

Aging & Disability Resource Network

Options Counseling

Desk Guide

The purpose of this guide is meant as a reference tool for staff who deliver Options Counseling services. It includes a *Screening Tool* to help screen for the appropriate service, based on client need and an overview of Options Counseling protocols, key phrases, statements, and questions – and well as communication tips and techniques. It is a supplement to the *ADRN Options Counseling Training*. This tool provides a detailed overview of the ADRN, Options Counseling case studies to help staff screen for Options Counseling, and an in-depth look at the Options Counseling process and requirements.

Sources:

Aging & Disability Resource Centers of Wisconsin. *Options Counseling Initial Discovery Training Guide*. Accessed from <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p0/p00496.pdf>

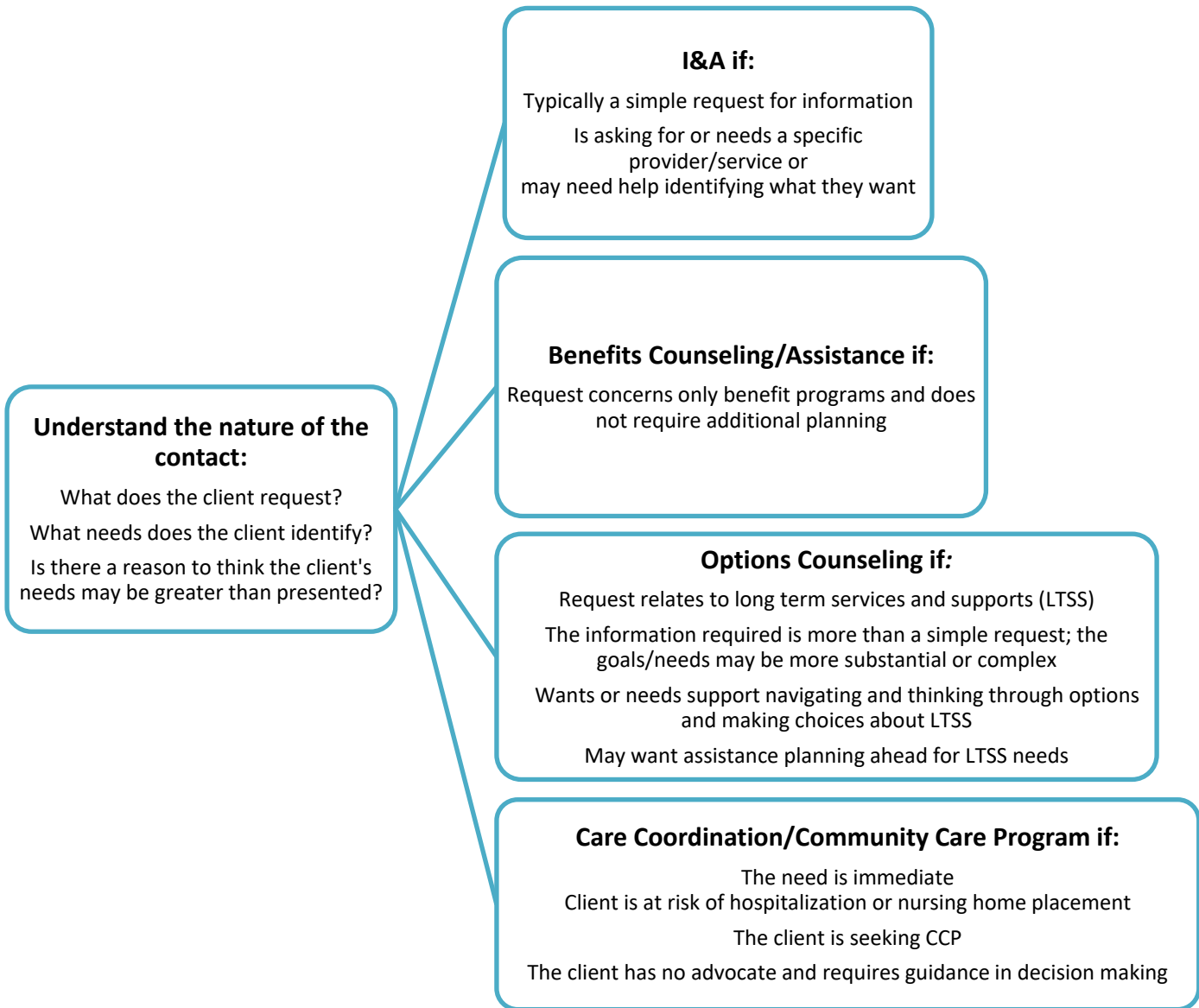
Aging and Disability Resource Center Technical Assistance Exchange. www.adrc-tae.acl.gov

Options Counseling Screening Tool

Service Definition: Options Counseling is a person-centered, interactive, decision-support process whereby individuals receive assistance in their deliberations to make informed choices about long-term services and supports in the context of their own preferences, strengths, and values.

Eligible Population:

- ✓ Age: 60 and older or 18-59 with disability.
- ✓ Who request or require current long-term services and supports (LTSS) and/or are planning for their future LTSS without regards to income or assets.
- ✓ The process may include others that the client chooses or a legal-decision maker, but the client is the focus of the service.



Screening/Offering Options Counseling

Skills or Knowledge – Staff who provide Options Counseling suggested the following reminders or considerations to make this step effective.

- A professional greeting, warm tone of voice, kind, and courteous behavior with appropriate language.

- Rapport building; be unhurried and calm.
- Ask open-ended questions (what, how, tell me...) – for example: “What kind of assistance are you looking for?” or ask them to describe a typical day.
- Use active listening, reflect, and paraphrase.
- Allow the client to tell their personal story.
- Remember, the client should do most of the talking, not the staff person.
- Listen for underlying issues or concerns.
- Keep in mind that people may not know what they want or need. Articulate, clarify and discuss assumptions.
- Gauge whether there is any question about or hesitancy related to accepting assistance; if so, make a point to clarify your role early in the conversation.
- Listen for cues that signal the person may need assistance thinking through options, such as: *maybe I ... I don't know ... Someone told me I need ... I can't ...*
- Ask directly if they would like additional support thinking through options and making choices.
- Frame Options Counseling as a tool to assist them with exploring and making decisions about options available to them, and breaking down next steps to help them access the options they choose.
- If the initial contact is via phone, chat, or email, ask if the person would like to continue the discussion face-to-face, or with family present.

Working with Informal Caregivers

- If a family member or other informal caregiver is contacting you on behalf of the person in need of services (the client), determine the client’s level of involvement and ability to participate:
 - Inform caregiver that the client needs to be involved unless the client defers or there is a very good reason to exclude (e.g. inability to participate, harm).
 - Does the client know about this inquiry? Do they want assistance?
 - Is there legal guardianship, not power of attorney?
 - Can you contact the client directly?
 - If the client can be included in the discussion, offer to schedule an Options Counseling appointment.
 - If the client cannot be involved and it is determined Options Counseling will be provided, remember the person in need of services is the client, and be sure to capture the client’s needs, goals, and preferences.
 - Regardless, a referral to the Caregiver Resource Center and/or Caregiver Counseling Center should be offered to address their needs and support their role as a caregiver to the client.

Sample Statements or Questions

Intake/I&A Specialist is also trained in Options Counseling

- Are you looking for help for yourself or someone else?

- *(If someone else)* Are you the person they are relying on the most? How is that going for you? What would be most helpful for you?
- *(If someone else)* Do you have permission to make decisions on your loved one's behalf?
- Thank you for calling; if it's okay I'd like to share a little bit about how the Options Counseling service works. We have lots of information about services and programs, but I'll need your help to learn from you what you are looking for and what makes sense for you. We'll sort through these options together; however, any decisions about next steps are yours. How does this sound?
- We've taken care of some of your requests for information, but it sounds like you have more questions. We've set up a service called Options Counseling where I can spend more time talking with you about your situation and offer potential options that might help. Should we launch into that right now, or would you like to do that at another time?
- We've had such a good discussion on lots of related subjects about options available to you. We call this service Options Counseling, and I hope you've found it helpful. Before I let you go, let's review what we've covered and...*[tailor for follow up and offer to write up options, resources and next steps discussed]*.

Staff person who is not trained in Options Counseling (may be an intake worker or worker in another program, such as SHIP)

- You've raised some important questions. To explore the best answers to these questions, based on your individual situation, I would like to recommend a new and free service called Options Counseling. Options Counseling can help you identify options that we may not think of today. Would you like me to put you in touch with the Options Counselor?
- It seems as if there are several subjects related to your question about homemaker agencies and the costs of these services. We have an Options Counselor who has the time and expertise to talk with you about possible options related to your question. It is a free service. Would you like me to put you in touch with the Options Counselor?
- We've discussed your Medicare plan and other insurance related questions but it sounds like you would like to discuss additional issues related to how you can get some in-home help for your husband. We have a free service called Options Counseling. Our trained and experienced Options Counselors can set aside time to discuss with you a host of topics. Would you like information about how to contact them?

The individual contacting on behalf of the person in need of services and supports is a family member or other informal caregiver

- Does *[name of client]* know about this inquiry? Do they want assistance?

- It is important to tailor the Options Counseling service to the person needing services and supports and involve them in the discussion of options. I need to be sure we make every attempt to tailor discussions around their preferences, needs and goals for the future.
- Are they available to speak with us? Can I contact the individual directly?

A professional/service provider calls on behalf of the person in need of services and supports

- The Options Counseling service must include the person needing services and supports as we tailor this service around their needs and preferences. Please let them know about the service and how to reach me. Meanwhile, I can refer you to some information and resources...
 - **Note: You may count this contact as IIB I&A*

Personal Interview - Assessment of Need/Situation

During the personal interview, key information is learned about why the person contacted your agency, the consumer's goals, values, preferences, resources and supports, and more.

Skills or Knowledge – Staff who provide Options Counseling suggested the following reminders or considerations to make this step effective.

- Explain early in the process that information is kept confidential, but there are exceptions they indicate the presence or risk of serious harm to themselves or another person.
- Assess the needs, skills, abilities of the individual thoroughly.
- Learn about the individual seeking assistance and others in their life, e.g. family or friends. Do they have a different view of the situation?
- If talking to the person over the phone, identify early if there is a willingness to meet in person (e.g. at your office or at their home) and continue the conversation there – i.e. the decision-support = and potential action plan components of the Options Counseling process.
- Pick up on the person’s values and preferences to use later during decision support, e.g.:
 - Living in my home is important to me.
 - The idea of paying for services makes me uncomfortable.
 - My family is key.
- Affirm the individual, reflect back on their strengths.
- Validate that the situation and choices can seem overwhelming.
- Sometimes, individuals are not willing to provide personal information; they are reluctant to trust that information given will not be judged and/or shared. We cannot force them to share information:
 - Remind the individual that information shared remains confidential (with exceptions) and will help you explore options tailored to their specific situation, needs and preferences.
- Identify internal strengths, e.g. “What keeps you going?”
- Identify what has worked in the past.
- If appropriate, use assessment tools, memory screening, depression screening, fall risk and psycho-social assessments.
- Gather information about finances, income, and assets as appropriate.
- See the “Art of Active Listening” fact sheet for more tips on how to be a more effective listener – which will help you get the information you need and build rapport with the client.

Sample Questions or Statements

- If it’s okay with you, I’d like to ask you some questions that will help me better understand your situation.
- What brought you here today?
- Have you contacted our agency before?
- What are your key questions or concerns?

- What is your priority for today?
- What information about yourself would be helpful for me to know? (in order to best work with you)
- Do you have any health concerns that you think I should know about?
- Please describe your day to me. [OR] What does a typical day look like for you?
- Tell me how this (the issue or concern) affects your day.
- What services have you tried or are currently receiving? What sorts of services have worked best for you in the past?
- Are friends and family helping now or available to help?
- What have you done in the past about this?
- What are the things that are most important in your life?
- What is working well in your life?
- What isn't working so well?
- Who are the important people in your life?
- What activities and/or hobbies do you enjoy most?
- What would make things better for you?
- What would you like to see happen, now and in the future? What is not available that needs to be available? What would you like to be able to do?
- Where do you see yourself 1 year from now? Where would you like to be?
 - What steps would help you get there?
- We have a lot of resources that may be helpful for you.
- Some of the programs and services have requirements about a person's income and assets.
- If a home/office visit might be helpful, consider stating:*
 - This is a lot to talk about; a lot of things are easier to talk about face-to-face.
 - If it's okay with you, we could talk about this more in your home or my office.
 - Feel free to bring other important individuals to the meeting.

Explore Resources and Decision Support

Based on information learned during the personal interview, you'll then **explore programs and services** that may fit the individual's situation. Research options by searching through resources such as Benefits CheckUp and your agency's own resource catalogues/databases. Don't forget to explore both private and public resources and informal supports (family, friends, neighbors) that may be available. Printed material such as fact sheets, brochures, and other materials are gathered at this time.

Decision support takes place when evaluation of the pros and cons of each service is discussed; and the values and preferences are applied to the choices. Many of the sample questions/statements below are taken from *Motivational Interviewing*. Please see the **Motivational Interviewing fact sheets** for more information.

Skills or Knowledge – Staff who provide Options Counseling suggested the following reminders or considerations to make this step effective.

- The goal is to provide the individual with *informed* choices
 - Informed: not just “told” – informed expects that people understand the differences and understand the implications and impact of the different choice.
 - Choices require that they be desirable – if an option is undesirable then it’s not a choice.
- The process doesn’t always provide multiple options as sometimes there is only one option to fill a need, but client may need counseling to be informed on the service or program.
- Use information in conversation that ties in with resources.
- Do the benefits fit the individual’s needs, values, and preferences?
- Use clear, jargon-free language to describe services, as well as reflections that contain information about the client’s individual views or concerns about each service discussed.
- Refer to other colleagues as appropriate (e.g. Caregiver Resource Center).
- Assure the person that they “drive the train.” (i.e. they control the planning process)
- Respect the identity of all involved.
- Remember, the choices are theirs.
- Eliciting opportunities for reflection will help gain an understanding of what is important in the person’s life.
- Remember to “dose” information and not overwhelm with unnecessary information; do not gather information that is not necessary.
- Use motivational interviewing techniques and strategies.

Sample Questions or Statements

- If it’s okay with you, I’d like to tell you about a couple of options that might be helpful. How does this sound to you?
- Sometimes information about services is confusing. If I say something that isn’t clear, then please let me know.
- We’ve talked about a lot of choices, where would you like to start to narrow this down a bit?
- From 1-10 what services would you want most?
- Out of all we’ve talked about, what is most important to you?
- Let’s compare the different options regarding the same type of service.
- Let’s talk about what this might cost you in the short term and in the long term.

- Which choice makes the most sense to you or which do you prefer? Why would you prefer that?
- We've talked about ____, ____, and _____. Where would you like to start?
- What are good things about this option?
- What are the negative things about this option?
- What would life be like if you chose this option?
- What do you make of this?
- Is there anything else?
- Reflect on values, e.g.: "I know it's important to you to stay in your own home."
- (Sample motivational interviewing technique) "It's hard when, on one hand, you've saved a long time, and on the other hand, paying for help at home is something you never envisioned. What do you make of this?"
- What is the biggest thing that is holding you back?
- If there something else that we haven't talk about yet?
- What additional information would you need to make a choice?

Action Plan

Summarizing the conversation can bring the interview to a close with the identification of an action plan – i.e. next steps to be taken to access the services and supports the consumer has identified. What will happen when and by who are usually key components of the plan. The action plan does not have to be formal and should match the person's comfort level. Note that some of the questions/statements below may help encourage planning for follow-up.

Skills or Knowledge – Staff who provide Options Counseling suggested the following reminders or considerations to make this step effective.

- Remember, all clients should be offered this step, but they have the right to refuse.

- Offering to break down and write out next steps can be very helpful. You can use forms to write next steps, then provide a copy for the person and keep one for yourself. You may use the IDOA Options Counseling Action Plan worksheet or one of the alternative action plan templates shared by AgeGuide. Feel free to modify any tool you think will work best for the client you are assisting.
- Explain each step clearly, helping to navigate the system and fill out paperwork.
- Consider the following:
 - Did you promise to help in any way, e.g. make calls and/or connections?
 - Are the action steps clear?
 - Is it clear who is going to do what?
- Use of motivational interviewing skills and strategies can be very helpful at this point if resistance surfaces around next steps. Assess readiness and remember to “roll with resistance.”
- Remain neutral and supportive.
- Remind the individual that this is a collaborative and shared process.
- Plant ideas for future consideration and discussion.
- Consider that some people think taking or accepting services is an “all or nothing” proposition. Talk about starting small – they can always call again later for additional assistance.

Sample Questions or Statements

- It seems that we’ve come to a place where you’ve made some decisions. Have I got that right?
- As we discussed earlier, if you are interested, we can make a list of some things you can do to move forward and access the options you’ve chosen.
- Where would you like to start?
- What are your priorities to handle first?
- Tell me what you think your next step will be.
- Who can help with these steps?
- How long do you think it will take for this to happen?

- How confident are you that this will happen? (Consider motivational interviewing tools like confidence or importance rulers)
- Based on what we've talked about, do you have any concerns about what might get in the way of this happening?
- What would need to happen for you to know that it's time to take this step?
- Do you need any other assistance in achieving your goals?
- How are you feeling about our conversation/visit?
- Out of everything we've talked about, what was the most important information for you? What was the most valuable?
- I'd like to do a little more research on this. Is it okay if I call you in a couple of days?
- (If you helped the consumer fill out an application) Sometimes this application process may take a while. Is it okay if I get in touch with you in a week or two to learn how it's going?
- Can I call you back to see whether these options worked? That way, if something doesn't work, we can work together to figure out some alternatives.
- If you are not available, can I leave a message with someone at your home to have you call me?
- Let's agree on our next time to meet for follow up (ideally within 60 days).
 - Write it on the action plan/take home plan
- I really enjoyed talking with you and look forward to talking with you again on _____ at _____.

Follow Up

Follow up provides an opportunity to check back and learn how the individual is doing, what happened or didn't happen, if anything has changed, and if they need additional assistance. Follow up should be discussed with the individual during the action plan phase.

Skills or Knowledge – Staff who provide Options Counseling suggested the following reminders or considerations to make this step effective.

- Consider re-stating your role as a reminder if appropriate.

- Re-establish rapport.
- Use your professional judgment to assess any urgency, or health and safety concerns.
- Complex situations often require follow-up, so eliciting information about the person's priorities is helpful.
- Remember to ask for permission before sharing thoughts and ideas about next steps.
- Research additional options if needed.
- Re-engage in the exploration of resources/decision support process as appropriate.
- Options counseling follows the philosophy of self-determination: participants have the right to not follow through on goals and action steps. Do not push back or try to persuade them.
 - One strategy is to seek to understand the reason, listen reflectively and express empathy.
 - Motivational interviewing states that resistance often stems from fear of change.
- If the participant agreed to a follow up contact but does not respond to your first (and then second) contact, you could send a letter or email letting them know you tried contacting them but have not heard back. Remind them that you are checking in to see how they are doing and if they need additional assistance; provide your contact information.
 - If after three good faith attempts to contact the client you have not heard back from them, you may close the case, but make yourself available if they follow up at a later date.

Sample Questions or Statements

- Hi, this is ____ from _____. Did I catch you at a good time? I just wanted to check-in after our conversation from *[enter time frame]*.
- How are things going?
- Was the information I sent you helpful? What did you think about it?
- Thinking back to our conversations, tell me any thoughts you've had since we talked.
- You were going to share the information we discussed with your [family, friend, spouse, etc.]. How did that go?