

Tips for Being a Great Partner

Embrace the Silence

Above all else, your job is to help your friend tell their stories. Our instinct is often to jump in when someone pauses or stops talking to show that we're still engaged. But if you sit in these silences, oftentimes the storyteller will continue talking and go deeper into what matters about the story.

Silence can be your friend – so, try just letting these moments happen. You can even say something like “Go on” or “Tell me more” to encourage them to dig deeper.

Ask Open-Ended Questions

Finding your WHY is a deeply personal endeavor. While a partner is essential to the process, they cannot lead someone else to their WHY. It takes the two of you working together in a team.

Asking open-ended questions allows your storyteller to dig deeper into the meaning behind their words. Questions like “What about that story stuck with you?” and “How did you feel after that happened?” give the storyteller space to continue without pushing them in any one direction.

As you go through the process, you may form a theory about your partner's WHY. But if you only ask questions that affirm your theory, you may lead them down a path that's not theirs. Even a simple question like - “Did it make you feel angry when that happened?” – can affect the way a storyteller's path.

As a rule of thumb, if it can be answered by “yes” or “no”, it's probably not open-ended.

Avoid Asking 'Why' Questions

This may seem counterintuitive since the storyteller is trying to find their WHY. But asking questions that start with the word 'why' can actually be counterproductive.

“Why questions’ often elicit emotional responses. This can derail a story or even change how the storyteller feels in the moment. Whereas if you start your questions with ‘What’ and ‘How’, you'll often get more rational answers that will allow you to dig deeper into the story.

For instance, imagine asking a teenager - “Why were you home so late?” You'll likely get an emotional or even defensive reply. Imagine if instead, you asked “What happened that meant you were home so late?”, it invites them to share the information in a rational way, and ultimately will help you find out what happened.

Make Sure They Feel Comfortable

Your partner chose you because they trust you. Above everything else, your job is to make them feel safe and heard. Whatever you need to do to guarantee that, go for it.

And beyond that... good luck!



Questions to Help You Dig Deeper

- When that happened, how did it make you feel?
- Who else was involved in this story and how did they make a difference to you?
- What is it about this experience that you absolutely loved?
- You've probably felt this same feeling before. What is it about this particular story that makes it special?
- How did this experience affect you and who you've become?
- What was the lesson you learned from that experience that you still carry with you today?
- Tell me what you meant when you said, "It really filled me up."
(Or whatever general statement the storyteller might make.)
- You say what happened made you feel disappointed (or sad or joyful or suspicious). But you've probably felt that way before. Describe how this particular feeling was so different that it still comes to mind all these years later.
- Of all the stories you could have shared with me, what makes this one so special?

Story #1

Details & Context

Feelings & Significance

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What themes emerged? (e.g. Taking care of others, Feeling valued, Belonging)

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Story #2

Details & Context

Feelings & Significance

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What themes emerged? (e.g. Taking care of others, Feeling valued, Belonging)

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Story #3

Details & Context

Feelings & Significance

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What themes emerged? (e.g. Taking care of others, Feeling valued, Belonging)

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Story #4

Details & Context

Feelings & Significance

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What themes emerged? (e.g. Taking care of others, Feeling valued, Belonging)

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Story #5

Details & Context

Feelings & Significance

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What themes emerged? (e.g. Taking care of others, Feeling valued, Belonging)

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Primary Themes

Looking back to all of the stories shared, what are your storyteller's main themes?

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