NVR 2 L8

Support Without Judgment, A Resource for Shifting the Dialog

This resource comes from a place of curiosity and life-long learning. The hope is to provide insight into how dialogue can be powerfully changed.

In the natural flow of conversation, "you" and "I" are organically present. We speak to each other without considering that those 2 little words can be received differently depending on the situation. When observing red and yellow flags in a relationship with a loved one, there are natural questions – "why do you stay?" "I think you should leave." "Don't you see what s/he is doing to you?"

Notice the consistent presence of those 2 little words. The statements originate from a place of love and concern. Yet are they received with love or are they received as an attack or as judgment? Words have power. In these moments, there is risk. The statement has been made. Defense mode to protect self has been triggered and the conversation becomes a push and pull of who's right. The risk is feeling unsupported, attacked and judged by a loved one.

Shifting from judgment into genuine support happens when the existing words are replaced and old habits in conversation are retrained. This makes room for new words and new habits. The mind is a muscle and will take practice and patience to retrain it. Instructing becomes vulnerable questioning, advice shifts to curiosity. It is a tool allowing a shift in the dialog. The ability to share observations without expectation and asking open questions that let a loved one find their own footing.

Following are a few examples of "automatic response" questions and statements along with options for reframing them by bringing permission and curiosity into the dialog. These examples are guides. Everyone speaks uniquely. Finding words that are true to your voice is what gives them power.

A reaction question:
"Why don't you just leave?"
The dialog shift:
"If there is any thought of leaving, what would be the first step?"

A reaction question:
"Why do you pay for everything?"
The dialog shift:
"I'd like permission to share an observation. Have you noticed how many times money comes up in our conversations?"

A reaction statement:
"I really think this is an unhealthy relationship."
The dialog shift:
"After hearing your concerns, do you feel safe in this relationship?"

A reaction statement:
"You're obviously not happy."
The dialog shift:
"What brings you the most happiness right now?"

A reaction question:
"Why would you love someone who clearly doesn't love you?"
The dialog shift:
"What does true love look like for you?

When situations happen and words are hard to find in the moment, there is a simple exercise that can be a life saver: worst case scenario, best case scenario.

Beginning with the worst names any and all negative possibilities: **"what's the worst thing that can happen when things don't change?"** List out the possibilities. Land on the very worst one: **"what will life look like in this situation?"** The next question becomes **"is that acceptable?"** Acknowledge the response and leave it where it is.

Then shift to the best case: **"what's the best thing that can happen when things change?"** Explore the possibilities and land on the very best one: **"what will life will be like when that happens?" "Is that what's wanted?"** Acknowledge the response.

Set them side by side – The #1 worst and the #1 best: **"which is preferred?"** A preferred choice has been named, a direction has been chosen and actions can be defined.

"For this choice to become a reality, what's the first step that needs to be taken?"

Ending with the opportunity of choice shows there are possibilities outside of existing daily reality.