

The Peregrine Centre Rural Mental Health Podcast

Episode 32. Speedbumps: In the Middle

Speaker Key:

RS Rebecca Sng

MD Mark Donovan

00:00:00

Intro Hello. I'm Dr Rebecca Sng, director of The Peregrine Centre. As we begin this episode of The Peregrine Rural Mental Health podcast, please join me in stopping to consider the land beneath your feet, wherever you might be listening from today. Let's take a moment together to acknowledge the traditional owners of that land. We pay our deepest respects to the elders of the past, those of the present, and the emerging elders of tomorrow. The Peregrine Rural Mental Health podcast is brought to you as part of our rural mental health partnership with New South Wales Health.

RS Hello, everybody, and welcome to this episode of the Peregrine Rural Mental Health Podcast. Today, we're continuing our miniseries called Speed Bumps, or challenges that commonly come up in different stages of therapy. So, I'm very happy to welcome our guest for today. Maybe I'll get you to introduce yourself.

MD Sure. I'm Mark Donovan. I'm a clinical psychologist, and I've had the privilege of doing work with clients, people that have come along with difficulties, for 30-odd years, as well as teaching and training others in a few different universities. So, I've had lots of opportunities to hit lots of speed humps, Rebecca. Many, many speed humps.

00:01:24

RS Familiar, familiar territory.

MD It is very familiar territory, yes.

RS So, today we're going to talk about, in the middle of therapy. We all agree that therapy often has a beginning, a middle, and an end. And I think this is the place, personally, where it's very easy to let your structure disappear because you're in the middle of therapy. You're not thinking about forms and writing back to GPs and all that kind of stuff. You're in the midst of the work.

So, I'm starting with this question for all our guests, and it's a big question, which is, what's the point of putting structure into your therapy? Why don't we just play it by ear and see how we go?

MD Look, there will be occasions when you get away with it. And your client would direct you in such a way that you're able to make helpful, meaningful change for them through the process. But they probably wouldn't be coming in for help if that was going to be the case. So, probably more often than not, if you just let it play out and you follow their lead, they'll lead you to the place that they're stuck in, and they'll keep you there, and you'll remain there.

00:02:34

And you'll have nice conversations, potentially, and you'll have a nice chat. They might feel a bit better after the session because you've had a nice chat. You've listened to them. They feel listened to. But maybe things aren't really going to be that different in their life. They're still stuck in the same patterns.

RS Right. I get kind of a picture in my mind of a well-worn track or a rut.

MD Yes, exactly.

RS Where people are just going round and round in circles, and they ask for your help. But what can happen is you get pulled into that track or to that rut.

MD Yes. And you just do the laps with them. And it feels nicer for them because you're there beside them as they walk around the same path. So it is a little different. And clients will often be appreciative. If you ask them, is this helpful, they'll say, yes, yes, it is.

RS Because they feel better. For a bit.

MD Yes, for a bit.

RS And that is true, that some people are not yet ready to walk out of the rut or to change track. That's fair enough. But there are people who are ready, and they just don't really know how to get unstuck.

MD Yes.

00:03:40

RS And so, structure is one way to kind of see if we can get people having a different conversation than the one that they've had.

MD Exactly.

RS That makes a lot of sense to me. Okay. So, I'm going to throw some common scenarios at you, things that come up for people as they're in the midst of therapy. The first one is kind of a two-parter. I've tried to engage this person, and they do seem happy to chat, but I can't seem to get them to open up, in inverted commas. And the second part is, what if I have a good rapport, but I don't seem to be making good progress with this person?

MD Well, I guess it points perhaps to your idea that they don't yet know how to get out of this rut, and that in terms of it's a nice chat, and they find it helpful, but things aren't changing. And there could be a number of reasons. So, one thing that I always think back for myself is, okay, what are we trying to do here? What is the goal? What are we trying to achieve together?

And then part of that would be, oh, have I explained this, or have I talked about this with my client, the person I'm trying to work with? Do they know this is what we're trying to do together? And if the answer is yes and yes, okay, good, great. That bit's been covered. And if not, then do those things. Clarify, what are we trying to achieve together?

And so that might be a conversation in the work itself, where you would notice.

It'd be like, oh, I'm aware that our conversation, whatever's happening, it could be that it feels like we're having similar conversations each time we meet.

00:05:21

And I'm wondering whether this is achieving what you need and what you want to achieve through our work together. And then that would be your sort of segue way into, would it be okay if we just checked in on terms of those goals of what it is we are trying to achieve together? So, you might have that conversation.

RS And of course, psychologists, we love the word goals, because that's how we all train. But you don't have to call them goals.

MD No, no.

RS You can call them things you want to achieve or this is what you wanted to get out of the work, or the change you were hoping to see, or whatever you want to call it.

MD Exactly. Yes.

RS Okay. So, maybe it's a sign that, in fact, we don't have a very good shared understanding about the issues and what we're going to do to try and change those issues.

MD Yes. Yes.

RS Okay. And so, if we don't have that, to work together to get that shared understanding, that's important. But also, as you said, to check, is the work that we're doing together in line with the shared understanding?

00:06:24

MD I always like, if possible, to draw stuff or write stuff, so that there's some visual representation of where we're headed and how we're going to get there.

RS Yes. And if your client is not a reader or something like that, or you've been working with a child, for instance...

MD Pictures.

RS Pictures. You could use toys, you could draw it in the sand, whatever. There are different ways to explain it.

MD Yes. The whole idea of sharing is to try and make it feel doable, so that the person you're working with has a sense of, oh, maybe these changes are possible, because that doesn't seem too bad, and it doesn't seem too hard. And to recreate hopefulness.

RS Right, yes. That mechanism of change, I know that sounds like a fancy term, but how is it going to change? If we do this, then this will have this consequence, blah, blah, which I have CBT in my head for that one, which I don't even use that much. But that kind of idea of, okay, if we were to do this, we expect that this might happen.

I agree with you. That creates a hope, doesn't it, like, oh, okay, you sort of get

me. You seem to sort of get what's going on, and your suggestion seems based on the experience of other people, where they did this thing, and it sounded helpful.

00:07:47

MD Yes. Look, certainly, my experience has been that if at the point that I have a sense that as a team, me and this other person that have just potentially met recently, that we've got a sense of what's the issue here? What is the problem we're trying to work through? What's the thing? And that my sense of that matches their sense of that. So I've shared it, and they've said, yes, that's it. Okay. So that feels like first base.

Great. And then, if we then also... Because, to me, for that person, often feeling understood is like, oh, this makes sense. That's why I'm having these difficulties, is because of these things happened in my past that led to this, which resulted in this. And I do this stuff because it makes me feel a bit better in the short term, but it doesn't really help me out in the longer term. So the story makes sense.

RS Yes. And this is the kind of stuff that I think people often do in the first session, right? And then they put it away in a drawer and they never really talk about it again. That's an exaggeration. But it's so easy for that to fall off the agenda.

MD Yes. Exactly. Yes.

RS And one of the things that can really derail it is this idea about a new crisis every week, that somebody comes in and you say, what would you like to talk about this week, and they say, well, it's not about the shared understanding that's in the drawing. What I'd like to talk about is how my son is driving me crazy.

00:09:16

MD Here's this week's version of it, or here's another issue of my life. Again, they feel a bit better at the end of the session because you've listened to them. They feel heard. That's nice. But then there's the next one next week. So I guess, as the practitioner, I would be trying to helpfully notice. And so, I would just notice a pattern.

And I'd try and raise that, and I'd just be like, oh, it's interesting. I'm just noticing that today it seems that our focus could be about your son, and I'm aware that last week, our focus was this, and the previous week that. And I'm just wondering how this fits. I remember back when we first started, we were talking about these as the things that were important to you and these were the changes you were hoping to make. And I'm wondering, does it feel like we're making progress towards that when we touch on different issues every week? And so, to share that dilemma.

RS Yes. That's interesting, isn't it, because I think that's such a good takeaway, that when something is happening, the first thing is to notice it's happening. And the second thing is, if it's appropriate to raise it with the person that you're working with and say, what do you think about this? Is this getting you towards the thing that you want to approach, or is there something that we feel is off the track?

And I think that I'm thinking of about those models which are single-session models, where even halfway through the session, you're supposed to ask this question, is this the most useful thing to be talking about today?

00:10:54

I guess if you did it every session and people were expecting it, it doesn't sound like a rebuke or a criticism. It just sounds like, okay, I'm just checking in. Are we on track with the thing? And it really leads me back to this idea about what's the point of structure.

I think one of the points of structure is efficiency, or kind of travelling as fast as we can, not rushing, but this idea that we're getting somewhere, because actually, the experience of getting somewhere is important, isn't it, because when people feel like they're not getting somewhere, they don't come back. Usually, that's what people... That's what I would do.

And so, I wonder if this sense of progress and making progress is important particularly in the middle section of therapy.

MD Yes. And so, a nice summary in terms of noticing it, raising it. And there's lots of different ways of doing that.

RS Why do you think people hesitate to do that?

MD Well, it feels like most people who work in the helping profession are kind, helpful people who want to be caring. Yes. And it feels that you don't want to impose on the client or the person you're trying to work with, that you don't want to interrupt them because it would be rude to interrupt them. And sometimes, for certain people, they may just have a bit of a tendency to talk a lot.

00:12:26

And so, there isn't an opening to raise it. And you look at your clock, thinking, oh, gosh, in a minute now I'll jump in, but all of a sudden then it's like, I've only got five minutes to go. Next time, I'll do it.

RS Yes, we've all had those conversations, right? Yes. So, maybe they don't leave any space for you. Maybe this is the doorknob conversation which, it seems very emotional, but it's only five minutes to go before the end of your time. Those kinds of things. You've raised an important thing, which is interrupting, which sounds scary, right? It sounds like the opposite of what you'd expect of a therapist.

MD Yes, of being caring and understanding and listening.

RS Yes. But interrupting, I think, is a bit of a therapeutic skill, isn't it?

MD Sure.

RS Because of this issue about being in the rut, the easy automatic track that people can get on. It really brings me to a much broader question, which is, how do you balance the guiding of a session with that kind of person-centric, person-led approach? It's tricky, isn't it?

MD Yes. At any time, you kind of tune in because you're trying to tune into your client to understand what they're describing and listening and making sense of that, at the same time keeping in mind what it is the work's about, having a sense of where you're trying to get to. And so, you want to listen, and we're trained to do that in terms of that sort of reflective listening, and you don't want to just end up on the path, on the rut, stuck in the rut.

00:14:02

Yes. And look, some people find it easier to interrupt. Rebecca, I wasn't one of those people. I can tell you, early in my career, I was a shocker for just being a really nice person.

RS That does not surprise me at all, Mark, because you are a very nice person. And I can imagine.

MD And I'm still probably a bit nice, and even as a nice person, I've learnt the skill of being able to pause and stop a session. And sometimes it's something you can even agree in the first session.

RS I think that's key, isn't it?

MD You can say, would it be okay if, during our work together, working as a team, that if I notice something that I think might get in the way of us being able to work towards the stuff that's important to you, your goals, that I could pause and maybe could I say, can I pause? Would that be all right if I did that? And so, to get that agreement upfront means that now, even as the nice person, I can say it because they've said it's okay for me to say.

RS Right. And they gave permission.

MD And I've given them permission too. If at any point there's anything happening in our work together that feels like it's getting in the way, please pause. Let me know.

00:15:09

RS Yes. And pause is a nice word, isn't it? It's not like I'm going to stop you, which is probably a standard thing that people would say. But can I pause you, because you might restart you, but I'm going to ask you to check, is this helpful? Is this really what you want to be talking about? I think that is important, that having your hands on the reins of the session doesn't mean you're not working towards what the person wants to work towards.

So, to me, being person-led is working towards what they want to work towards. It's not necessarily getting there in exactly the way they think they want to get there, because if they could do that, they would have done it before they came to see.

MD Exactly. Yes.

RS And I think that's a very good point, to get permission or to explain.

MD Well, it makes it easier upfront. And even if there's a lot of things we mean to do in the first session, we don't get to all of them, and so sometimes it's like, oh,

man, I forgot to say that to this client. And now you're into session three, and you're noticing that. It's like, oh, I wish I had, because then I would find it much easier.

Great. Just raise it at the beginning of the session, is what I've learned. If you leave it to, I'll wait for a good moment and then I'll raise it, there isn't going to be a good moment. So, what I find is easiest is just say, what are you hoping to get out of today? What's most important for today?

00:16:35

You listen to that and you go, great, okay, good. Look, before we start, I just wanted to mention something that I realised I hadn't mentioned the first time we met, which is, at any point in our work together, if I feel like, and blah, blah, blah. Mention the pause then. And then you're into, look, you mentioned about school being tough this week. Do you want to start there?

And then you're back into their agenda items again. You're person-led. That's what they want to address. But in your mind you're also thinking, their goals, their aims, and the mechanism of change, the vehicle for getting to where they need to get to. And then, depending on your approach, there's different vehicles that will get you there.

RS Right. And it strikes me that what you're trying to do there is not a, no, stop talking. What you're trying to do there is, yes, and this. So, maybe there's a theme out of the story which relates to the shared understanding that you have of the problem. Or maybe there's a feeling that's coming out of the story, that it sounds like you felt really let down, and it made me think about all the times you have been let down, and how has that informed how you work with people or whatever.

00:17:46

So, that kind of idea about pulling out the theme or the feeling I think can be really helpful when you're guiding, but you're not kind of asking people to do a massive U-turn.

MD As you say, it could be about emotional patterns, it could be about behavioural patterns, things that they tend to do.

RS Yes, the reason I mentioned feelings is because often people tell you a story because they want the feeling validated. It's not really about knowing every detail of the story. It's to actually have somebody saying, that sounds hard, or that sounds annoying, or that sounds like it was amazing.

So, in those kinds of things, where you can actually practice what we would call in parenting, emotion coaching, or that kind of, hey, I really get why you'd feel that way a bit in those circumstances, sometimes that's all people need. They don't need you to hear every part of the story.

MD And it's interesting. The way you're talking about feelings, I'd also then tag needs, because they're often right next to each other, and they're sort of brother and sister or whatever. So, with that feeling would be an unmet need, often, of

some sort.

RS Right. So it's a little flag. And then, oh, okay, what's happening here? Let's go explore that little territory there then. Then that brings you back to the work, so to speak.

So, let's say that it's going well, and we've managed to pull them back on track, and that we were making good progress and then, suddenly, there's a setback of some kind. Maybe they were feeling happier, and then now they don't feel happy this week, or they were getting on better with their son, and then this week a blow-up.

00:19:31

MD A blow-up. Yes.

RS How would you manage that?

MD Well, again, it'd be potentially something you would have seeded early on in terms of almost expecting this to happen. But again, you may not have had the opportunity for that. So, this might be the first instance of, it all been going swimmingly well and then it all comes crashing down. And there's that sense of despondency, and they feel like, what's the point, and hopelessness.

RS Yes, lack of hope.

MD In terms of that idea of people's motivation and that we've got different levels of motivation to make the changes we want to make, right? And so, oftentimes the beginning of the work, whatever it is, the problem that led us to come and seek help, is a really big problem. And we're very motivated, often, unless somebody else has sent us, and then we may not be so keen.

RS Yes. Motivation is complex.

MD It is. It is. But early on, there may be motivation that we're really quite keen, and then that can sometimes sag a bit because things aren't so bad now, because we've made a few improvements.

RS Oh, right. Yes, because things are going well, in fact, we become less motivated for change.

00:20:36

MD Yes. And then we might start dropping off doing the things that are helpful, which means that some of the problems might then rear back up. So it's almost, this is not unusual and almost to be expected. But why I'm saying motivation as well is I'd be trying to help them to regarnier, to kind of recreate that sense of hopefulness.

RS How would you do that?

MD Validating the experience they're having now, which is, oh, that sounds like it's been a really rough week. That must have been so disappointing, since you've had such... Things have been really going well with your son, and then this happened. And so, obviously, validating what is happening in this moment. If

possible, seeing it in the context of the work more broadly, because there's a tendency, when things go bad for us, that that's all we see, is the thing that's gone bad and we lose sight of everything else.

RS Yes. And almost sometimes it's like, oh, I was waiting for the other shoe to drop.

MD Yes. Of course it happened. Yes, yes.

RS The good times are the aberration and the outlier. It's actually the bad times that [overtalking].

MD Yes. This was always going to happen, so what's the point?

00:21:43

And, again, that sense of hopelessness, which would decrease motivation. And so, in the conversation, while validating and trying to help expand out the picture of what's happening, that would then help hopefully understand that this was understandable, given the circumstances. So we could have noticed that maybe there were some other triggers that had happened that had led to this setback.

And usually, as a human, when you can make sense of it, ah, great. So it's not now something that I've got no control of, that I can't understand, that is going to just keep happening, and it's going to come out of the blue. It's like, it makes sense, I can understand why this happened, and there's something I can do to try and help reduce the likelihood of it happening again.

So I would always be trying to get there, and then I'd be trying to have the conversation with them in a way that would hopefully pump up their motivation to do that in lots of different ways, so that they would feel that, okay, here we go, great, all right. Good to go again. And off we go. And we've got a plan. If this happens again, we've got a plan for how to deal with that.

RS Yes. And so, it might be that you can see a trigger, and it might be that it's hard to see the trigger. But I agree with you that if you can kind of put some understanding around it, that can help.

I always think about Michael White's metaphor, where he says there's a migration of identity between being a person who's, in inverted commas, sick, to somebody who's well, is this idea about, okay, well, it's up and down. Things will go up and down.

00:23:33

But it's almost like migrating countries. Just because you visit the country of your birth doesn't mean you live there again. It just means you might go and visit occasionally, but you don't feel like you are a person of that country. I always like that metaphor because I'm a migrant. My family are from Singapore, and when we go back and visit Singapore, I certainly don't feel Singaporean. It's very clear to me that, although I'm still Australian, I'm might visit Singapore once in a while. But that doesn't mean my identity is what it used to be.

MD So, in this instance, it's like the identity, they may still think about themselves in relation to the problem version of themselves, that they are, whatever it is, weak,

depressed, anxious, whatever it.

RS Yes, or we're the family who fights, right? We're the family who fights. And then on Sunday, we have a little visit to the family who fights country, but that doesn't mean we live there. We moved already. It's just that we occasionally might go back and visit.

MD Nice. Nice.

RE Yes. And I like that metaphor of, well, just because you end up having a little fight doesn't mean you're the family who fights.

MD Yes. Yes. I thought you were referring to a different idea from narrative therapy, actually. So, that's lovely, by the way. I like that. I'll take that one. Thank you. I'll try and remember it.

00:24:53

RS It's not mine. It's Michael White's.

MD Good old Michael. But again, it relates to the same thing, the ideas we have about ourselves in terms of the stories we tell ourselves in our heads, and that we haven't got used to the new version of this yet. And so, in some ways, it'd be almost like the precursor to your story, in that we're still new to Australia, that we don't feel Australian yet.

And I'm a migrant from Ireland. So, as that little seven-year-old guy with a funny accent in the playground here, I felt very out of my country. And so, I felt different. I felt like I spoke wrongly, I did things wrongly. It would be silly and shameful. But after a period of time, then I felt like a self-describing Australian. It took a little while. So, likewise, in terms of people making changes in their lives.

RS Yes. I think Michael White calls it betwixt and between, which I always think is nice, that kind of up and down, we're in a state of flux, we're making a change, and identity is migrating. There's a journey going on. Yes.

So, let me ask you this question. What if I've been seeing this person, things have been going okay, but actually, they've become inconsistent in coming, and they come sometimes, sometimes they don't. When they don't, maybe they don't really give a very convincing excuse, or they come 20 minutes late or whatever. What sorts of things would cross your mind?

00:26:29

MD Well, look, I'd be thinking, have we even discussed how frequently that they think they need to attend in order for us to make good progress together? Are there barriers to them attending? Sometimes there'll be financial barriers, depending on the nature of the contact, right? But they may feel too ashamed to actually say, look, I can't afford to see you, that's why I keep having to cancel every second session.

RS Yes. Or they can technically afford it, but it's a real stretch.

MD Oh, yes. It's quite possible as well that, do I really understand what they want to get out of this? Is their not coming a sign that actually, they're pretty ambivalent?

They're in two minds about is this going to help them? Do they understand clearly enough what we're trying to achieve together and how we are going to achieve it? Because if they've got a clear sense of that, and they believe in it, I reckon they'd be turning up.

RS Yes. Is this a way of giving feedback?

MD Yes, yes. And a key word in the work is to make sure to get feedback.

RS Yes. And you have a nice way of getting feedback every session. Do you want to just talk people through that?

MD Yes. So, I think in terms of three main things, and there's various sheets of paper and stuff you can get clients to fill out, which are great.

00:27:43

A lot of my work is online, and so sheets of paper can be a little trickier. And so, look, I'll just say at the end of a session, I just want to check in, in terms of our conversation today, just to see if it's been helpful. And first of all, in terms of feeling understood. To what extent does it feel like, as you've been describing things to me, that I'm getting it and understanding it, right? Not at all, to, yes, pretty much. How am I going here?

And so, if a client says, well, not really, it's like, okay, I'm so glad you told me. Thank you. I'm going to come back and understand that better in a second. But I want to ask you another question. In terms of meeting your needs, what you hope to get out of today's session, to what extent have we been able to achieve the things that you hoped, to get things you wanted? Not at all, to, yes, pretty much? And again, get a bit of feedback.

And then finally, in terms of the approach, how we've gone about it. The way that we've been talking today and done our work together, to what extent has that fitted for you as a person? So, on some level that would speak to things like therapeutic approach, right? So, you mentioned CBT.

RS The model.

00:28:49

MD Exactly. They're not going to say, oh, I really like the way you do your downward arrowing, Mark, but they may say, I found your questions really helpful, which tells you...

RS Yes, I liked that exercise we did there.

MD Exactly. Yes. So, the first time you do that, it takes a bit of time because you've got to say those things out loud in full, like I just have. But then afterwards, it's real brief. It's like, I just want to check in before we finish today, Rebecca, if that's okay. So, in terms of understanding, to what extent you feel understood, your needs? The approach we've taken? Anything we could tweak for next session to kind of make it even better than today?

RS That would be quite transformational, wouldn't it be, if we really carefully left time for people to give proper feedback. And, of course, as well as that, there are

other ways too. You can have measures, questionnaires. You can have behavioural counts where you'd say, how many nights did you sleep well this week or whatever. But there are ways to kind of give progress feedback which don't involve a person having to be brave enough to say, well, actually, Mark, I'd like to raise this issue with you, which is, I don't think I'm getting anything out of this.

So, I think that it's so easy to forget to do that or that to become last on the list. But the risk is then, as you said before, that you're kind of drifting in the wilderness. And as you said, if you're just keeping your head above water, sometimes you start to lose hope. You're not feeling a lot of progress.

MD Yes. It's like, this lifesaver has not got me any closer to the beach. They seem a nice person, but I'm still out here and I'm getting tired now.

00:30:26

RS And I feel bad, but I'm drowning. Yes, yes. So, feedback is not just for fancy researchers or for clin psychs. The idea is, if we really care about what's happening for the person, then having some feedback is central, isn't it, to understanding them?

MD Yes. Well, again, if you're working with somebody else to help them, you're a team. There's you and there's them. Or if 'them' is a number of people, a bigger team, right? But ultimately, you're working as a team. And if the team aren't talking about how it's going, the team can't work together.

So you do need to check in with the team, in terms of other team members, how are we going here? And there's heaps of research, plenty of research to show that this is really important stuff and that in terms of as a practitioner, my sense of how the session's going and the work and all the rest of it may be well off course.

RS Right. The vibe of it. If you're just saying, well, it seems to be going well, you're often inaccurate actually.

MD Yes. That's what the data show. And, look, I'm a shocker. Again, there's many bad things I do. And leaving time is not something I often do well. And I'm sort of looking at the clock thinking, okay, we've got five minutes. That means that we can still work for another three minutes before we have to wrap up, right? So I'll run it right down to the end. But even then, there's still time to say, before we finish, briefly, I just want to check in, in terms of today's session. In terms of those three things, how did we go today?

00:32:04

RS Yes. Okay. This is our final question that we probably have time for. How do you manage your own drive or need to fix, solve, tell people what to do, and particularly when it's amplified by pressures from the outside, like somebody's at risk, or maybe there's a kid that's refusing to go to school, or there's, I don't know, a spouse who's very unhappy, who's going to leave them. How do you manage that kind of sense of urgency without falling into directive...?

MD Yes, pushing for change. Yes, which will just lead to resistance, and then you have

to deal with that. Yes. It's a million-dollar question, isn't it, really? And I think it is that you like to remain reflective in terms of noticing what you're doing. And sometimes it's after the fact you notice, because all of a sudden, you notice the resistance. Suddenly they're pushing back or saying, yes, but no, I don't think... And it's like, oh, gosh, I've slipped into it. And then all those good reasons you said.

RS Yes. That's a sign, isn't it, that yes, but?

MD Yes, yes. They're pushing back.

RS That won't work because. Yes.

MD And so, in those moments, then, if you can catch it beforehand, even better. But often you won't, because you're human. And that's okay, too.

00:33:27

And so, I'll generally apologise or I'll basically kind of notice it in some way in terms of, oh, look, sorry, I realise I'm being your dad here and telling you what to do. You don't need your dad here. What are you thinking might be helpful in terms of blah, blah, blah? So, in other words, I would kind of just pull back, get off my agenda, my goals.

And sometimes if you're working with kids and families, and I know both of us do, it's often you're aware of the parent and what the parent wants and is wishing for and is scared of and everything. And you almost slip into the parent's agenda, rather than tuning into the young person and staying abreast of them. Obviously, ideally, you're working with both, and you're trying build in what the parents are looking for, as well as the young person.

And that wouldn't just have to be in child and family work. That could be you're working with a couple, and you've got one person in front of you.

RS Yes. And I like that would worry, that idea that often the pressure is about somebody's worry or concern, which in many cases is a sign of love, is a sign of care, but also that it's a risk assessment. It's a sense of, oh, if this doesn't happen, blah, then this will happen, this consequence will occur, and that would be terrible and unendurable and all those kinds of things.

And so, it is worth thinking about, I think, whose worry is this? Is this sitting with the person who's sitting in front of me, or is this actually the school's worry, or the DCJ worker's worry? And how do I help to, I wouldn't say reassure, but how do I address that worry with the person who owns it, rather than me taking it on?

00:35:13

MD Yes. Yes. And, look, sometimes you may even share it with the person you're working with directly in terms of, look, I'm probably pushing for that because I'm just thinking of what your mum said earlier, what your dad said earlier, or what school have said, or workplace is wanting you to go back tomorrow. And so, I feel like that's where that question, or that's where that suggestion was coming from. Can you think of a way that we could work together, knowing that work wants you back tomorrow, knowing that Mum wants this?

So in some ways, you can then collaboratively work with the person in front of you to address this other agenda, this other worry. And it's something I'll often use, actually, working with kids and families, is that idea of, you have a young person who doesn't want to see you, they don't want to come along, they've got better things to do, right?

But the problem is, of course, that their parent wants them to come along because the parent thinks there's problems. And so, often you might raise that in terms of, oh, okay, so can I get a feel there? You're thinking, why do I need to be here? Mum knows. She's real worried.

So, what do you reckon we could do that would help Mum to worry less, because otherwise she's probably going to keep dragging you back here. So, what do you reckon Mum needs to see that would be different, that would then mean that she'd be off your back and you could just go off and do stuff and you wouldn't have to keep coming back here.

00:36:37

RS Right, which is person-led, isn't it. What you want is mum off your back.

MD Exactly. That's the problem for them. Yes.

RS Okay. We could talk all day, obviously, on this topic, but I think some of the takeaways for me are, obviously, this idea that drifting or doing nothing is a decision, in a funny way. There is a cost to doing nothing. And actually, putting in some structure can allow progress to be faster.

When it's faster, people can often feel more hopeful and more motivated. But also that the progress needs to be defined by the person that we're seeing, and the goals or the places where they want to get to need to be their goals and places they want to get to. When they're not, we often find ourselves not making progress because, actually, they're not that interested in going down that.

But there's also a sense in which I understand it's about me and managing my stuff, that maybe I've got worries, or I've got pressure on me, or I didn't flag that I was going to interrupt them. There's all these things.

00:37:45

And one of the things I think that's so helpful is simply noticing and raising that with the person in a really honest manner, saying, oh, look, I made a mistake, or I should have done this and I forgot, or, hey, I can't help but notice we're having this kind of pattern, and let's work together as a team to see what is the useful thing to do at this point.

MD Yes. Nice.

RS Great. Okay. Well, thank you for that, Mark. No doubt, when we put up the podcast, we will also put up some extra resources that people can delve deeper into. But we appreciate your time today, and thanks so much for coming.

MD My pleasure. Thank you. Great questions. Thank you.

Outro I hope you found today's episode helpful. You'll find specially selected resources

on this topic on our digital learning platform. To join the platform for free or to suggest questions or topics for further episodes, please visit our website theperegrinecentre.com.au.

01:03:23