

Helping parents change – challenging skills

This is the ‘developing understanding’ skills stage of helping parents

- The process of helping is almost always concerned with enabling parents to change their constructions and behaviour.
- A clear and shared understanding may not be possible without the parents changing their constructs.
- The aim is usually to develop more useful models for understanding difficulties.
- Change is not easy and may be particularly difficult where fundamental and important constructions are involved.
- The idea of challenging refers to the process of inviting parents to think differently.
- Attempts to change a person will almost always involve a degree of threat, as it questions the person’s beliefs and can easily be seen as critical.
- Effective challenging is, therefore, dependent upon the quality and strength of the relationship between the helper and parent.
- Challenging can only be done effectively from the basis of a clear understanding of the parent’s problems.
- Methods of change may vary from being indirect and gentle to direct and confrontational.

Methods

- Simply exploring problems (e.g. by asking questions) will enable change, by facilitating clarity at the very least.
- Providing new information.
- Clearly summarising the parent’s constructions.
- Advanced empathy: saying what the person is implying or not expressing clearly, or connecting ideas that the parent has failed to put together.
- Self-disclosure: helper disclosing self-information for comparison with parent’s views.
- Immediacy: discussing the relationship between the parent and helper as a way of challenging views.
- Sharing the notion of there always being alternative constructions.
- By explicitly negotiating hypothesis testing situations, with the helper enabling them to generate alternative views.
- Testing might include eliciting and discussion of the views of others (e.g. helper, child, other parent), observations, or experimenting.
- Disputing or arguing against parents’ views via logic, contradictions or inconsistencies in his/her argument, or by presenting contradictory evidence.
- Role-play.

Style and attitude of the helper when challenging

- With respect for the parent and his/her views.
- With empathy or a clear understanding of the parent’s views.
- For good reason and for the benefit of the parent.
- Expressed as clearly, concisely and specifically as possible.
- Carefully and gently at parent’s pace.
- Tentatively and invitationally.
- In partnership with parent.
- With explicit agreement to question and dispute.
- Acknowledging that there are always different viewpoints.
- Positively; acknowledging strengths, not weakness.

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- Adapted from: Davis, H., Day, C., and Bidmead, C., (2002) *Working in Partnership with Parents*. London: Pearson Education.
- See also: Tasks and Skills of the Helping Process.