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Why should creating safe relationships be the priority?

People do not fear being vulnerable, they fear your reaction to their vulnerability. Brene Brown

ie, it isn't their job to trust us, it's our job to prove we are trustworthy. There is no downside to prioritising safety and trust – it doesn't mean you do not do the interventions but that when you do they work so much better. It's what we do as we do them that matters.

Sadly the training I have done has assumed we know how to create safe relationships and yet I regularly witness examples of well-intentioned people getting it wrong with some, or even worse – people missing the point completely! And I myself have improved in this with all I have learnt.

I go into more detail in my training but here is some of the reasons that you can research further:

Common sense

Think about it – if you are with someone you trust you are more open and honest, and relaxed, and ready to listen. If you go for help from someone you don't trust you are on guard and it is unlikely to work. This applies in all relationships. We avoid people we don't trust.

Therapeutic Alliance

All research into what works best ends up saying the intervention is less important than the relationship. That doesn't mean the model is not important but Assay and Lambert did a meta analysis of therapy research into what affects change – only 15% is technique and model – 45% is down to the relationship. Is your training in that ratio?

When I train in addiction services I list the research that is done into which model to use that prove it doesn't matter as much as the relationship, and even how better relationships lead to people needing lower levels of methadone. (see www.findings.org.uk for more)

Trauma Informed

The ACE Study and subsequent research has shown that the difference between those who are affected most by childhood adversity are those with no safe adult to support them, children with at least 1 safe adult are affected less. It's that simple.

Childhood development has also shown the vital need for a child to have a safe adult to develop fully, in fact they can die without it. As adults we still need to feel safe, those who have never experienced it need to learn in order to heal. We can be that one safe adult.

Sadly people who have had trauma are even less likely to trust so we need to overcome that barrier first, before we can do any work with them. Why should they listen to us?

Effect on us

When people do not feel safe they are more likely to display defensive behaviours and resist engaging, and those are the things that both make it harder for them to progress but also take up most of our time and cause us the most stress to deal with.

So it makes our job easier, and success more likely, plus we feel more relaxed. (see the how article, or my training, for more on this – it doesn't solve every stress and difficulty we encounter but it does drastically reduce them)



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Social change

The experts on a national and global setting, including people thanked or nominated for the nobel peace prize, all emphasize the need to look at our own approach to situations and people as being vitally important to affecting change. It's about creating an environment where change can happen.

People like:

Dr Scilla Elworthy (The business plan for peace)

Adam Kahane (any books)

Otto Scharmer (Theory U)

Willian Ury

Look them up – quite astounded me how much they focus on how important how we are when dealing with people who are trying to kill each other or refusing to work together, and what a difference it makes!

Business

Any of the above, plus it is now accepted that in order for a business to succeed safe relationships at work are vital. People perform better if they trust their team/ boss, and feel safe enough to be themselves.

In The Speed of Trust Stephen MR Covey shows how teams that work with high trust significantly outperform those who do not prioritise trust.

And again Theory U talks about in leadership the blind spot is what is going on inside us when we act – our trustworthiness.

Cybernetics also talks about how the system with the most flexibility is the most successful. Rigidity is a barrier to trust and a feeling of safety.

Misc

Another great example is Jill Bolte Taylor – she does a TED talk about when she had a stroke and it affected the language part of her brain. She speaks about the profound effect it had on her when people approached her with kindness, and the opposite.

These are just some of the areas I have studied that led to me concluding the need to prioritise relationships, the study is ongoing.....