



Module Nine: Prevent Helper Stress and Burnout

This week I want to give a model for replacing the behavior you likely currently use for balancing yourself when you are experiencing helper stress and burnout. While I don't make any assumptions about your work, many who purchase this eCourse are social workers, psychologists, counselors, teachers and managers. Each of those professions requires the helper to provide help to clients and students. Even if you are not in the helping professions, it is likely you function in a helper role. Any time you are in a situation helping others, you are functioning in a helper role and therefore susceptible to helper stress and burnout.

Remember when we talked about the Quality World in Lesson 5? Well, one of things I didn't discuss is that we all have Quality World pictures of ourselves as our best possible self. There is no room for mediocre pictures in our Quality World. So when we are functioning in the role of helper, we already have a Quality World picture of ourselves as an awesome, effective helper.

Whenever you are functioning as a helper, you compare your effectiveness in the situation with the picture of perfection you have in your Quality World. Sometimes, you evaluate your performance as a match to your Quality World picture. When you work effectively to help your helpee make more responsible decisions, then you feel competent and effective as a helper.

But what happens some days when you evaluate your effectiveness and you fall short of your expectations? Then you don't feel so good. Remember a time when you really tried to help someone and they just didn't listen. You probably spent a lot of time trying to help him or her make better decisions, and whatever you did or said didn't work. The person you were trying to help continued to do things the same ineffective way.

When this happens, helpers tend to take it personally. If only I were more skilled . . . If only I knew more . . . If only I had more experience with this problem . . . Every time we blame ourselves for not being good enough to handle our client's problems, we are taking responsibility for things we have no responsibility for.

The only thing we can ever give another person is information. Information is always neutral. It is up to the person with whom you share the information how to determine its value. If you tell

most people it is raining, they value that negatively. However, if you tell people in a draught it is raining, they will be happy and excited.

So the goals for the helper when helping people are to provide neutral information, to ask self-evaluation questions and to create a need-satisfying environment.

Here is a self-evaluation question for you: "Whose behavior can you control?" Of course everyone knows the answer is only your own. However, what do we spend our whole lives doing? Trying to change other people.

When you measure your worth as a helper against the behavior your helpee chooses, it is a recipe for disaster. You can't control what other people do and Choice Theory tells us that every person chooses the best behavior they have at any point in time to get something they want. If your helpee continues to choose behavior you wish he or she wouldn't, that doesn't mean you are a bad helper. It simply means your helpee believes it's the best behavior he or she has in that moment to get what he or she wants. When your helpee doesn't do what you think is best, it's not personal. It really has nothing to do with you. You and your helpee simply have a difference of opinion about what is best. And frankly, whose opinion should matter most? Naturally, it should be the person's whose life will be affected by the choice--your helpee's.

So if you don't measure your worth as a helper by what your helpee chooses to do, then what should you use to measure? I suggest using something over which you have total control. What is that? You! Instead of using your helpee's behavior, why not use yours? Examine how well you did creating a need-satisfying environment. That's your new measurement tool for assessing how effective you are as a helper.

Here are the questions to ask yourself: Here are the questions to ask yourself:

Survival Need: Did I create a safe space for my helpee? Did my helpee feel safe with me?

Love & Belonging Need: Did I create a connection with my helpee? Does he or she know I care? Does my helpee know I like him or her and have something in common with him?

Power Need: Did I let my helpee know how important she is? Did I listen intently and purposefully? Did I respect my helpee?

Freedom Need: Did I give my helpee at least three choices of behavior, e.g. "You can do it exactly the same, better or worse"? Did I give my helpee as much independence as he can responsibly manage? Did I engage my helpee's creativity?

Fun Need? Was I having any fun and/or learning with my helpee?

These questions will help you assess exactly what you are in control of and responsible for--the environment you create in the relationship between you and your helpee. If you can answer yes to all those questions, then you can comfortably feel good about your skills and ability as a

helper. You can attain and maintain that particular Quality World picture of yourself as an effective helper.

What's the good news about answering "no" to any of these questions? That's right! You can go back and change it. When you realize your helpee wasn't feeling particularly important, you can focus on creating that perception within your relationship. If you recognize your helpee wasn't feeling particularly connected to you, then you can go back and work on building your relationship.

You can maintain your Quality World picture of yourself as an effective helper when you begin to measure the correct variable. Stop looking for your helpees to validate that you doing a good job and begin to self-evaluate the things of which you are in control. Did you create a need-satisfying environment? Did you ask effective self-evaluation questions? Did you provide neutral information?

Providing neutral information is about simply, matter-of-factly providing your helpees with information without giving any indication of how you think he or she should value that information. If you want to give your opinion about what you would do in a similar situation and your client wants that information, it's all right to provide your opinion, but whenever you do, remember that just because it would be your choice does not mean it should be the choice of your helpee.

Asking self-evaluation questions will be explored in much greater detail in our lessons about reality therapy. We begin that topic in two weeks and I'm looking forward to it.

Conclusion:

Your assignment this week is to think of a time when you didn't have the effect you wanted in a situation where you were trying to help another person. Perhaps you gave advice and they didn't take it or you spent a great deal of time patiently asking Socratic questions trying to lead him or her to a better answer. You became frustrated and doubted your ability to be an effective helper.

Then complete the questions on [vj g"J gr gt"Ugrh/Gxcnvcvqp"y qtmij gg0](#)

Use these questions every time you are feeling ineffective or less than stellar in your helping skills. If your answer to all questions is positive, then you are awesome! If you have some "no" answers, then go back and attempt to correct the situation. Stay focused on the areas over which you control. Do not take helpee behavior personally.