

Health and Wellbeing MECC (Making Every Contact Count) Information

This is a brief overview of Health and Wellbeing MECC, which will provide you with some helpful background information before you attend the face-to-face training.

What do we mean by Making Every Contact Count (MECC)?

In the UK today there is a significant problem with people leading unhealthy lifestyles which can have serious health consequences for the individual, their families, and financial cost to services trying to support them.

The good news is that we can help raise awareness of the benefits of healthy lifestyles, and support people to make lifestyle changes by using the opportunities that people working or volunteering for local services have in their every-day conversations with their service users. You may even find the MECC principles useful for discussing healthy lifestyles with friends and family.

What is MECC?

Making Every Contact Count is having a short conversation about someone's health at a time when they are accessing a service. This is sometimes called 'the delivery of brief opportunistic lifestyle advice'.

Why is MECC necessary?

Cardiovascular diseases, strokes and cancers are the biggest cause of premature death in the UK. Lifestyle factors, particularly smoking, are some of the biggest contributors to these illnesses.

The good news is that risk of developing conditions such as cardiovascular diseases can be reduced if people adopt healthy behaviours.

The five key lifestyle areas are:

- Healthy eating
- Physical activity
- Stopping smoking
- Alcohol
- Mental wellbeing

How to MECC (using Ask, Advise, Assist)

To support people in making lifestyle changes just follow a very simple structure. It's called Ask, Advise, and Assist (AAA).

1. **Ask** - Raise the issue with a simple questions, during day-to-day contact with someone;
2. **Advise** - Give messages about healthy lifestyle change and tips to achieve them;
3. **Assist**- Share information or encourage people to contact relevant organisation.

How to MECC (using Ask, Advise, Assist)

Your face-to-face training will talk you through how to raise a health concern with service users and how to judge when and how to judge when to do so. You will be taught to build rapport, look for signals which indicate how comfortable you and the service user are to talk about these issues, how to raise it in an appropriate way, the importance of mirror listening and affirming what the person says to you, and how to summarise the conversation at the end.

1. Ask

You will probably want to build rapport by greeting someone with a smile, using their name, and giving them your undivided attention. Use an open posture to show you are interested in them and watch for signals that they are uncomfortable like folding their arms. You can find creative ways to raise issues by being responsive to what you see or hear – does the service user have a bad cough that you can comment on? Are they drinking a diet soft drink? See how they respond and use that to judge whether to continue.

2. Advise

Now would be the time to discuss a few key facts that you know about the issue – for example, explain about alcohol units and how many men and women should drink at a time.

3. Assist

Find out whether the person wants to know about support available to them. If you raise a lifestyle issues and give them some brief information about it, you should be able to judge whether that person is interested in more information or support from someone else. Otherwise, ask!

In Telford & Wrekin, you can signpost people to the Healthy Lifestyles Hub at Southwater One for any healthy lifestyles support and referral on to specialist services.

Repeat back what they say to you to show you are listening and understanding (mirror listening), give positive responses and affirmations to build their confidence in making changes (“it is really hard to stop smoking, did you know you are four times more likely to quit if you use help from a stop smoking service though?”) and briefly summarise the conversation at the end.

When to use MECC:

- During day-to-day contact with service users;
- When someone mentions a health behaviour issue in conversation;
- When you can see that tackling a health behaviour issue would help someone meet their goals (e.g. getting a job, or saving money);
- As part of existing information gathering.

Key Points:

1. It is important to understand the health messages for each key lifestyle area before offering advice. The NHS Choices website has some very helpful information on each of these areas www.nhs.uk;
2. You are not expected to be an expert in health advice – know the basics, and know who to refer on to for more! In Telford & Wrekin this is the Healthy Lifestyles Hub;
3. You are not expected to be a model of a perfect lifestyle yourself, so don't be put off raising the issue even if it is one you struggle with yourself. Often people appreciate when someone can relate to their challenges;
4. It's important to consider privacy - can anyone overhear the conversation? If so, don't proceed;
5. Use exit strategies if the person is unable or unwilling to talk e.g. say "I can see now isn't the right time to chat, that's ok. If you ever feel like talking get in touch."
6. Consider adding lifestyle question/prompts to paperwork already being completed by customers or service users e.g. are you interested in receiving any information about healthy lifestyles?.