

COLLABORATIVE HELPING: A PRACTICE FRAMEWORK FOR FAMILY-CENTERED SERVICES

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FOUR IDEAS TO GUIDE HELPING RELATIONSHIPS

OUR ATTITUDE APPROACHING FAMILIES IS THE FOUNDATION OF OUR WORK

The attitude or relational stance we hold with families is the foundation of our effectiveness. The ways in which we think about families (our conceptual models) and act with families (our helping practices) position us in particular relationships with them and can be evaluated in terms of their potential to support the relational stance we'd prefer to hold. One useful relational stance is that of an "Appreciative Ally" in which we position ourselves in alliance with people and in which people experience us as "in their corner" or "on their side." This stance is grounded in a spirit of respect, connection, curiosity, and hope.

EFFECTIVE HELPING IS BEST ORGANIZED AROUND A FORWARD-THINKING SHARED VISION

Our work is often focused around problems and what needs to change. While this is an understandable focus, it can leave families feeling overwhelmed by problems and contribute to shame and defensiveness. This is unhelpful and slows down our work. Instead, we can organize our work with families around their hopes for the future and preferred ways of being in the present. A forward-thinking agreed upon focus provides an irresistible magnet for change, establishes positive momentum, and minimizes "resistance."

IT IS USEFUL TO THINK ABOUT PEOPLE AS BEING IN A *RELATIONSHIP* WITH PROBLEMS RATHER THAN *HAVING* OR *BEING* A PROBLEM

The ways in which we think about problems that people face shapes our work with them. We often think of people *having* a problem (e.g. she is suffering from depression) or *being* a problem (e.g. he is bi-polar). This can imply that change requires an alteration of people's very being and bring about despair, shame, and/or defensiveness. We can also think about people as separate from a problem and yet in an ongoing and changeable relationship with it (e.g. Depression has come into a person's life and created problems for them). This separation helps people experience themselves outside the influence of the problem and opens space to better respond.

INQUIRY (THE PROCESS OF ASKING CAREFULLY CRAFTED QUESTIONS) IS A POWERFUL TOOL IN THE HELPING PROCESS

If we view the people we serve as more than the sum of problems in their lives and if we begin by attempting to help them envision preferred directions in life, we can re-think helping efforts as a process of co-research or collaborative inquiry. In this process, helpers pose questions designed to help people envision desired lives, identify challenges that stand in their way, and jointly develop constructive ways of responding to those challenges. Collaborative inquiry represents a partnership that taps the resourcefulness of both families and helpers.

FOUR COMMITMENTS TO SUPPORT A RELATIONAL STANCE OF AN APPRECIATIVE ALLY

STRIVING FOR CULTURAL CURIOSITY AND HONORING FAMILY WISDOM

Families and helpers can be seen as distinct cultures, each with beliefs and preferred styles of interacting. Services can be seen as a cross-cultural negotiation in which families and helpers interact in a mutually influencing relationship. In this interaction, family actions may be more understandable through the family's lens than through the helper's lens. To fully understand family complexity, it is useful to approach each family as a unique micro-culture and to learn as much as possible about their particular culture. We can think about entering each family as an anthropologist looking to elicit family meaning rather than assigning professional meaning. This endeavor can be supported by entering with a stance of "*not knowing*" or *cultural curiosity*.

BELIEVING IN POSSIBILITIES AND ELICITING RESOURCEFULNESS

When we enter a culture, what we look for profoundly organizes what we see. All families have particular competencies and know-how as well as capacities to grow, learn and change. Our work proceeds quicker and elicits less "resistance" when we focus on *what is and could be*. A belief in possibilities does not ignore or minimize problems in family life. In fact, viewing families as different from and more than the difficulties in their lives allows us to simultaneously acknowledge the severity of problems and elicit, elaborate, and appreciate family resourcefulness in addressing those problems. In this way, we can maintain a belief in resourcefulness without romanticizing families.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP AND ON FAMILY TURF

If we believe that families are the experts on their lives and often have more resourcefulness than we realize, our work together can become a collaborative process that draws on the skills and know-how of both parties. The goal is to develop a cooperative relationship in which the family is an active participant. Cooperation is a two-way street, and helpers as well as families can be non-cooperative. Since, we as helpers hold a leadership position in the relationship, a collaborative relationship begins with us finding ways to cooperate with families and fit our work to their turf.

ENGAGING IN EMPOWERING PROCESSES AND MAKING OUR WORK ACCOUNTABLE TO THE PEOPLE WE SERVE

Empowering processes refer to ways of thinking and acting that acknowledge, support, and amplify people's participation and influence in developing the lives they prefer. Disempowering processes refer to ways of thinking and acting that inadvertently disqualify, constrain, or supplant people's participation and influence in their lives. Despite our intentions, helpers' actions may have empowering effects, disempowering effects or mixed effects. One way to avoid inadvertent disempowerment is to make our work accountable to the people we are attempting to help and actively solicit their feedback about the effects of our actions. In this way we can become accountable allies *working for* families rather than experts *acting on* them.

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY

Collaborative Helping is a practice framework to help families by envision desired lives, address long-standing problems, and develop more proactive coping strategies. It offers an alternative approach to thinking about and working with families. Beginning with a conviction that people are more than the sum of the problems in their lives, we can expand our focus from simply identifying and correcting immediate problems to helping people envision and develop new lives. The heart of this model is “collaborative inquiry,” a process of joint exploration in which helpers pose questions designed to help people envision and develop preferred directions in life. In this process, we can view helper expertise as the ability to ask questions that elicit, elaborate and acknowledge people’s abilities, skills, and know-how that have been previously obscured. The questions in collaborative inquiry are developed for the benefit of people served with a focus on how they experience themselves in the process of responding to the questions. The questions are designed to contribute to a more complex experience of self and invite the enactment of alternative life stories. The enactment of preferred lives can be powerfully enhanced with the development of communities of support that can serve as appreciative audiences for change.

This framework draws on ideas from appreciative inquiry, motivational interviewing, the signs of safety approach to child protective services, and solution-focused and narrative therapy models. It is applicable at multiple levels and can be productively used in direct work, supervision, administration and organizational consulting. In fact, its effectiveness at a front-line level is enhanced when the organizing principles are also applied at various levels throughout an organization through the development of institutional practices and organizational cultures that are grounded in the four commitments previously described.

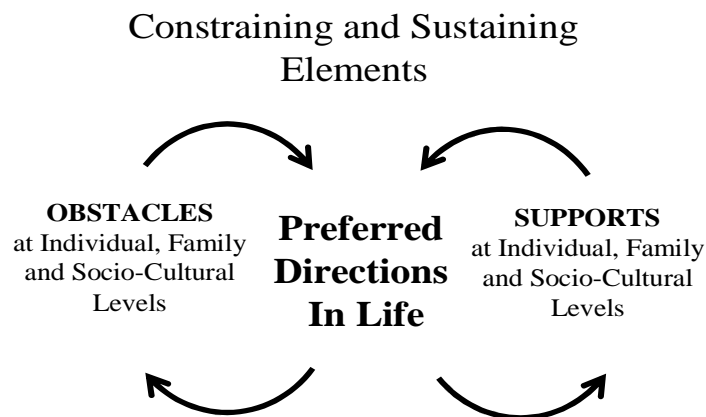
In collaborative inquiry, there is a two-way flow of information. The process does not simply convey helper expertise to families nor simply elicit their ideas. Instead, it is a joint process that highlights the shared knowledge that emerges in the course of a conversation. Collaborative inquiry does not require helpers to abdicate their own knowledge. There may be valuable wisdom in our work and life experience that can be useful for people served. However, it is important to be cautious about when and how we offer this wisdom. My own preference is to first emphasize local wisdom, then ideas that are jointly developed in meetings, and then additional knowledge from my own work or personal experiences, if it seems appropriate, useful and invited.

While this is a collaborative process, it is not an egalitarian partnership. Families are in a more vulnerable position in helping relationships and it is important to acknowledge this and be mindful of the power differential that exists. Helpers take on a leadership role in the organization of questions, but remain accountable to people served for both the direction of the inquiry and the effects of the questioning process on them. We can accomplish this by asking people how the process is going from their perspective and adjust our efforts accordingly.

A FRAMEWORK TO GUIDE COLLABORATIVE HELPING

An outline for collaborative helping that is applicable at multiple levels includes five steps (in this outline, “client” can refer to families, workers or organizations; “consultant” can refer to workers, supervisors, administrators or organizational consultants):

1. Building a foundation of client engagement (Getting to know clients in ways that humanize them, build connection with them, and encourage hope for shared work)
2. Helping clients envision preferred directions in life and work. (Drawing on clients’ best moments and greatest frustrations to focus on a desired future or preferred coping in a difficult present.)
3. Helping clients identify obstacles to and supports for their development of preferred directions in life and work. (We can think about these elements as separate entities and view clients as being in a mutually influencing and changeable relationship with them.)



4. Helping clients address obstacles and/or draw on supports in order to “live into” preferred lives and work.
5. Helping clients develop communities to support the enactment of preferred lives and work. (These communities may involve presence of others who are alive or dead, real or imagined.)

IDENTIFYING PEOPLE’S STANCES TOWARDS PROBLEMS AND DEVELOPING CONSTRUCTIVE HELPING RELATIONSHIPS

People served often hold a particular stance towards the problems in their lives. We can identify three possible stances that are useful to consider.

Customer Relationship:

The (presenting concern) is a problem in my life, I can do something about it, and I want your help in doing something about it. (This is known in solution-focused work as a “Customer Relationship” in which a complaint or goal has been jointly identified by people and helpers, people served see themselves as part of the solution, and are willing to do something about the situation.)

Visitor Relationship / No Problem Stance:

The (presenting concern) is not a problem in my life and I don’t need to do anything about it. (This is known in solution-focused work as a “Visitor Relationship” in which a shared goal has not been jointly identified by people served and helpers and in which helpers and people served have different definitions of the problem and different agendas for dealing with it.)

We will refer to this stance as a “No Problem” Stance. It often develops in situations in which people are seen as being “in denial” or minimizing a problem. In this situation, helpers can fall into attempting to convince family members that a problem exists or try to force family members to acknowledge or agree with how they “should” see things. However, agreement may not guarantee safety and the interactional patterns that develop around a “No Problem” stance can inadvertently rigidify that stance.

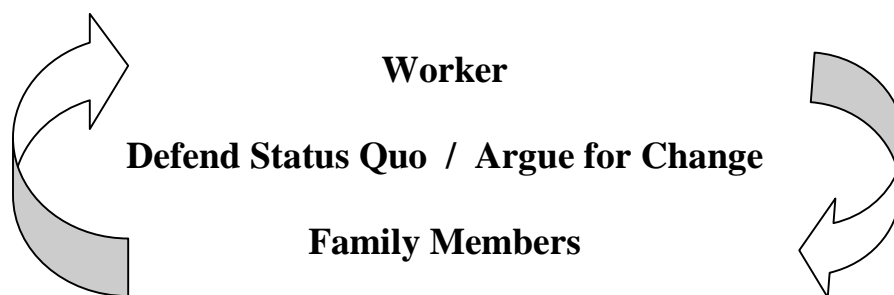
Complainant Relationship / No Control Stance:

The (presenting concern) is a problem, but there is nothing I can do about it. (this is known in solution-focused work as a “Complainant Relationship” in which people have complaints about a problematic situation, but do not see themselves as part of the solution.)

We will refer to this stance as a “No Control” Stance. It often develops in situations where people are seen as being passive or “co-dependent.” In this situation, helpers can fall into attempting to convince a person that he or she can do something about the problem. People served can experience these efforts as “minimizing” the magnitude of their difficulties and respond with arguments for why change is not possible. The interactional patterns that develop around a “No Control” Stance can inadvertently rigidify that stance.

While we may hope people served see difficulties as a problem, they often hold a “no problem” or a “no control” stance. These stances constrain them from effectively addressing a problem. As workers and families interact around these stances, they can get caught up in problematic interactions that inadvertently rigidify these stances.

COMMON INTERACTIONAL PATTERNS AROUND A “NO PROBLEM” STANCE



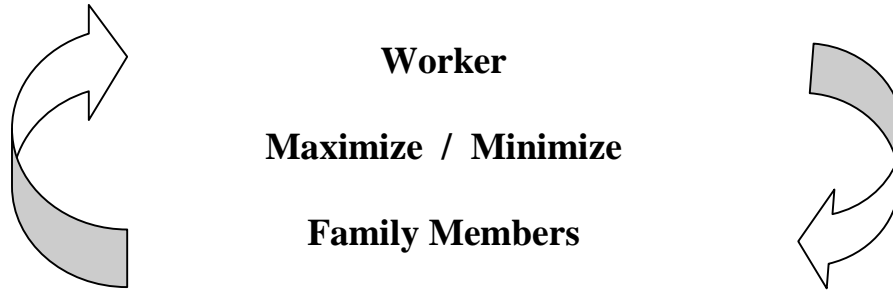
STEPS TO ENGAGE PEOPLE WITH A “NO PROBLEM” STANCE

- 1. First do no harm** - Try to avoid prematurely arguing for change.
- 2. Connection before correction** - Connect with people’s intentions, hopes, values, and preferred view of self.
- 3. Mind the Gap** - Elicit and examine discrepancies between people’s intentions, hopes, values, and preferred view of self and the current effects of their actions.
- 4. Grow the exception into a plan** - Build on this exception to a “No Problem” stance to develop an agreed upon focus for shared work.

Sample Questions in this Process:

- When you slapped your son, what were you hoping to achieve?
- What were you hoping he might learn in that moment? (looking for some positive intention that we can support)
- (if we can find an intention we can support) What does that say about the kind of person you hope he’ll grow up to be?
- What does that say about the kind of parent you hope to be? (looking for a preferred view of self)
- When you slapped him, what do you think it was like for him? (looking for actual effects)
- So, I’m sitting here holding on one hand the hopes you’ve described for your son and the kind of parent you want to be and on the other hand these effects you’ve just described. What’s it like for you to sit with both of those? (examining the discrepancy between intentions and effects)
- What helps you remember your best intentions for both you and your son?
- What helps you face the effects of your actions?
- As you think about your description of feeling bad about this situation, what do you think it tells me about the person you want to be that you’re willing to face feeling bad rather than ignore it or run away from it?
- As you think about the parent you’d rather be with your son, are there times you’ve been more that parent?
- How have you done that? What has helped you to do that?
- Can you think of other times when you’ve been more like that?
- What makes being that way important to you?
- If you could bring more moments like that into your life, would that be a good development?
- Would it be useful for us to focus on helping you do that more?

COMMON INTERACTIONAL PATTERNS AROUND A “NO CONTROL” STANCE



STEPS TO ENGAGE PEOPLE WITH A “NO CONTROL” STANCE

1. First do no Harm

Avoid prematurely arguing for change.

2. Connection before correction

Search for the hopes behind people’s complaints. (What a person despairs against may point to what he/she hopes for.)

3. Taking the first step

Elicit and examine instances of self-efficacy or agency as people are invited to describe their responses to a problematic situation.

4. Growing the exception into a plan

Build on these exceptions to a “No Control” stance to develop an agreed upon focus for shared work.

Sample Questions:

- What is it that bugs you most about this situation?
- What would you like to see differently?
- What makes that hope important to you?
- How have you responded in this situation? (looking for moments that contain bits of hope,
- When your partner went to hit you, how did you respond? You know, what did you do? (looking for responses that contain bits of self-efficacy)
- How did you do that? Then what happened? What else did you do?
- Can you think of other times when you’ve taken similar steps? (connecting with other moments of self-efficacy)
- What were you trying to accomplish there?
- If you could bring more moments like that into your life, would that be a good development?
- Would it be useful for us to focus on helping you do that more?

SOME QUESTIONS TO HELP PEOPLE ENVISION PREFERRED DIRECTIONS IN LIFE

A question From Steve deShazer:

- What needs to happen for us to stop meeting like this?

A question to anticipate positive work together:

- If we were at the end of our work together rather than the beginning and you were looking back and feeling good about what you had accomplished in this time, what would be different in your life?

A question about progress since first session from solution-focused therapy:

- What has been happening since our last meeting (or between when you called and today) that you would like to see continue in your life together?

The miracle question from solution-focused therapy:

- Suppose one night there is a miracle while you are sleeping and the problem that brought you here is solved. What do you suppose you will notice different the next morning that will tell you that the problem is solved?

Questions to elicit the presence in described absence:

(Influenced by Johnella Bird and by Michael White's "absent but implicit")

People often come in focused on what is missing – "She never listens to me anymore. She's always running around and doing whatever she wants. I feel like I'm losing my daughter." When we hear the absence, we can inquire about what could be present.

Possible Responses to "I feel like I'm losing my connection with my daughter."

- When did you notice this connection with your daughter getting lost?
- Do you think there has been a shared connection in your relationship before that happened?
- How did the two of you develop that connection in your relationship?
- Has this connection ever been lost in the past and then found again? How did you do that?
- What would tell you that a renewed sense of connection had been achieved in this relationship? What would have changed?

Questions from Appreciative Inquiry

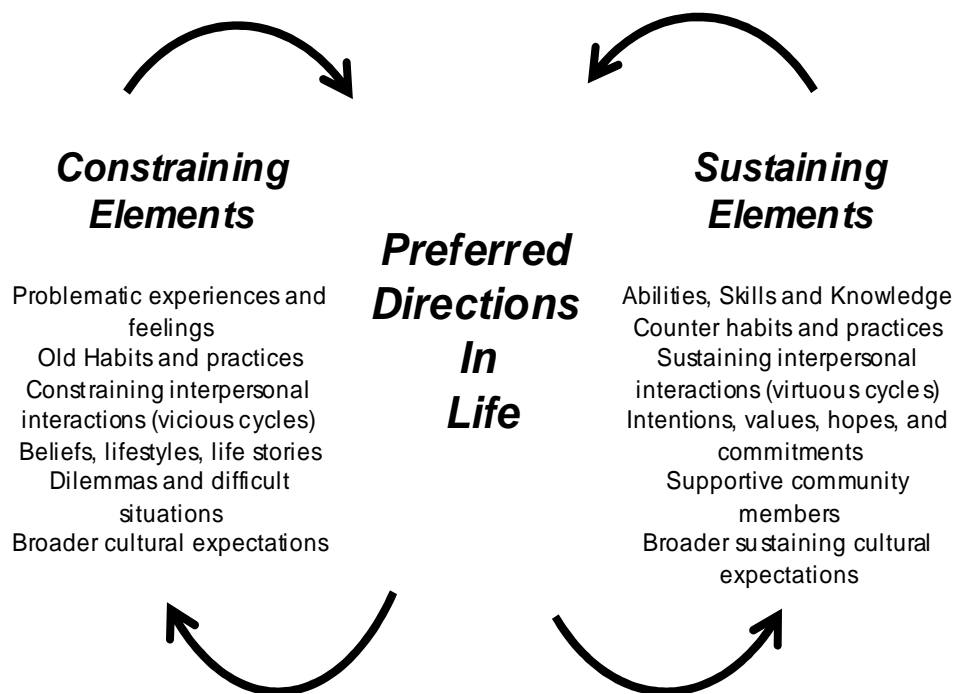
- Everyone has days when they are "off," when they are not "at their best." As you might guess, I am going to need to ask you about that in a bit. But, before I do, can I ask you a little bit about when you are "on," when you are "at your best" as a parent?
- Can you think of a particular moment when you felt good about yourself as a parent? What was happening? What were you doing? How were your children responding?
- What did you particularly value or appreciate about you were in that moment? What makes that important to you? What does that say about your hopes and dreams for your self as a parent? What does it say about what you stand for as a parent?
- Imagine it is a year from now and your relationship with your kids is totally grounded in those things you most value about your parenting. How would you know it? Concretely, what would be happening? If we had a videotape of you in this future moment "at your best," what would we see on the videotape?

Questions from Leahey & Kegan's Moving from complaint to commitment:

- What complaints do you have about this relationship?
- What would you like to see instead?
- If your complaint and your preferred alternative were somehow a message to you about what you really care about, what is important to you, what you really value, what would that message be? (It can be helpful to put the answer in the frame of "I am committed to the value or importance of _____ in our relationship.)
- If your relationship were grounded in those commitments, concretely how would we know? What would we see happening that is different?
- Would that be important to you and why?

IDENTIFYING ELEMENTS THAT CONSTRAIN AND/OR SUSTAIN PREFERRED DIRECTIONS IN LIFE

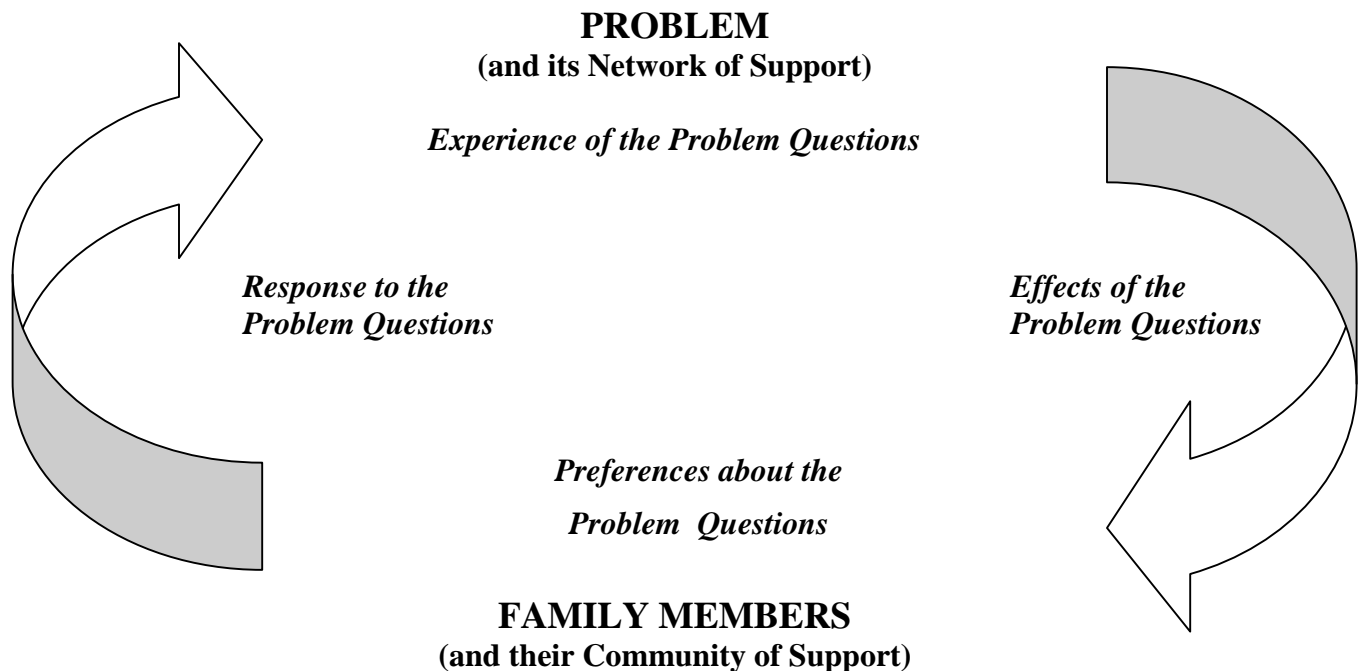
Once we have helped people envision preferred directions in life (future possibilities or preferred ways of coping in the present), we can identify various elements that have been obstacles to preferred lives and/or elements that could be supports for preferred lives. We can identify constraining elements and sustaining elements at individual, interactional, and socio-cultural levels. A focus on both constraining and sustaining elements gives us the flexibility to fit our efforts to family preferences and focus on problems or solutions or both. The figure below lists some possible constraining and sustaining elements.



We can think of people as being in an on-going and modifiable relationship with constraining and sustaining elements and see our work as helping them shift their relationship to constraining elements and enhance their relationship to sustaining elements. If we think about these elements as separate entities, we can use externalizing conversations to examine the influence of the particular element on the life of the person as well as the influence of the person on the life of the particular element. While externalizing conversations can be used with both constraining and sustaining elements, they have typically been used to help people shift their relationship with constraining elements or problems. When people experience themselves as being in a relationship with a problem rather than having or being a problem, they often experience a sense of relief and an increased ability to do something about the problem. Externalizing creates a space between people and problems that enables people to draw on previously obscured abilities, skills, and know-how to revise their relationship with the problem.

A SIMPLE OUTLINE FOR EXTERNALIZING CONVERSATIONS

Externalizing conversations are a powerful helping practice that can be initially difficult to apply. The following outline is an attempt to make these ideas more accessible. Externalizing conversations can be organized around four areas: people's *experience* of the problem, *effects* of the problem, people's *preferences* about the problem's effects, and people's preferred ways of *responding* to the problem.



Purpose of “Experience of the Problem” Questions

To separate the problem from the person through externalizing language and develop a rich understanding of a person's experience of their relationship with that problem.

Purpose of “Effects of the Problem” Questions

To develop a thorough understanding of the effects the problem has had on the person in different aspects and different relationships in their life. While we may learn about mixed effects and possibly beneficial effects, the primary focus is on negative effects of the problem.

Purpose of “Preferences about the Problem” Questions

To invite a person to consider how the problem's effects fit or don't fit with their preferred direction in life. To offer them an opportunity to take a position in relation to the problem, make their intentions and values known, and mobilize emotional energy behind that position.

Purpose of “Response to the Problem” Questions

To elicit and elaborate a story of the person's efforts to develop a different relationship with the problem (which may be to resist it, oppose it, overcome it, cope with it, contain or outgrow it, use it constructively, etc.). To invite the person to give meaning to this story and examine future possibilities as that story unfolds.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS IN EXTERNALIZING CONVERSATIONS

Experience of the Problem

- In what situations is XX most likely to come into your life?
- How do you notice it when XX shows up?
- What's it like having XX in your life?

Effects of the Problem

- When XX comes into your life, what effects does it have on you?
- What has XX gotten you to do that goes against your better judgment?
- What toll has XX taken on your life? (inquire about various aspects of life)
- What effects has XX had on others close to you?
- Has XX created problems for you in relationships? If so, in what ways?
- What does XX try to convince you about yourself? If XX were making decisions for you, where would it take you in your life?
- If XX were to get stronger in your life over the next 6 months, what do you think your life would look like then?

Preferences about the Effects of the Problem

- As you think about the various effects XX has had on your life and relationships, would you say these are positive or negative developments?
- Are those effects something you'd like more of or less of in your life?
- Why is that? In what ways do these effects fit or not fit with your hopes for your life?
- Where would you rather take your life?
- What do those intentions say about who you are and what you stand for in your life?

Response to the Effects of the Problem

- You say that you don't like the effects of XX and that you would like to find a way to keep it in its place. Towards that end, would it be okay if I ask you a little about some of your success in doing that?
- Can you think of a time when you were able to keep XX in its place a bit or keep on in the face of its attempts to hold you back?
- What did you do differently? How did you do that? Who helped you to do that? When or where are you more able to do that? (Go for details.)
- What steps did you take to develop a different relationship to XX? What did you do first? Then what?
- Was this a new development for you or have there been times in the past when you were able to do that?
- What does it mean to you that you've been able to do this?
- What does it tell you about yourself?
- What capacities or abilities or know-how does it show?
- How did you develop those capacities? Who helped you in developing them?
- How would you describe somebody who was able to do that? Does that description fit for you?
- As you continue down this new path, how will that affect other aspects of your life?

RE-THINKING “STRENGTHS”

There is an increasing focus on the idea of building on “client strengths” in mental health and social services. While this is a positive development, we can take conversations about “strengths” even further in two ways:

1. We can elicit “strengths” not as stand alone entities (e.g. he is a good cook, she is a good basketball player), but as elements that sustain people in relation to an agreed upon goal (e.g. elements that support a parent’s “best judgment” with his/her children).
2. We move from an *internal view* of strengths (thinking them as “belonging to people, as being inside them, as being lacking in some people or as being amenable to growth, harvesting, mining or extracting”) to an *intentional view of strengths* (thinking about them as achievements, qualities, skills of living, values, hopes, dreams, beliefs, and activities).

With an *intentional view* of strengths, we can view the Strength as an externalized entity and have richer conversations about the Strength by asking about:

- The ways in which a particular Strength is put into practice.
- The abilities, skills and wisdom that comprise this Strength.
- The history of the development of this Strength.
- The important people in a person’s life who have contributed to this Strength.
- The meaning this Strength holds for that person.
- The intentions, values and beliefs, hopes and dreams that stand behind this Strength.
- What this Strength says about who the person is and what they “stand for” in their life.

Sample questions to externalize the “Serenity” as a strength described by a mother of a challenging adolescent:

- Can you tell me more about this Serenity?
- If Serenity was not a quality that you have, but something you do, what are the skills that go into it? What, for you, are the practices of Serenity?
- How did you develop those practices?
- How would you like to use Serenity in your life?
- Why is it important for you to use it in that way?
- What values are important here?
- When you think of those values, what hopes or dreams do they reflect?
- What do those hopes and dreams say about what you are committed to or what you stand for in your life?
- As you think back across your life, who do you think might particularly appreciate your pursuit of Serenity in the face of your son’s provocations?
- How have those people contributed to your development of Serenity?
- If they could witness your practice of Serenity, what do you think it would tell them about you?

DEVELOPING COMMUNITIES OF SUPPORT FOR THE ENACTMENT OF PREFERRED LIVES

Problems can disconnect people from important others in their lives. When this happens, problems often become stronger and people lose sight of aspects of their life outside the influence of problems. If problems gain influence when people are disconnected from others, then helping people reconnect to a supportive community can assist them in life. The development of a community of support can counteract the isolating effects of problems and help people stay in touch with alternative, preferred versions of who they are in their life. There are a variety of ways in which we can help people connect to potentially important communities of support.

We can use re-remembering conversations as a questioning process to help people evoke and hold the presence of important others in their heads and hearts. Re-remembering conversations build a sense of solidarity with important others or “allies” in order to help people better resist the influence of problems and pursue preferred directions in life. It is important that we think broadly and creatively in the process of identifying potential allies. We can draw on people who have been important to persons served in the past as well as the present. We can evoke important people who have passed away. Potential allies do not have to be directly known in order to be significant in people’s lives. They can be authors, characters in books or movies or comics, musicians, sports figures, or celebrities who are admired by persons served. Allies also do not have to be people. They may be imaginary friends, important toys or favorite pets. Re-remembering conversations that draw on important spiritual figures can lead to poignant and powerful conversations.

We can also use reflecting teams and witnessing practices to develop actual audiences that are invited to listen in on a helping conversation and then offer reflections about what it was like to hear the emerging alternative story. This process follows a very structured and pre-designed format. The audience can consist of people who are introduced to family members, particularly for this purpose or people who are already known to them. Introduced audiences have historically consisted of various professionals, but can also involve other concerned non-professional parties (e.g. other people who have struggled with similar issues and are willing to support a particular family member). Known audiences consist of members of a person’s existing community who are asked to listen and acknowledge a story that is told. These can be set up informally (e.g. a couple in which one member is interviewed and the other is asked to reflect upon what they have heard) or formally (e.g. members of a person’s community are invited to listen to a particular therapeutic conversation and are then interviewed to elicit their reflections).

Finally, we can focus our helping efforts on actively assisting people served to identify, constructively utilize and over time sustain a community of allies.

ONE OUTLINE FOR RE-MEMBERING CONVERSATIONS

The following framework outlines four broad steps in re-membering conversations and offers a few sample questions to help in each step.

1. Identify people or beings (alive or dead, real or imagined) in the person's past or present who would could serve as allies, recognizing, appreciating and standing in support of the person's preferred response to problems or pursuit of preferred directions in life. Get details of that relationship and its importance to both the person and their ally.
 - As you think back across your life, who stands out someone who would be likely to recognize and appreciate your efforts to pull your life together in the face of the difficulties you've described?
 - Can you tell me a little bit about your relationship with X? How has X been important to you in your life? What has it meant to you to have X in your life? How might you have been important to X in her life?
2. Find specific times when the ally witnessed important differences in the person's life. Elicit a detailed story of those events (e.g. who, what, where, when, and how) and their meaning through the ally's perspective.
 - What does X know about you or what has X witnessed you doing that would tell her that this commitment is important to you? (in great detail)
 - What do you think X saw in you in that moment and what might X have particularly appreciated about how you responded in that moment? How do you think X's witnessing of this commitment on your part may have touched her life?
3. Weave together contributions the ally has made to the person's life and possible contributions the person has made to the ally's life. Explore the effects of these reciprocal contributions and their respective implications for the person's identity.
 - How has knowing X touched your life? What how has she contributed to your life? What effects has that had on you?
 - In the situation you described, what do you think X might have most appreciated about how you responded to it? What do you think that tells X about you? In what ways might parts of that description of you fit for you? What's it like to view yourself in that way?
 - Why do you think X showed so much interest in you? What do you think your time together might have meant for her? What might you have contributed to her life? What effects might you guess that could have had on her life?
 - What do you think she might have appreciated about your contribution to her life? What difference might that have made for her? As you think about what she's gotten from knowing you, what might that suggest about the person you are?
4. Link the conversation about past events back to the present situation and to future possibilities. Attempt to bring the ally's presence more into the person's current life to support the person in continuing to develop preferred directions in life.
 - If X was somehow here now and listening to our conversation, what do you think she might be thinking about it? What would it tell her about you?
 - What's it like for you to think about X's response? What's it like for you to be invoking her presence here? What could help you to hold onto her presence in your life?

SOME USEFUL REFERENCES

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