

A Brief History of Essential Lifestyle Planning

Content outlined, edited and reviewed by Allen, Shea & Associates • Researched by Anthropic AI • July 2026

There are many successful approaches to person-centered planning, Essential Lifestyle Planning (ELP) is one of them. It focuses on how a person wants to live each day. It is the foundation for most of the widely used person-centered thinking tools listed later in this article.

History

Beginnings

ELP began in the late 1980s at the University of Maryland. Michael Smull and Susan Burke-Harrison developed the approach. They were asked to help people leave institutions and residential schools. Records described many of these individuals as "not ready" for community life. ELP offered a different starting point. It asked what was important to each person in everyday life. It also asked what each person needed to stay healthy and safe. Each plan described the support needed to move toward that life. Their success led to inquiries, presentations and a growing interest in this new method of planning.

Growth in the 1990s

During the 1990s, the use of ELP spread. It reached people living at home and people using community services. It also reached children, transitioning youth, older adults, and end-of-life planning.

Key Ideas

A person-centered plan is a means, not an end. The life the person wants is the outcome. Plans balance what is important to and important for a person. Plans use plain, everyday language. Plans make sure the person is heard, regardless of disability. Plans are written as a guide for daily support.

From One Plan to Freestanding Tools

Why the Change Happened

ELP began as one complete planning process. A trained facilitator gathered information and wrote a full plan. Over time, a pattern became clear. Not all individuals need a full written plan. However, everyone around the person needs the thinking skills inside it. Day-to-day staff, not facilitators, shape most of a person's life. To accommodate this need, the parts/tools of ELP were separated into freestanding tools. Each tool now

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works on its own. People can use one tool or combine several as needed. The tools give structure to everyday conversations. Information from the tools can feed into a full plan later.

As ELP grew into a broader set of person-centered thinking skills, the number of trainers, mentors, and practitioners in the U.S., Great Britain and Australia grew significantly. In 2000, the first annual gathering of The Learning Community for Person Centered Thinking was held in Portland, Oregon. Michael Smull is now a founder emeritus of the organization. The TLCPCP continues to teach the skills of Person-Centered Thinking.

The Tools

The primary person-centered thinking tools include:

- **Important To / Important For:** sorts what matters from what keeps someone healthy and safe.
- **One-Page Description:** a one-page summary of the person and their support.
- **Working / Not Working:** reviews life from the person's perspective and others' perspectives.
- **Communication Chart:** records what a person tells us through behavior.
- **Relationship Map:** shows who is in the person's life.
- **Good Day / Bad Day:** describes what makes days better or worse.
- **Rituals and Routines:** records the daily routines that matter to the person.
- **Learning Log:** records what staff learn during ongoing support.
- **4 Plus 1 Questions:** reviews what was tried, learned, and what comes next.
- **Donut Sort:** clarifies staff responsibilities and where judgment is allowed.
- **Matching:** matches support staff to the person's preferences and interests.

Use of the Tools

Use varies by state, agency, and setting. Important To / Important For is taught as the core skill. The other tools build on that balance. One-page descriptions are among the most widely used tools. Some organizations call them one-page profiles. They appear in schools, health care, and social care. Working / Not Working and 4 Plus 1 structure reviews and meetings. Some agencies use Learning Logs in place of traditional progress notes. Several state systems list these tools in official planning guidance.

Current Status

Federal Policy

Federal Medicaid policy now requires person-centered planning. The 2014 Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) Final Rule sets the standards. Each person receiving HCBS must have a person-centered plan. The plan must be driven by the person. It must be written in plain language. And the planning team must include people the person chooses.

California

California law reflects these same ideas. The Lanterman Act entitles each person to an Individual Program Plan (IPP). The IPP process is meant to be based on person-centered planning.

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