

Person-Centered Thinking Primer for Individuals Living with Brain Injury

By Catherine Mello

After a life changing brain injury, answering questions like, “What is my vision for my life?” or even, “What does a good day look like for me?” have very different answers post brain injury than they may have before the brain injury. Each person has unique set of experiences prior to the brain injury and often experience trauma, grief, and loss after a brain injury. Employing strategies for person-centered thinking and person-centered planning can help keep the person with a brain injury as an individual at the center of their supports and services as they navigate life with a brain injury.

Though definitions put out by different groups vary slightly, person-centered thinking generally¹ focuses on language, values and actions toward respecting the views of the person and their loved ones. It emphasizes quality of life, well-being, and informed choice. This way of thinking is the foundation for person-centered planning which puts these principles into action. The focus of the plans should be on the person’s strengths as opposed to focusing on disabilities and problems.

Before the plan development meeting is held, the person at the center of the plan meets with person they want to facilitate the meeting or another person of their choosing to plan for the meeting. This helps the person to prepare the information that they want to share at their meeting and the logistics.

Key Elements for Pre-planning:

- Preparing information about personal history, vision, needs and preferences to share at the meeting
- Identifying which supporters the person wants to attend the meeting
- Identifying the person’s strengths
- Determining who will lead the meeting
- When and where should the meeting be held
- What accommodations or strategies they will need to best participate in the meeting.

The person and their facilitator can use some of the many tools that have been developed to help the person develop a profile based on their history, needs and preferences that they will share at their person-centered planning meeting. The person and facilitator can select the tools that they feel focus on the information that is important for the person at the center of the plan to convey as part of the planning process.

Person-Centered Planning is an exploratory and evolving process. Being person-centered means that supporters and services meet the person where they are. Discussion should start based on their strengths and interests. A person should not feel pressure to have their vision for their life clearly defined before the meeting.

¹ <https://ncapps.acl.gov/about-ncapps.html>

A facilitator who can be the person at the center of the plan or another neutral individual leads the planning process and facilitates discussion. The person shares the information outlined in the tools they used for during pre-planning as a starting point for development of the person-centered plan.

Key Discussion Points:

- Strengths of the person at the center of the plan
- Person's vision for their life
- Person's routines and rituals
- Person's preferences and dislikes
- What is happening around the person that may impact their life
- Barriers to short or long-term needs and preferences
- Opportunities to try new things or learn new skills
- Discussing risks to inform choices

The person and supporters should identify supports, both natural and paid, available to the person that can be put into place to help them pursue their vision as well as meet their day to day needs. The person and their supporters should then identify the action steps that they will take in the short term to address both the person's needs and their priorities and the resources that are available to implement each action step. The plan should be written in a way that is accessible to the person at the center and copy should be given to all supporters who participated in the meeting and will be supporting implementation of the plan.

The person-centered plan should be reviewed periodically to review progress toward action steps and outcomes or whenever there is change or updated at the discretion of the person at the center of the plan. The person and their supporters review which strategies worked and which did not. Person-Centered planning is meant to be a dynamic and evolving process that changes with the person.

For people with a brain injury and their supporters, using a person-centered approach can help regain a sense of control over their life and keep the focus on their values and needs as they evolve.