Keeping the Helpful Difference - Clinician dialogue

Guide a collaborative conversation about keeping the helpful difference while checking fit and participant choice.

Mental health professionals | 15 minutes

Fictional example: Devin's task-starting routine depends on written instructions arriving on time.

Invite and obtain permission

Offer: "Would it be useful to explore keeping the helpful difference using an ordinary or fictional example? We can adapt it, observe, or stop." Ask what the person wants from the conversation.

Elicit before teaching

Ask: "How does this show up, if at all, in your own words?" Offer this idea tentatively: Maintenance can include anticipating constraints and seeking support. Ask what fits and what does not.

Guide the task

Name a helpful change, the conditions that sustain it, and an early sign that adjustment is needed. Ask for permission before giving an example. Use this fictional illustration if useful: Devin's task-starting routine depends on written instructions arriving on time.

Reflect and check accuracy

Reflect only what was offered: "I heard you describe ___. What did I miss?" Ask: What support makes this change sustainable? Avoid assigning motives or interpreting silence as agreement.

Respond to a mismatch

If the person rejects the frame, say: "Thank you for correcting it. What would be more useful?" Return to their language or choose a different approach.

Close with agency

Ask which observation, question, or support request the person wants to keep. Confirm a manageable ending and appropriate follow-up; do not turn a tentative possibility into a homework obligation.

Reflection

What would tell me to adapt, stop, or seek supervision?

Scope and adaptation

Acknowledge distress and structural barriers before asking about change. Do not use exceptions or compliments to dismiss harm. A personal scale is a conversational aid, not a validated outcome measure, risk screen, or reason to withhold assessment.

Original AI-assisted educational draft; independent clinical review pending. Version 1.0. Background: What is Solution-Focused Therapy?. Full source links and scope: library.morethantherapy.org/approaches/resources/SFB-A18-3