



# Support for Therapists

**By Gwyneth Moss, EFT Master**

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*Hi Everyone,*

*In this excellent 2 part series, EFT Master Gwyneth Moss of the UK shares many insights, tips and pointers for supporting therapists.*

*Hugs, Gary*

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## **Part 1: The benefits of support**

Last week I called one of my Level 3 Trainees. She is a highly experienced and skilled psychotherapist who runs a busy local practice. I asked her "Do you do supervision?"

"Yes"

"Could you supervise me?"

"What me? Supervise you?"

There was surprise in her voice. So I explained that I needed to change my supervision arrangements and that I would be delighted if I could discuss my clients with her and so gain the benefit of her experience and objectivity.

Later I found myself thinking about the presuppositions that underlay her initial surprised response. A trainee can't supervise a trainer. Supervision is hierarchical. And that led me to thinking about the word itself.



Just close your eyes and say the word supervisor and notice what inner experience you get. I get an image of a hard faced woman who walked up and down the line frowning and shouting when I had a vacation job as a student. The feeling is of being watched, being judged, being found wanting. Not something at all helpful or an experience I would welcome.

When I say 'supporter' its entirely different and I remember someone who listened with acceptance, who saw the goodness and the gifts in me and with whom I could be myself, just as I am, and whose clear minded simple questions persisted however much I prevaricated and helped me to get back on track and find what I was looking for.

Now I know that many of you reading this will have professional or licensing requirements that set out in great detail the what, how and whom of your professional supervision and this article is not intended to either agree or disagree with any of that. This article is about the role of the 'supporter' in therapy. What I would like to do is provoke some thought about the core qualities/functions of what a supporter can be and to inspire those for whom formal supervision is not mandated to voluntarily seek out some form of support.

We all have writings on the walls about being 'good enough' or 'not good enough' and those writings can get in the way of our development both personally and as a therapist. We can interpret a well meant observation as criticism or worse can blame our client for 'not being ready' or 'being resistant'. (Not ready or resistant are simply problems to work on before working on the problem). We can all benefit from support or whatever we call it because whilst we are breathing we are learning and growing.

EFT may be a small part of what you offer to clients or it may be at the core of what you do. Whatever, there will be a proportion of people, a large proportion, with whom tapping sessions progress beautifully with specific events emerging and clearing, cognitive shifts creating new perspectives and body tensions dissolving – with these people you will find it easy to get rapport, to know where they are at and to test results.



And then there will be a proportion, a small proportion, with whom you just don't feel at ease, or you feel inadequate to help, or you can't get a grip on anything specific, or you can't find the words, or they just make no progress however creative, empathetic and skilled you are. That happens for all of us no matter how experienced.

The basic intention of supervision or support (or whatever you choose to call it) is to help the therapist to help the client. Even if the client does not come back to us we are still in a position to learn from our experience in order to grow professionally and help others. So I'd like to offer some thoughts from my own experience of benefiting from supervision/support.

### **Reviewing your Case Book**

A few days before a supervision/support session I go through my appointment diary and make a list of the clients I have seen that month. I put them into three subjective categories around my feeling about them and our sessions: doing-fine, not-sure, and stuck. The stucks I will definitely discuss with my supervisor (knowing that her intention is for my learning and growth and the benefit of my clients) and the not-sures if we have time. I will also briefly tell my supervisor about the doing-fine group so that she can give me a pat on the back and draw my attention to my successes. I know that if I did not have that supervision appointment then I would put off doing this review. Consequently I would not dwell on the satisfaction of the doing-fine category and I would avoid contemplating the stuck and not-sure folks. That's human nature. Sometimes simply in making the list and reviewing the previous month's list I get an insight about someone in the not-sure group and an idea for the next time I see them. Simply in me doing this review my clients are already benefiting.

### **Just Talking About It**

When we see clients we commit to respect their confidentiality. This means that we don't talk about them and therefore that we don't talk about our work. Part of the way that friends support each other is that we can come home or pick up the phone and talk through not only the frustrations and disappointments of our day



but also our successes, surprises and achievements. As therapists we cannot do that as it would compromise confidentiality and so all that mental clutter of the day stays in inner experience where it can go round and round.

There is a huge value to speaking aloud and it is quite simple to understand why: we use more of our brains when we speak than when we think. To speak aloud we start from inner experience and then use the thinking part, the creating words part the making sounds part and also the hearing and comprehending parts as our words go out through the mouth and come back in through the ears.

I have often found in supervision that I can be half way through explaining just why I found a session difficult or just how a person responded and I get an insight and the stuckness starts to move and without the listener saying anything I know what to do next. So the second benefit of supervision is that here is someone who will listen with attention, acceptance and respect of confidentiality, giving us the space to convert from inner experience to thought to sound that which we normally have to keep quiet. Just being able to talk about what we do helps us and our clients.

### **Objectivity asks good questions**

We all know just how difficult it can be to tap for ourselves and our own issues and how well it can flow when working with another. We are all masters at hiding from and avoiding that which we find unpleasant and that hiding happens automatically and without conscious thought. The presence of another person not only brings the jump-leads effect of a second energy system but also the objectivity to ask the simple little questions that we have not asked ourselves. And it is our responses to simple little questions like: "what's so bad about that?" or "what could you have done differently?" that make us turn inner experience into words. It is the same effect with supervision.

When a therapy session does not go as we would expect it can be that our response to that person was preventing us from getting out of our own way.



The simple questions of “what was it about them that you found difficult?” or “who did they remind you of?” can shed light on the writing on our own walls or allow specific memories to emerge for tapping. Or sometimes a person’s life experience may closely mirror our own and the triggered emotions colour our objectivity. Again those simple little questions from another can help us to bring awareness to specific events and the writings on our own walls so that we can use EFT to clear them up.

Or it may be the other way and the question “who do you think you reminded them of?” can bring the insight.

So the another benefit of supervision is being asked simple little questions that bring awareness to our own stuff that is keeping us from getting out of our own way. Sometimes awareness is enough and sometimes we need to tap and having a supervisor you can tap with there and then is a great bonus.

Now a qualified supervisor can also spot when a therapist is on ethical thin ice and needs steering back to firm ground. And in addition to that supervising role there is the benefit of the supporter which for me means spending time with someone who:

- Gets you to review your practice and has the intention of the success of your practice
- listens with attention whilst you talk about your client work and is committed to keep confidential whatever you tell them;
- can ask simple little questions to help you become aware of your own stuff and can help you tap through whatever arises
- gives you a pat on the back and brings your attention to your learning, growth and achievements and reminds you to take care of yourself



## **Part 2: Being a supporter**

In the first article I wrote about the benefit of support for those who are using EFT to help others. Now I would like you to think about how to be a helpful and valued supporter.

### **Undivided Attention**

To offer support is to offer your undivided attention. Make an appointment with your supportee and clear the decks of your own life for that time. Support is not a two way chatter it is a directed and purposeful one way process where one person commits to offering their intention and attention for the benefit of another – just like we do in therapy. Support is an asymmetrical agreement and because of that requires some form of payment or exchange. For the duration of the support session you need to get your own self and your own stuff out of the way – this is their time. So no interruptions and no saying “Oh yes, it’s like when I ....”

### **A Good Listening To**

As a supporter you need to give your supportee a good listening to. And at the same time gently prevent them from babbling or jumping about all over the place. Listen with an awareness of what you are listening to and for. Gently bring them back to the client they were discussing or the question they were raising if their mind wanders or sidetracks. Agree a structure for the sessions that works for both of you so that you use your time together efficiently: you could start with an overview, then focus on the stuck cases and end with a success.

### **Praise their Successes**

Often people take their successes for granted and pick up on every error or omission. As a supporter you need to have your antennae on alert for success and sometimes as little as a smile and nod is enough in recognition, sometimes it’s a ‘well done’ or ‘Wow!’ that you need to offer so that they can recognise that they have done well. And of course you can always ask “and what did you learn from that success?” “What could you do differently now?”



If you are aware of the concept of 'attributional style' then you can challenge your supotees global or permanent negative attributions to help them think more healthily about their work.

### **Ask the Unasked Questions**

I was recently telling my supervisor about a client with an obsessive fear of death and she asked me the obvious question that I had not considered "have you asked her how and when she learned what death is or did someone special die when she was young?" That was a really useful question which when I asked my client opened many doors.

With another client she asked me "who does she remind you of?" and I had to think long and hard and she had to ask me twice before I replied "my old boss in London" and that opened lots of tapping doors for me. So as a supporter, as you listen, have the back of your mind looking out for the unasked questions. Resist the desire to offer your interpretation of the client's situation - remember that you are hearing the story second hand and the most helpful contribution you can offer the therapist is a question rather than an answer.

From client to therapist to supporter there is an increase in objectivity and a decrease in subjectivity. A supporter can be highly objective because all they know about the person is what the therapist tells them. The supporter has never met the client and their understanding lacks the subtlety that comes from nonverbal awareness, they have to fill in subjectivity with conjecture and imagination. This is why I agree with a quote attributed to Fritz Perls "Any interpretation is a therapeutic mistake".

A supporter cannot tell a therapist what to do and what a supporter can do is ask the questions or tell the stories or offer the teachings that enable the therapist balance their objectivity and subjectivity to help the client.

And of course if you feel that your supotee is straying towards the outer bounds of general human ethical behaviour then you must say so and you must then help them to accept and change their behaviour.



Whether or not we operate within a formal professional code of ethics we all need to behave with kindness and consideration and in a manner that we can be proud of.

### **Talk and Tap**

When a therapist is really stuck with a client I get them to tap continually as they describe the client and I keep giving little sounds of encouragement or asking "then what" to keep them going for several minutes. Often this leads to a spontaneous insight of where to go or an understanding of what action the client needs to take. A variant of this is to have the therapist role play the client and I act as therapist and ask the simple questions a therapist would ask and we tap together. This generally 'unsticks' the therapist and sometimes the surrogate effect unsticks the client too.

### **Remind about Self-Care**

We all forget to look after ourselves and as a supporter you will probably need to remind your supportee to get a good balance of work, rest and play. Good things to suggest that we can all do are balancing the time we are serious with time having fun; and the time we are noisy with time being quiet; and the time we are sitting at a computer with time moving whether walking, running or dancing. There are many ways to relax, re-energise and let go and they all work but sometimes we need a supporter to be remind us to plan them into our lives. And of course we need to be reminded to tap.

Being a supporter is rewarding in itself and an added benefit is that there is so much that our supportees can teach us and that we can learn from their experiences. Outside of the licenced and mandated professions where supervision requires specialised training and qualification all of us with natural human empathy and common sense can be supporters if we follow these suggestions.

Gwyneth