Three ways of using node-link maps

Mapping as a keyworking or counselling tool

Both research evidence and clinical experience suggest that an effective counselling session has four key elements (Dansereau, Dees et al. 1995; Dansereau and Simpson 2009):

1. **Communication**: Drug working can be thought of as a problem-solving exercise, and so a clear, shared understanding of the issues is important to facilitate communication. Maps provide a clear visual representation of issues, and have less word clutter than traditional oral or written material. Node–link mapping has been shown to be particularly helpful for clients with less education, and for those with ethnic backgrounds that are different from their workers’. Mapping also enhances clients’ own perceptions of their communication abilities, thus building confidence and self-esteem.

2. **Focus**: Mapping provides a way to cluster information meaningfully, as well as providing a readily available summary to guide and focus discussions. Evidence suggests that maps help counsellors and clients maintain their focus and attention, and mapping has been shown to benefit clients with attentional problems.

3. **Producing ideas**: Counselling sessions may need to cover a lot of ground in order to resolve a particular problem. Node–link maps can provide a strategy for idea generation, and may also facilitate causal thinking by making clients examine what influences their behaviour, or what may happen next. This process may be most useful when keyworkers and clients are struggling to remember details, or are in need of a fresh approach. Node–link mapping also leads to greater insights from the counsellor, helping him or her identify gaps in clients’ thinking, and to address psychological issues facing clients.

4. **Memory**: Memory for session information is related to the effectiveness of counselling. Node–link maps have been shown to enhance the recall of information in both educational and clinical settings.

- Observations of mapping-enhanced counselling sessions and discussions with keyworkers and counsellors suggest that this technique increases collaboration between client and therapist by taking the direct focus off the client and putting it on a picture or diagram of the therapeutic issues. For clients who are uncomfortable maintaining eye contact, node–link mapping provides a relevant, alternative visual stimulus and therefore can reduce anxiety. Maps created during a session can be given to the clients as reminders or as vehicles for homework between sessions. They may also be reintroduced by the counsellor to evaluate changes and progress, and used as a structure for clinical supervision sessions. However, it should also be noted that mapping, especially if overused, can sometimes disrupt therapeutic rapport (e.g. by slowing the pace of the session). It therefore is important for individual counsellors to tailor their use of maps to fit both their own style and client needs.

- The following map summarises the key benefits of adopting a node-link mapping approach.