

Therapeutic Risk Taking, Sharing Decision Making and the Emperor's New Clothes

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Therapeutic risk-taking involves empowering patients to make decisions regarding their own safety and to take risks to enable personal development. It involves patients making choices and having control (Morgan 2004, DH 2004, Felton et al 2017)



Photo Timo
Wolf

Psychiatric hospitals provide a containing system for a population perceived as threatening to the moral and social order (Foucault 2006, Scull 1982)

Community care presents new opportunities for people with mental health problems to gain rights, inclusion and citizenship but it also presents challenges for control of this population. Risk assessment and management becomes a system of surveillance (Szmukler and Rose 2013)



Mental health professionals commonly report experiencing dilemmas in decision-making. These pressures include weighing up the individual's rights, professional duties of care, public safety and awareness of possible consequences for the practitioner themselves (Felton et al 2017, Robertson 2011; Nolan 2012).



“One is no longer concerned about achieving
something good....rather preventing the worst”

(Beck 1992:46)



Therapeutic risk taking acknowledges that by actively taking risks positive change can occur. Here risk is understood differently, it can result in gains and not just losses making more visible alternative definitions of risk that account for possibilities not just probabilities.

Therapeutic risk acknowledges that taking risks is an essential part of the human experience that not only enables us to learn and achieve but also build resilience and personal insight from mistakes (Deegan 2001, Lupton 2014)



*Oh, how fine are the Emperor's new clothes! No costume the Emperor had worn before was ever such a complete success.
"But he hasn't got anything on," a little child said*

Fundamentally therapeutic risk taking maintains an association between service users and risk, perpetuating a view that being risky is part of the experience of mental health problems.



“The person who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing is nothing, becomes nothing. He may avoid suffering and sorrow, but he simply cannot learn, feel, change, grow or love. Chained by his certitude, he is a slave; he has forfeited his freedom. Only the person who risks is truly free” (Leo Buscaglia)

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