



Practice Tool

The five anchor principles

The five anchor principles prompt practitioners to make sense of what they know at five key points during an assessment (Brown, Moore and Turney, 2014).

They are a helpful tool for supporting analysis and critical thinking about any kind of assessment (whether formal or informal).

They can be used in supervision to review work at any point in the assessment process. They are also useful for structuring analytical writing in assessments and plans.

Anchor principle one

What is the assessment for?

Anchor principle two

What is the story?

Anchor principle three

What does the story mean?

Anchor principle four

What needs to happen?

Anchor principle five

How will we know we are making progress?

Anchor principle one: What is the assessment for?

- > This is an important question to discuss in supervision at the outset.
- > Being clear about the purpose of the assessment helps practitioners to start thinking about key issues from the start.
- > Asking ‘What is the assessment for?’ is quite different from asking ‘Why are we doing the assessment?’ which can prompt a process-driven response.

Questions practice supervisors can ask:

- > What do you think the purpose of this assessment is?
- > What is your immediate response to the assessment task?
- > What sense have you made of the information already available to you?
- > What is the best way to explain the purpose of the assessment to the person(s) being assessed?

Anchor principle two: What is the story?

- > This idea of a story helps practitioners to understand that their job is to connect relevant circumstances, facts, and events to create a coherent narrative.
- > Stories have characters, sub-plots, twists and turns, multiple perspectives, and multiple endings.
- > There may also be more than one story depending on the perspectives of people involved.
- > Practitioners need space in supervision to reflect on the information they have gathered and think about the story that is developing.

Questions practice supervisors can ask:

- > What are the views and ideas of each person involved in the assessment?
- > What are the different stories held by different professionals about what is happening?
- > What do you think the story is?
- > What other factors might influence the story (for example: class, culture, ethnicity, immigration status, economic status)?

Anchor principle three: What does the story mean?

Once the practitioner has gathered enough information to present a story, there needs to be a focus on what the story means. Supervision discussions now need to focus on:

- > **Reflecting:** thinking about what we know so far. Where are the gaps in the story? How can we find further information?
- > **Hypothesising:** developing explanations about what the story is. It is not important whether hypotheses are right or wrong. Their role is to help you challenge fixed ideas and consider alternative explanations (Guthrie, 2020).

Which explanations does the information that has been gathered support?
- > **Testing:** to understand whether explanations are correct and if any new information needs to be gathered.

Questions practice supervisors can ask:

- > What information is disputed and why?
- > What have you not been able to find out?
- > What different explanations can we generate about what is happening?
- > Which explanation do you think is most accurate? Why?

Anchor principle four: What needs to happen?

- > Once you have reached an understanding about what the story means, the focus shifts to thinking about what needs to happen next.
- > Plans should link with the story (assessment of the situation) and the views of people who draw on care and support.

Questions practice supervisors can ask:

- > What would success look like? What are we wanting to achieve?
- > What is the most pressing thing that we need to do next?
- > What does the person(s) drawing on care and support think the next steps should be?
- > What do other professionals think needs to happen?

Anchor principle five: How will we know we are making progress?

Once the practitioner has gathered enough information to present a story, there needs to be a focus on what the story means. Supervision discussions now need to focus on:

- > When plans and intended outcomes are clear, it is easier for everyone involved to understand them, and to review progress.
- > If these are not making a difference, it is helpful for practitioners to reflect on why this is the case and what else is needed.

Questions practice supervisors can ask:

- > How will we know we are making progress?
- > What steps will we see along the way?
- > Have plans been achieved? If not, what got in the way of this?
- > Has our explanation of the story been confirmed or disproved?

References

Brown, L., Moore, S., and Turney, D. (2014). *Analysis and Critical Thinking in Assessment*. (Second edition). Research in Practice.

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