

Tips for Improving a Supportive Helper-Helpee Relationship

Issues to focus on when responding to a helpee in a supportive relationship include:

If your helpee is displaying anxiety:

What is your helpee anxious about?

What situations bother your helpee?

Is this a reaction your helpee has been having for a while, or is it a new one?

Did some particular incident set these feelings off?

Can your helpee remember having felt this way before?

What other feelings accompany the anxiety?

Does your helpee have any idea why the anxious feelings have occurred?

How does the anxiety get in the way now?

What purpose does the anxiety serve?

In what ways does it protect your helpee?

Is the anxiety related to you or to the counseling session? Is it related to the subject matter? All of the above?

Is your helpee scared of being scared? Is your helpee frightened by the anxiety?

What does your helpee imagine would happen if the feelings were let go?

If your helpee gave the anxiety a voice, what would it say?

If your helpee is hurt:

What situations cause your helpee to end up being hurt?

Does this happen with specific people?

Is it an angry or a sad hurt?

When your helpee is hurt, what is the typical response?

How do others get the power to hurt your helpee?

How does your helpee want others to respond?

When your helpee responds inappropriately, how does it feel?

Did your helpee anticipate being hurt before he entered the problematic relationship?

Are there ways he contributed or set up being hurt?

How does your helpee let others know that he has been hurt?

Has your helpee been hurt badly in the past?

Does one incident stick out in your helpee's mind as being particularly painful?

If so, what were the consequences for your helpee then?

What needs of your helpee are not being met?

If your helpee is experiencing guilt:

What does your helpee feel guilty about?

Is it one particular thing that happened or a lot of things?

Is your helpee afraid somebody will find out?

What does your helpee think would happen if someone found out?

How would your helpee react?

When your helpee felt guilty before, how was it handled?

Who taught your helpee to feel guilty in this kind of situation?

Does it seem that your helpee gave others the power to make her feel guilty?

What does it mean, in terms of how your helpee sees herself, when she feels guilty?

What would your helpee really like to say or do when responding with guilt?

What consequences does your helpee anticipate?

Is your helpee's guilt relevant, or is it carried over from an earlier period?

If your helpee is discussing affection:

What fears does your helpee have about being close to others?

Is the difficulty in giving affection, receiving it, or both?

How has your helpee handled the need for affection in the past? How has loneliness been handled?

How would your helpee like people to show their affection?

Have there been times in your helpee's life when affection was really needed and it didn't come?

In retrospect, can your helpee see any reason why he didn't get affection? Was part of it his inability to respond?

Does your helpee make it difficult for others to respond warmly and affectionately to him?

Does your helpee see parts of himself as being unlovable?

If so, how did your helpee learn that?

How does your helpee let others know that he needs them to care?

Does your helpee experience the ambivalence of being afraid of affection and wanting it at the same time?

If your helpee is angry:

Does your helpee feel angry all the time, or just in specific situations?

What is it that makes your helpee angry?

How does your helpee express anger—physically, verbally, or by holding it inside?

What value judgment does your helpee put on being angry?

Does the anger get displaced to relatively unimportant situations?

With whom is your helpee angry? Why?

How does your helpee deal with other people's anger?

What have been the consequences of your helpee's anger in the past?

When people important in your helpee's life fight with each other angrily, what does your helpee imagine would happen?

Is your helpee afraid the anger will destroy, or is your helpee afraid the anger will have no impact?