

A KEY INSIGHT INTO HOW TO OVERCOME RESISTANCE AND GET BUY-IN

Many of my training participants say, “people with I/DD are very interested in receiving sexuality education, the resistance to this education isn’t coming from them, it’s mostly coming from staff/professionals and parents.” How is it that some of us can see a need so clearly and others can’t? When faced with this dilemma, it’s hard to know what to do with resistance to sexuality education when it shows up and gets in the way of buy-in.

I came across an article that made me pause and think about resistance - what it’s really trying to communicate and how to support people beyond their resistance to take the first steps toward change.

The article was in The Leadership Brief, May 2009, Volume 17 titled, “Overcoming Resistance.” This article is focused on leaders in organizations who are trying to implement a change and face resistance from employees. In our field, when you face resistance it probably is a different sort of relationship than leader and employee. However, these ideas can be applied to many situations where you find yourself facing resistance when you are disrupting the “status quo.”

Understanding peoples’ Levels of Resistance, and where the resistance comes from is key to working with it.

Level 1: “I Don’t Get It.”

This level occurs due to the lack of information, disagreement over the data, or just plain confusion. At this level, we need to discuss why the change needs to happen. We want to use data, stories, or analogies that people can relate to.

Example: If a parent says they are resistant to having their child attend sexuality education classes, we want to give them information about what will be covered and

any data that supports this change. We also want to share stories about people who did not have sexuality education and how that lack of education created negative consequences. Plus, we want to highlight the positives that came from classes.

A common mistake is to assume everyone is at level 1 and keep giving factual information over and over again and expecting something to be different. If you sense that giving information isn't working, you want to assume they are at a different level.

Level 2: "I Don't Like It."

The second level of resistance is more emotional. It comes from fear of the unknown and the person has lots of worries. If we keep giving information, it won't work because the resistance isn't about not understanding, but about fear. You can't tell people to get over it, you have to listen, acknowledge, and validate their fears. They need reassurance, support and also honesty.

Example: I usually ask, "what worries you about this change?" then, we can address the fears that are stated. Also, you can ask, "what topics do you think are important for this person to hear". Using a partnering approach helps them relax and can help them feel more open.

Level 3: "I Don't Trust You."

This last reason is a tough one to overcome because they might be resisting you, not the idea and proposed change. Maybe it's because of the history between the two of you, but also it could be about others that were in your position in the past. No matter the reason, build trust before getting buy in. Explore if you may have done something that broke down the trust and take responsibility for those situations. When you sense this is the root cause of the resistance, it's time to focus on the relationship you have with the person. Once people see you as trustworthy and know you, they are more likely to be OK with any change you're introducing.

All three of these levels of resistance have differing needs at their root and require different communication strategies. Start by assessing the level the person is in and then, focus on giving appropriate support to overcome the resistance and move towards buy-in. Gaining insight into what's behind resistance can be key to achieving your end result - supporting the people you work with.

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