

UIC Solutions Suite Webinar Series

Transcript for how-to webinar on Express Yourself: Assessing Self-Determination in Your Life

Recorded by Judith Cook

Slide 1 (announcer):

Thank you for visiting the University of Illinois at Chicago's Health & Recovery Solutions Suite. The following recording comes to you from the UIC Center on Integrated Health Care and Self-Directed Recovery. Visit our online Solutions Suite to obtain free tools that promote health, self-direction, and employment for the behavioral health field.

Slide 2:

Hello. My name is Judith Cook. I direct the University of Illinois at Chicago's Center on Integrated Health Care and Self-Directed Recovery. Our Center offers an online Solutions Suite, containing free tools for the behavioral health field. These tools promote wellness, self-direction, and employment for people in mental health recovery. You can visit our Solutions Suite on the web site where you found this webinar, at www.center4healthandsdc.org. Today, I'll be discussing how to use our self-determination assessment workbook called *Express Yourself*, which is offered in our Solutions Suite.

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Our Center and the Solutions Suite are jointly funded by two federal agencies. First is the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research, of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living. Second is the Center for Mental Health Services of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The work of the Center does not necessarily represent the policy of any agency or endorsement by the federal government.

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I'm glad you could join me today. There are several learning objectives for this webinar. One is to understand the concept of self-determination and why it is important for people who are recovering from a mental illness. The second is to become familiar with the content of the workbook, how to complete it, and how to help others use it. The third is to learn how the workbook can be used to help people understand and enhance their level of self-determination.

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Let's start by learning more about what self-determination involves. Self-determination means having the freedom to be in charge of decisions regarding your life. It involves choosing where you live, who you spend time with, and what you do. It means having the resources you need to freely make decisions in order to create a good life. It also means choosing *where, when, and how* you get the help you feel you need, for any challenges or problems you face.

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Many people with emotional problems are unaware of what self-determination is and its important role in building a satisfying life. They may not believe that self-determination is possible for them, due to the stigma and discrimination they face. They may not feel that they can control their own destiny because of the many barriers they have to contend with. Sometimes, this view is also held by their families, friends

and other supporters, including service providers. This can reinforce people's belief that they can't make choices and be in charge of their own lives.

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We designed *Express Yourself* as a way to educate people about what self-determination is. We wanted to convey the idea that everyone deserves the opportunity to control their own lives by freely making choices about how they live. People also use this assessment tool to discover how much self-determination they have in different life areas such as work, school, and living situation. It helps users identify those areas where they'd like to increase their level of self-determination, and other areas in which they're already satisfied. *Express Yourself* is a self-guided assessment, but it also has been used by people working together with their service providers, and in groups.

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As users complete the assessment, they become more aware of what self-determination is and how its presence or absence affects their lives. After they complete the assessment, people are offered links to web sites they can access in order to increase self-determination in different life areas. For example, a person who wants more self-determination in the area of transportation is directed to a web site that shows them how to use local public bus, train, and other transit systems.

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Let's take a look at how *Express Yourself* works. The assessment part of the workbook consists of 21 statements about specific life areas such as "I choose where I work" or "My basic human rights are respected." Users read each statement and think about whether it describes their life. If it does, they skip it and go on to the next one, continuing until they reach a statement that *isn't* true for them. After putting a check mark next to that statement, they move on until they've read and thought about each one.

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Next, users go back to the statements they've checked, read each one again, and put a second check mark next to ones that are important to them. Not all of the life areas are of equal importance to people, so this second check mark helps to target what really matters. At the end of this step, they'll have a double check mark next to each important aspect of their lives where they feel they lack choices and control.

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Sometimes people stop here. They've learned new things about their lives and want to take some time to think about what this means. They may decide to share what they've learned with others such as friends, family, and service providers. But not everyone is ready to take action to increase their self-determination, which our workbook acknowledges.

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Other people feel ready to learn more and perhaps make plans to increase their self-determination in a particular life area. If so, they can click on live links to web sites with information specific to that area. For example, people who put 2 check marks next to the statement "I decide whether to live alone or with someone else" can read an article entitled "Should you live alone or with a roommate?" Those who put a double check next to the statement "I decide whether or not to have a boyfriend or girlfriend" can click on a link to an article with tips on how to develop a romantic relationship while facing mental health stigma.

Regardless of what they decide to do, users are encouraged to think about and share what they've learned with others, especially regarding those life areas they checked twice.

Slide 13:

We also encourage people who complete the self-assessment to review and use another Solutions Suite product entitled, *This is Your Life! Creating Your Self-Directed Life Plan*. This second tool helps people put into action the things they learn from their self-determination assessment by using a life planning process. Developing a life plan can increase self-determination because it helps people figure out what they want out of life, their future goals, and next steps toward those goals. It's designed to be a low-stress experience, starting with small steps, and taking care of yourself along the way. You can obtain a copy of *This is Your Life* from the Solutions Suite, along with a podcast and a webinar about how to use it, as well as free technical assistance for implementation.

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Turning back to the self-assessment workbook, you may be wondering who can benefit from using it. The answer is that it has a lot of different types of users. One group is people in mental health recovery, or those managing other kinds of disabilities and challenges. Another group is people undergoing important life transitions, such as going away to college or getting a divorce. A third group includes people who are transitioning into the community from a more sheltered setting such as a hospital or jail. Another group includes people who are joining a new community mental health or peer-run program.

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Express Yourself! is a self-guided assessment, but it also has been used by service recipients working together with their service providers. Some have used it in group settings at peer-run behavioral health programs, community mental health centers, inpatient units, and forensic settings. It can be used anywhere that a person or a group wants to learn more about self-determination and how to increase it in their lives.

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Express Yourself! is 11 pages long and is written at a 5th grade reading level. It can be completed online or downloaded and printed for use. The online version includes live links to the web sites. Users of the printed version can type the web site addresses into their browsers.

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To get started with using it online, you'll need an internet connection and a viewing screen such as a laptop, desktop, cell phone, or iPad. If you're going to download the paper version, you'll need paper, pens or pencils, and a printer. Also with the paper version, it's helpful to print out a list of the web links so people can type them into their browsers. If users don't have internet access, you can print out sections of the web sites to give people an idea of the content. Then, you can help them access the web sites later.

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You may be wondering how people have used the assessment, so let me share an example. The clinical director of a community mental health program contacted us about a challenge his agency was facing. He had noticed a gap between what his staff thought clients' goals should be, and what the clients actually wanted to do. This disconnect was interfering with the ability of staff and clients to work well together.

We recommended that “Express Yourself” be used to open up a dialog in which clients could discover what they wanted to work on before staff introduced their own ideas.

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After several months, the clinical director let us know that this was working well, and had led staff to adopt strengths-based approaches that support self-determination. The program’s clients also noticed the difference, and now feel that their goals are being taken seriously. Recently, this agency started using “Express Yourself” at the time people join the program. They’ve noticed that their newer groups of clients seems more energized and empowered than previous cohorts.

Slide 20:

Thanks for your interest in how to use our self-determination self-assessment. If you still have questions, you can request free technical assistance from our Center, which we offer on a time-limited basis. Call us at 312.355.1696 or click the “free technical assistance” button on the Express Yourself assessment page of our web site.

Slide 21 (announcer):

Thank you for listening. You can obtain additional Solutions Suite recordings, or download a transcript, by visiting the Center’s web site.