

## Powerful Questions and Goal Setting

Why put so much focus on powerful questions? Because it is a core coaching technique that will help you to improve your goal setting and scaffolding skills. Even if you are an expert at using powerful questions in a Motivational Interviewing context, it can take time to figure out how to apply this technique when a client is ready to set some goals and take some action.

Below, we provide an example dialog of how powerful questions can be used in a conversation around goal setting. In this dialog, an employment counselor is helping a participant sign up for child care. While this dialog does not exactly reflect the Ramsey County’s unique child care process, it accurately explores how coaching can be used in goal setting conversations with TANF participants.

FACILITATOR KEY	
Powerful Questions	Reflective Statements
Affirmations	Scaffolding
START DIALOG	
ES	Looking at the Bridge of Strength we just filled out together, what do you feel is most important to tackle right away?
Participant	I need child care right now. I need to get back to school to finish the Nursing Station Training.
ES	Okay great! Let’s write that down as your short term goal on the GAP tool. Next, we are going to break down that goal into small steps so you have a clear plan of how you are going to accomplish it. Sound good?
Participant	Yes. The sooner I can get day care, the better.
ES	Sounds like you are really motivated to get this done. Okay. What is the first step you need to take in order to accomplish this?
Participant	I don’t know. I’ve never done this. My mom used to watch them, but she passed away and since then I’ve had no help.
ES	I’m so sorry! The stress of taking care of kids in addition to the loss of your mom... oof.
Participant	It has been so hard.
ES	I’m so sorry to hear about that. I’m looking forward to you accomplishing this so that things ease up for you. It sounds like it has been a lot to handle. Let’s make a good plan here so you can get at least one thing off your plate. So you said this is your first time applying for child care. What do you know about the process?
Participant	So I haven’t done any of this before and I’m not sure how to get approval. My sister said she first had to find a center that she wanted to send her kids to. She said that was a huge pain because no one has openings. She said she could take my kids to the same place as her kids, their cousins, for me. But like I said, I don’t have approval and I don’t know how to get it.
ES	Okay. So you already have a place and way to get them there.
Participant	Well I don’t have approval or authorization so I can’t send them.
ES	I see. And if you can get authorization, you would want them to go to day care with their cousins?
Participant	Yes, if I can get figure out how to get approval.

ES	Okay. Well, you should know that you’ve already taken a huge first step by identifying where you want your kids to go. You are already one step closer to accomplishing this goal. Your sister mentioned the approval process. What did she tell you about that?
Participant	She told me I had to go to this location (shows you a card) but that you would tell me what I need to bring to the meeting and help me set that up.
ES	Sure, I can help you with that. Let’s make sure we are documenting this conversation on your goal setting worksheet. You are already making big progress. So your goal is child care. Your strengths are that you’ve identified a location, you have a sister who can provide you with knowledge and can help you get your kids to the center.
Participant	Yeah... I guess so. I didn’t think of that as a strength.
ES	It is a big strength! This is a great start. You just cut a few days if not a few weeks of this process!
Participant	Well how soon do you think we can get them in?
ES	Good question. Let’s look at the time bound section of the worksheet. What is the latest you can see them getting into childcare?
Participant	If they don’t start in two weeks, I will go crazy.
ES	Let’s put two weeks down. You seem really motivated and I think you can get it done.
Participant	You have no idea. I would go get them in today if I could.
ES	So you have that card. What would you need to do in order to complete the application for child care authorization today?
Participant	Can you call them to get the application?
ES	What is the worst that could happen if you gave it a shot first?
Participant	...I will do it wrong and have to wait longer. Can you please do it? I just need this off my plate.
ES	That is very understandable. You’ve had a hard past few weeks and you just want this done. I’ll tell you what. How about you call and will put it on speaker. I will listen too. If you miss any piece of it, I will fill in the gaps. I’ll be here to support you.
Participant	I guess so. I’m just nervous.
ES	I understand that. Let’s write this down on the GAP tool as your first step. “Call child care worker.”
Participant	Okay.
ES	And when will you have this done?
Participant	Can we do it now?
ES	Of course! When we are done we will celebrate and you’ll have already finished your first step to accomplishing this goal. After we call them we will have more information and can finish filling out next steps towards your goal of childcare. How does that sound?
Participant	Okay. Give me the phone. Will you read me the number?
<b>END</b>	