

Understanding Loneliness & Behavior

Difficult behaviors result from unmet needs. In a sense, difficult behaviors are messages which can tell us important things about the person and the quality of his or her life.

People with difficult behaviors are often missing:

- Meaningful & enduring relationships
- A sense of safety & well-being
- Joy in ordinary & everyday places
- Power & choice
- A sense of value & self-worth
- Relevant skills & knowledge
- Supporters who are themselves supported



Because these needs are usually minimized or ignored in educational or human services settings, people may become:

- Relationship resistant
- Helpless & insecure
- Chronic rule-breakers
- Depressed & isolated

Supporting a person requires us to get to know the person as a complicated human being influenced by a complex personal history. While it is tempting to look for a quick fix, which usually means attacking the person and his or her behavior, suppressing behavior without understanding something about the life the person is living is disrespectful and counter productive.

Questions to ask to help a person to develop a plan that reflects a real & authentic life:

How can we help the person to-

1. expand & deepen their relationships?
2. achieve a sense of health & well-being?
3. have more fun in ordinary, everyday community places?
4. have more power?
5. make a contribution to others?
6. learn valued skills?
7. make sure their supports get the support they need?

Compiled by Suzanne Byers, Life Skills Supervisor

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Much of their suffering results from isolation not disability.

To summarize:

- The ultimate success of a service system depends upon its ability to help people to maintain & develop positive, "enduring, freely chosen" relationships.
- When people are connected to a social network, they are generally happier, healthier, & better able to adjust to life's ups & downs.
- The benefits of our therapies & interventions cannot be sustained in the absence of meaningful relationships.
- Relationships are a necessary pre-condition to long-term success.
- People who most need relationships are often relationship resistant.
- There is a big difference between coverage & relationships.
- Caring about someone is not the same thing as taking care of someone.
- Difficult behaviors are often an individual's only way of creating engagement. We must ask, "Who would the person be if they did not exhibit difficult behaviors?"



It probably goes without saying that there are a number of things beyond our control. What's needed now, more than ever, is the courage to work for things we can't reasonably expect to happen for all the people in our service system. The people most likely to find the courage to stand up for relationships are the ones who understand the importance of relationships in their own lives.

- David Pitonyak, Ph. D.

