



# DEVELOPING TOGETHER

## SOCIAL WORK TEACHING PARTNERSHIP

### Power and Powerlessness

This is an exercise for a Practice Educator to use with a student to explore issues relating to power. The practice educator can complete this exercise with the student in supervision, or can ask the student to complete the two sheets prior to supervision, then explore the feelings and actions they have noted during the supervision session, considering these in relation to service users.

#### Aims:

- To come to an understanding of the experience of power and how it affects you and others
- To relate it to your own working situation.
- To think about these responses in relation to the labeling of other people in positions of relative powerlessness.

#### Method:

- Take two pieces of paper
- Head one piece of paper with the title 'POWERFUL' and the other with the title 'POWERLESS'
- Divide both sheets of paper down the middle, so there are two columns
- Head the left hand column with the word 'FEELINGS' and right hand column with word 'ACTIONS' on both pieces of paper
- Think of a situation in which you have felt powerful - list on the first sheet what this has made you feel and how this has made you act.
- Repeat the exercise for powerlessness.

#### Discussion:

Once the student's (and practice educator's if applicable) feelings and actions have been shared, the practice educator needs to explore the following questions with the student:

- Can the student identify any behaviours that reflect a service user's feelings of powerlessness or of power?
- Social work roles often involve an element of power. Considering how a student has identified their feelings and actions as a result of previous powerful situations, what actions can the student take to ensure they will be able to act appropriately when situations arise for them to use the power invested in their role (i.e safeguarding investigations).

- Social work roles also involve feeling powerless at times. Considering how a student has identified their feelings and actions as a result of previous powerless situations, what actions can the student take to ensure they will be able to continue to practice appropriately when faced with powerlessness in their work (i.e. the court goes against their recommendation)