

## What is basic-needs informed care?

Government assistance and/or low-wage jobs are often insufficient to meet the basic needs of a family or an individual. When people cannot afford things like hygiene products or transportation, their lives are disrupted in many ways. Perhaps a client is missing appointments because she does not have reliable childcare, or a ride, or a winter coat. Unfortunately, our default is often to look for something wrong with the client, not with her circumstances. She is not motivated. She is depressed. She is using drugs. And so on.

### How can I become basic-needs informed?

It starts with asking the right questions and thinking hard about how resources might affect a situation. If an apartment is dirty, we should ask: Do you have a vacuum, cleaning supplies, garbage bags? If resources aren't the problem, then we have to move on to inquire about more complex barriers. But let's start with the simplest solution. This is true in all the helping professions. When a student is coming to school without proper warm clothing, we should not assume that mom isn't a good caretaker. When a patient presents with horrible breath, it is not necessarily a symptom. He could just need toothpaste.

### Will asking these questions embarrass people?

We ask highly personal questions all the time. We need to get ourselves comfortable when it comes to talking about these issues and ask things in a direct and supportive way. It is also helpful to find out about basic needs before a problem arises. There is a Basic-Needs Assessment in this toolkit to help with that.

### If someone needed toothpaste, why didn't he just ask me?

Remember, there is a power imbalance in these relationships. They might fear that you would lecture them about budgeting or look down on them for having poor hygiene. They simply might not think that providing these things is your role. Finally, we are all socialized to be agreeable. If you say, "You need to make sure your children are clean," the default response may be a promise to give them a bath – even if there is no hot water or soap to do that.

### How do I fit a basic-needs emphasis into a heavy client/patient caseload or full classroom?

This is a valid concern. But consider how basic-need informed care could empower you to help far more quickly and effectively. Sometimes meeting basic needs can transform a situation. For example, one civil rights attorney told us that many of her young clients were missing school because their parents could not afford to launder the uniforms mandated in their city's public schools. This is a huge problem that you can solve with detergent and a roll of quarters to use at the Laundromat.



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**How do I access these resources for the people I serve?**

There is no pat answer for that. You can look for organizations like diaper banks and food banks that might provide some essentials. You can ask a local civic club or faith community to have a drive for you. Ultimately, organizations that serve poor people should have a budget for these essentials. Getting there may take advocacy. People in the helping professions can be extremely effective advocates because of our direct experience.