



## Key Questions and Directions that Move Parents Forward

These are questions you can ask that help the parent tell his or her story, connect more fully with you, and gain perspective on why the emotional burdens have developed. With your attention, the parent may be able to get to laughter, tears or trembling with you, which will relieve some of the emotional load. In any case, your respect and warmth will help the parent feel heard and validated.

**“What happened?”** Let the parent tell their story.

**“How did you feel?”** Allows the parent to notice and express feelings.

**“When have you felt this way before?”** Helps the parent identify any patterns that may have been established in times past. Often, parents can release feelings more readily when talking about times past than when talking about the present difficulties.

**“What do you remember about the beginning of your relationships with X?”** (When talking about their child, ask the parent about their memories of learning about conception, memories of pregnancy, birth, and the first days, weeks, and months of their life with their child.) Lets the parent look at the history of the relationship that concerns them.

**“When did this difficulty begin? When do you first remember feeling this way?”** Lets the parent tell the history of the difficulty.

**“Has anyone been able to help you with this?”** Lets the parent tell you what help has felt effective to them, or tell you how isolated they’ve felt.

**“What do you wish you could say?”** Lets the parent speak from his or her heart, and say things that have been in his or her thoughts for a long time.

**“What do you wish you could do?”** Lets the parent talk about or role-play the impulses he or she has to manage all the time. If the parent is imagining fighting for himself, you can offer a hand to push against so they have the satisfaction of using some physical force safely.

**“Who do you wish could help you?”** Sometimes parents are missing their families far away, or are missing someone who has died, and need to cry these feelings through in order to stop waiting for help that can’t arrive.

**“Let’s try taking charge!”** Here, you model an upbeat version of what a person could say or do to take charge of the situation. You are not telling the parent what to do. You’re modeling a confident tone, posture, and words. You might model indignation or full-out protest. Often, a parent will laugh or cry at the prospect of following your example.



Emotional release is your goal; whether they can fully adopt the modeling you offer is less important.

Some of the typical “take charge” attitudes that you can model for parents are:

**“I’m a *good* mother/father!”**

**“I’m doing my best”**

**“My child *knows* I love her”**

**“Oops, I made a mistake!”** (said lightly)

**“I’m learning.”**

**“I’m doing a very hard job, just as well as I can!”**

**“I deserve time to care for myself.”**

**“I can ask for help.”**

**“I deserve respect. My child deserves respect.”**

**“Our family is a *good* family. We belong.”**

**“My children are *good* children, even when they aren’t easy to be with.”**

**“Don’t you dare!”** (talk to me that way, treat me that way, treat my child that way, etc.)

**“I’m going to...”**(inviting a parent to push on your hand or to tell you the fantasies they carry that have them in the powerful position is helpful here in eliciting laughter or tears that help dissolve fear and resentment.)

**“I am building a good life!”**