

How to Work with Clients Who Blame

Bonus 2:

An Interactive Strategy to Help Couples Detach From Blame

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An Interactive Strategy to Help Couples Detach From Blame

Dr. Buczynski: We've seen examples throughout this program of how important it is to help our clients investigate the emotions that often lay just beneath their blaming tendency.

Now doing this can be tricky in general. But it can be especially challenging when you're working with blame within *couples*. Because often, each partner might be trying to keep difficult emotions tucked away, hidden from each other.

So how can we get them to see the emotions that they need to help one another with?

Dr. Ellyn Bader has an interactive technique designed to help couples (and even individual clients) turn the focus of change onto themselves, instead of on someone else.

Ellyn explains . . .

Dr. Bader: I keep a white board in my office. I'll get up to the white board and say, "Every person, and this is everybody - in therapy, not in therapy, *everybody* - has things we do that are ineffective when we're under stress. I'll give some examples, "they might be we blame, we yell, we get sarcastic, we criticize, we withdraw, we run away." I'll say, "Let's brainstorm a list of all the ineffective things *people* do. We're not talking about *you* yet - we're just talking about *people*. So, let's brainstorm a list of all the ineffective things you can think of that *people* do when they're under stress." I get a big, long list on my board.

"Let's also brainstorm a list of effective things people can do when they're triggered or under stress."

Then I'll say, "Let's also brainstorm a list of effective things people can do when they're triggered or under stress." I give some examples like, "You can be curious. You can ask

questions. You can take a deep breath. You can ask for a time out. You can be empathic." I give some examples then I'll say, "Let's brainstorm as long of a list that we can think of, of all the effective things people can do when they're under stress."

Dr. Buczynski: Then Ellyn gives her clients a handout with 3 concentric circles on it - there are two layers surrounding a core.

Now in the layer surrounding the core, she asks her clients to write down some of the common ineffective coping mechanisms from the list that they use.

Then in the outer layer they write down a few strategies they could use that might be even more effective than their current strategies.

And finally, Ellyn uses this exercise to point out that we all have a vulnerable core. And most of us have a protective layer of ineffective strategies that surround it.

But, we also have an outer layer of healthier strategies - if only we could stretch ourselves into that layer.

I'll let Ellyn explain a bit more.

Dr. Bader: For example, when you feel fear, you may get aggressive, angry, or blaming. Let's spend some time talking about the vulnerable feelings that are hard for *you* personally to show or share."

What I've done indirectly is make it about *people* first, not about *them*.

I've been up-front about my own things that *I* do. I'm getting down in black and white, so that they can actually by the time we're done with this, take it home and put it on a mirror, a refrigerator, or on their desk or whatever – somewhere they can look at it. I'm indirectly exposing the vulnerability they're afraid of.

"What I've done indirectly is make it about *people* first, not about *them*."

Dr. Buczynski: So Ellyn's technique can be **uniquely effective in two ways:**

1. It helps make it feel safe enough for clients to explore their vulnerabilities in the first place.
2. It empowers clients to start being able to replace blame with more effective ways of coping and being in relationship.

Now to make it even easier for you to apply this in *your* work, we've created a handout of Ellyn's concentric circle exercise. Check it out, it's included right here in the bonus section.

In the next bonus, we'll go step by step with Peter Fonagy to see how he helps restore a blamer's ability to mentalize.

I'll see you there.