

# Useful Questions to ask mad people

May 26, 2017

Many people assume that psychologists spend all day telling people how to feel better and cope with life. In fact, junior psychologists themselves sometimes make this assumption. They think they are supposed to be spending most of the time in session talking, giving advice, providing any information. Which means they completely freak out when they can't think of what to say. I remember this feeling very well! While giving good advice, helping with strategies and providing good psycho-education IS part of therapy, it's not the most important thing psychologists do.

## **The most important thing psychologists do is to ask good questions.**

Not the cliché "what do YOU think about that?" question. (I never ask that, I know it makes clients want to kill you :)) But other questions. Really good, specific and smart questions. Lots and lots of them.

Asking the right questions in the right situation - and doing it session after session - helps people feel cared for, figure out what they need and what to do. It helps them learn to express themselves, seek out the right advice, get the exact reassurance they need to cope and how to plan out coping strategies. Asking the right questions is the secret sauce the best therapists have, whether they work with adults, kids or teens.

Unfortunately, outside of the therapy room - people don't ask each other good questions very often. In fact, people often don't ask any questions of each other at all. This is a huge shame, because asking the right questions can change lives.

Here's why.

- 1. When you ask questions to a mad person - it shows them you care about them. [...]**
- 2. When you ask questions to a mad person - it helps you know how you can help. [...]**
- 3. When you ask questions to a mad person - it helps them talk, express themselves and figure stuff out. [...]**

Of course, asking good questions is easier said than done.

Do you know why you feel upset about this, or do you just feel upset?

Do you feel more sad/hurt/angry/worried about that or some other feeling?

Are you worried about people thinking this?

On a scale from 1-10, how worried/upset/mad/scared/hurt are you about this?

If I were you, I might feel worried about this - how about you?

I can imagine other people feeling pretty hurt about that - how does it feel?

How does that affect you?

When you are lying in bed at night - what are the things that make you most upset?

Is there anything about this you feel embarrassed or ashamed about?

What do you wish you could change about yourself in all of this?

What makes you feel a bit better about all of this?

What's the most frustrating part of it all?

What do you think people don't understand about this?

When was the last time you cried about this?

Why do you think that made you so mad/upset/worried?

What helps you cope?

When do you most think about this?

How does this affect you?

What things trigger that off for you?

If you could change anything about that, what would you change?

Is there anything you feel like you need to keep a secret / hidden from others?