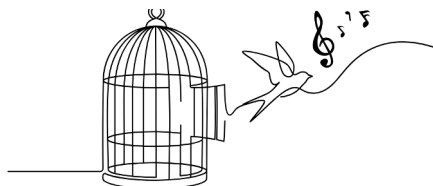


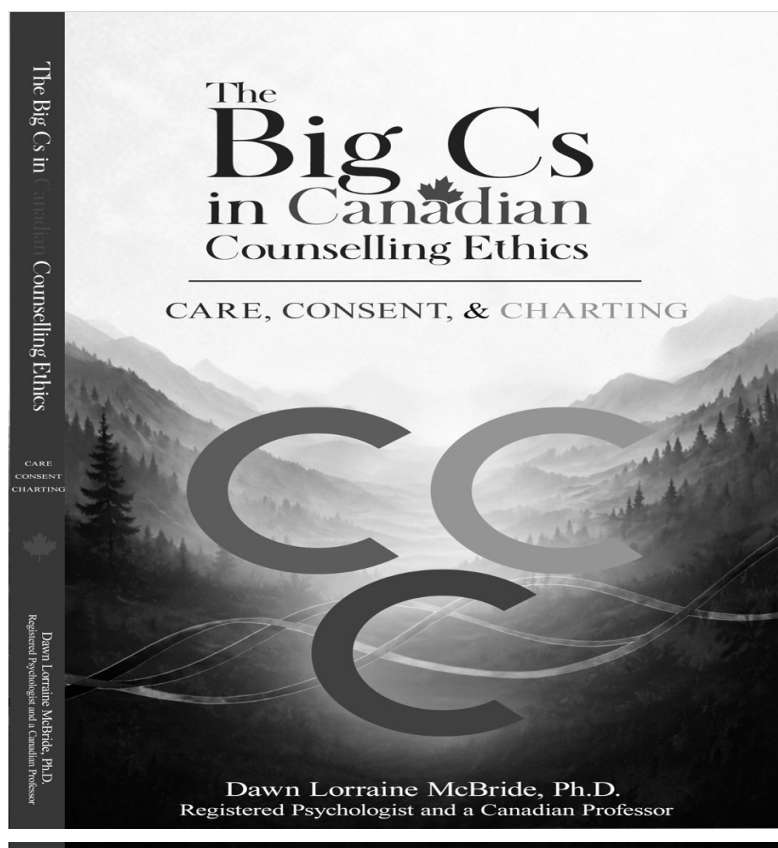
Relational Consent:

Supporting Autonomy
When Choice and Voice
Have Been Taken Away



Dr. Dawn McBride

*Reg. Psychologist/Supervisor, Associate
Professor, National Counselling Ethics Expert*



Agenda

01 WHEN CHOICE HAS BEEN TAKEN AWAY

**02 TAKEAWAY: HOW WE SEEK CONSENT CAN HELP
CREATE REPARATIVE EXPERIENCES OF CHOICE**

**03 RELATIONAL CONSENT: (1) PROTECT SUPPORT
(2) REPAIR & (3) BUILD ALLIANCE**

04 RELATIONAL CONSENT: 5 Cs + 5 Cs

05 RELATIONAL CONSENT: B.R.A.I.N.S.



***Violence is
NOT only
about what
happened to
someone.***

***It is also
about what
happened
to their
EXPERIENCE
OF CHOICE.***

CONTROL

COERCION

SECRECY

UNPREDICTABILITY

SILENCING

LOSS OF CHOICE

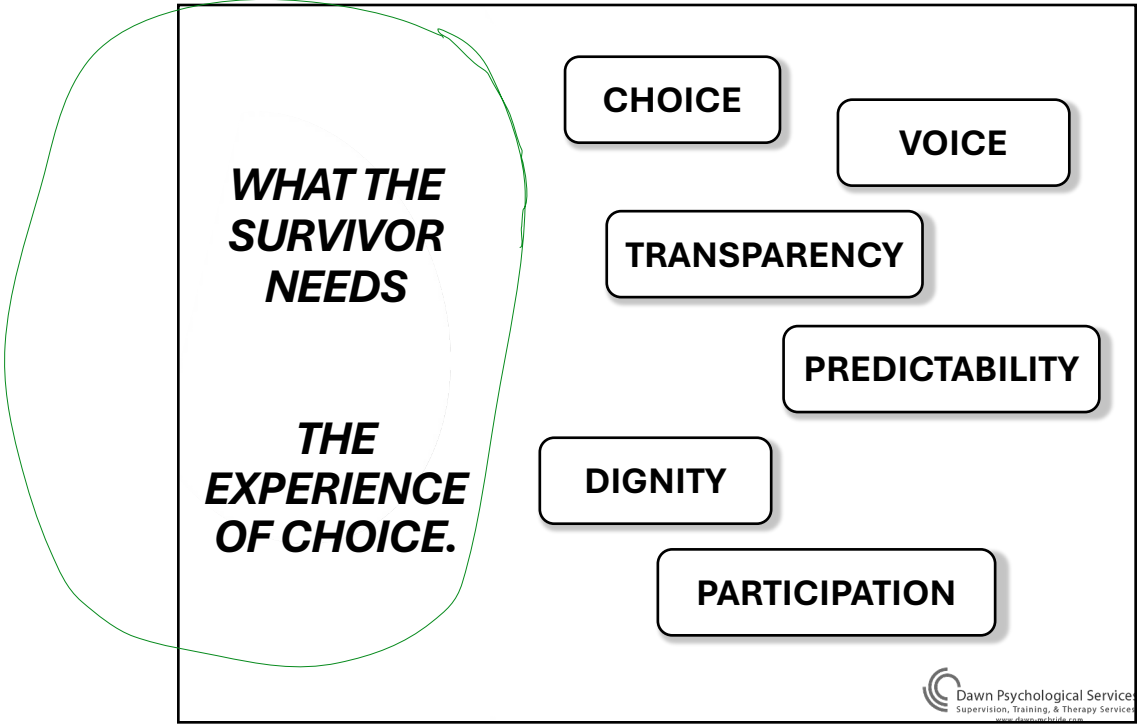


Abuse ➔ choice, voice, & control taken away, ignored, or overridden.

Even well-intended helping systems can unintentionally feel familiar to survivors when the process sounds like:

-  Sign here so we can get started.
-  *You have to answer some questions.*
-  *We need you to complete a few forms.*
-  *Your worker will meet with you at 10am.*

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RELATIONAL CONSENT SHIFTS THE FOCUS

INSTEAD OF ASKING ONLY:

*Did I get
consent?*

WE ALSO ASK:

- *How did this person experience giving consent?*
- *Did they experience choice, voice, understanding, dignity, and a conversation?*

**Even when we cannot
change the consent form,
we can change the
relational experience
surrounding the form**

**→
RELATIONAL
CONSENT**

**OVERALL
5 C'S**

**CONSENT IS A CONVERSATION
ABOUT CLIENT'S
CHOICES & CONTROL
BEFORE THEY AGREE TO**

(e.g., answer sensitive intake questions)



RELATIONAL CONSENT

Example-1

*"I would like to start our
time together by
highlighting the control
you have as a client and
your rights".*



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RELATIONAL CONSENT

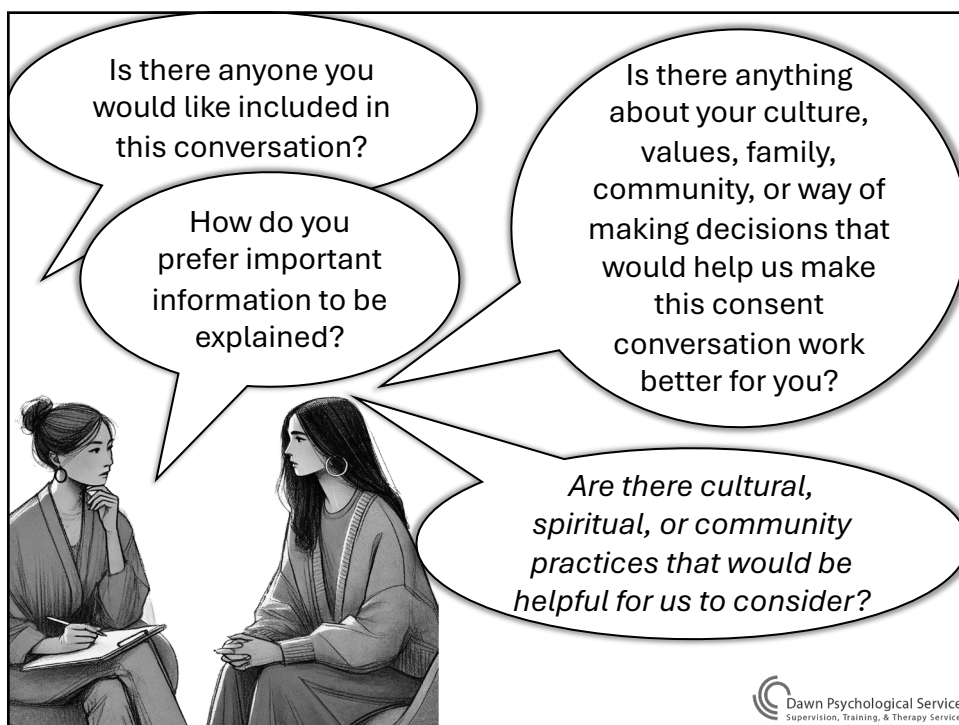
*"Before discussing your needs,
we can review your rights...
You have many & including that it
is my job to have your back.*

*This means no surprises, and I will
listen to your right to say YES or
NO. I wonder if this might also be
healing to hear about your rights.*

(What is it like to know I want to
help protect you and honour your
rights?)*

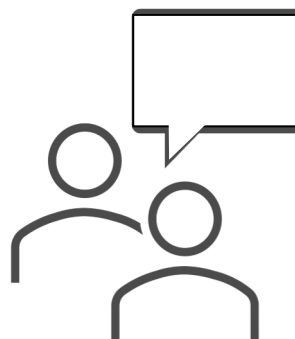


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• **CHECK:** What consent topic would they like to discuss first?

• **CHECK:** What do they already know about a consent topic before you assume you take the lead (power).



CHECK:

- ☐ **I am wondering what you already know about _____?** (e.g., (a) what is kept in your file? or (b) Who can see your file? or (c) how we can keep your privacy if we meet in public? or (d) what I will do if I am worried about you or something you tell me that involves..... ? etc.)
- ☐ **Any guesses** on how long I have to keep your file?
- ☐ **What do you want to know about _____?** (a) me, or (b) how we aim to “have your back” as well as how to make sure you are not caught off guard by any of the rules we follow?
- ☐ **What rules do you think I need to follow to keep you #1 in my office?**
- ☐ You have many rights as a client, including the right to know about x, y, and z. **Which right shall we start with before exploring why you decided to attend today’s appointment?** (or, *Any guesses as to what rights I have?)
- ☐ **How is counselling the same and different from talking to a friend, a doctor, or even a teacher?**

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SOME MORE Cs TO GUIDE RELATIONAL CONSENT

CREATIVE

Use stories, metaphors, visuals, objects,
and other approaches that make
consent understandable & memorable.

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**What Consent Topics Can
Be Addressed Using a Bowl of
Life Savers On Your Coffee Table?**



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**USE
B.R.A.I.N.S.
TO
RESTORE
CHOICE**

B – BENEFITS

R – RISKS

A – ALTERNATIVES

I – INTUITION

**N – NO, KNOW, NOTHING FOR
NOW**

B = BENEFITS

- What could completing this intake make possible for her?
- What support, protection, or resources could help her?

R = RISKS

- What concerns might she have about answering these questions?
- Who could see or receive the information she provides?



A = ALTERNATIVES

- What must be completed now; and what could wait?
- Could some questions be answered later, differently, or with additional support?

I = INTUITION

- What is she noticing or feeling about this process?
- What would help her feel safer; more able to continue?



RELATIONAL CONSENT: B.R.A.I.N.S.



**N =
NO/KNOW/NOTHING
FOR NOW**

- What can she say no to?
- What does she have a right to know?
- What can be left for later or "nothing for now"

RELATIONAL CONSENT: B.R.A.I.N.S.



S = SLOW DOWN

- What tells us she may need the pace slowed down?

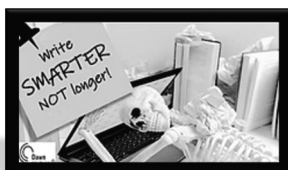
S = SPREAD IT OUT

- What needs to happen now?
- What could happen later?

S = SOLICIT

- What does she want or need from us right now?
- What would help her have more voice in how this proceeds?

2026 ETHICS TRAINING RELATIONAL CONSENT & CHARTING



Ethics #1: Writing Useful, Ethical, & Efficient Session Notes

Dates: October 22nd & 29th

Time: 9:00 A.M. to 1:15 P.M.



Ethics #2: Consent in Counselling – Forms & Process: Trauma- Informed

Dates: November 5th & 6th

Time: 9:00 A.M. to 1:15 P.M.

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STAY CONNECTED ETHICS SUPPORT, TRAINING, & UPDATES

**TO JOIN OUR
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