

# Therapeutic Friendship

## How to use this card:

*Pass this card around. Each person please state your name and read a small section of the content on *Therapeutic Friendship*:*

## Concept 15: Therapeutic Friendship

*The relationships that form around doing the work of Suppers*

The concept of therapeutic friendship offers people the possibility of becoming the designers of their own plans for better health or recovery with the help of peers. Once we accept that each individual has a biological natural reality, the footwork is up to individuals in relationships.

The concept of therapeutic friendship calls on us to recognize wisdom, but not to identify unassailable experts at the Suppers tables or in the resources we share. Health seeking can get very frustrating when experts disagree with one another. Whose advice should we follow? In a community of therapeutic friends whose purpose is supporting healthy change, we can help each other make the best matches between our diet and lifestyle problems and our diet and lifestyle solutions.

This concept is non-hierarchical, meaning help flows both ways and all roles have value. When the teachers are ready, the students appear; and when the students are ready, the teachers appear. In a recovery community based on therapeutic friendship, individual strengths to lead or follow, learn or teach, listen or speak are equally valued.

## [Marilyn's Story: Fixing My Numbers](#)

I'm not sure how I thought I was going to fix myself, but I always held this belief that "some day" would come some day and voilà, there would be a new me. I had a very clear picture of how I wanted to be and no idea at all about how I was going to get there. The word "magic" comes to mind.

Things didn't start to change until I sat down with a friend at Suppers and learned that setting and meeting goals is a skill that you have to practice every day. If I wanted strength, I had to build that muscle.

I had been to my doctor, and some of my numbers were getting pretty scary: weight, fasting blood sugar, and something to do with my liver. The prescription pad was not the way I wanted to go, but the alternative was making lifestyle changes I didn't like either. Exercise makes me perspire, and the thought of lean meat and lots of vegetables for dinner is not my idea of a good time. I was filled with self-pity, but fear of the prescription pad tipped the balance. Fear got me started.

A woman at Suppers who has been through all this took me aside and said she'd help me, if I was ready to get serious about goals. She is a type 1 diabetic. There is nothing anyone can do to keep her off medication (insulin), but she clearly takes great pleasure in assisting people who still have time to turn their ship around before type 2 diabetes sets in. She became my "therapeutic friend," a temporary sponsor who would mentor me through the process of acquiring these skills.

We took my vague goals and defined them clearly: I will walk daily, starting at 15 minutes and building up my capacity until I can walk for 45 minutes each day. I will eat a high protein and vegetable breakfast daily and limit treats to one dessert after dinner. I will have an apple and peanut butter snack every day at 3 p.m. (to avoid the typical pre-dinner crash).

We studied a Suppers handout on how to prepare for change and set practical goals. We specified what, how much, and how often I was going to make these changes and introduced them one at a time. I went to meetings and shared my process and was surprised to realize that feeling accountable to the group actually felt good! Instead of harboring secrets and hiding from the other members, I had a cheering section of well-wishers who had different but related challenges. They were given hope for themselves through my successes. And when I had little failures along the way, well, they understood. Just about everybody could identify with setbacks related to ice cream and chocolate. Together we brainstormed strategies for steering clear of these roadblocks.

Initially my doctor was alarmed when I refused a new prescription, but she couldn't argue with my numbers, could she? There was a fork in my road and I picked the path marked "change." God gave me a hand to hold in my journey down that path, and my only sadness is that I will never be able to help her fix her numbers like she helped me fix mine.

**Continue around the table by briefly sharing how you relate to the Suppers concept of Therapeutic Friendship.**

**What do you need from your friends to support healthy change?**

**Discussion Prompts (Each person select a prompt that works for you.)**

- On a scale of 1 to 10, with one being you are a total do-it-yourselfer and 10 being you don't get anything done without social support, where do you fall?
- Give an example of a time when someone helped you out.
- When contemplating dietary and behavior changes, what do you anticipate you'll need help with?
- What do you need to feel safe accepting help from others?

**Ideas for Next Steps:**

***Experiments and Observations***

- Do a thought experiment: Imagine you are getting help from someone with a diet or behavior change you want to make, who is helping and what are they doing?
- Do a thought experiment: Imagine yourself asking for the help you need. What will that be like?
- Who has a similar health goal and shares a similar diagnosis or desired outcome?
- Imagine that you are in the role of providing therapeutic friendship to someone who needs your help. How are you useful to them?
- Pretend you are describing how you would like to support others: What strengths do you have to offer someone who needs support for their change process?

***Between Meetings:***

- Read how other Suppers members related to this concept.
  - For people who eat too fast, read [Celia and May's story](#), page 212 in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of *Logical Miracles* or on the Suppers website.
  - For people for whom change is anxiety producing, read [Amanda's story](#), page 214 in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of *Logical Miracles* or on the Suppers website.