships altogether. Likewise, the weave can become a source of inspiration for identifying potentially positive resources that could be exploited further.



Remember, be sure to draw the lines in the weave to each resource as the person who is the focus of the weave experiences them. Even if you disagree, the trick to this activity is to understand the world from the point of view of the person at the center of the weave. It takes some degree of empathy to do this, but the results can be very helpful advancing your work with someone in crisis.

