

# The Helper's Dance List

## A list of typical interactions that can affect the helping relationship

All of us have roles in our lives that involve helping people. Mostly our help is okay but there are a number of unhelpful dances that we, as helpers, can do despite our best intentions. If we can notice them as they happen we have a chance to change. This list adds up to common patterns we have come across in teaching empathy and people skills using Cognitive Analytic Therapy for nurses, doctors, teachers, psychologists, social workers and many others. We call them dances to capture the whole interaction between people of feelings, behaviour and thinking summed up by the adage: 'it takes two to tango'. The list is not set in stone. First just score your reactions quickly to all the items. Second go through it again and change or add words to help each item fit your unique variety of experience. Not all the items will strike a chord with you. Add notes such as 'used to be true' or 'true when working at x'. Compare your results by talking them through compassionately with a colleague. Discuss things you might do differently. Keep in mind the rough and ready **One-Third** idea that one third of any dance is led by the person you are helping, one third is led by you and one third by the system, model or organisation in which you are embedded whilst helping.

1. **Never good enough:** I have high expectations of myself which makes me think my help won't be good enough, others will be disappointed and I will cope by trying even harder

**This could be me:** not at all rarely sometimes often always **(Please circle)**

2. **When the person I am helping is too demanding:** I feel put upon and suffer in silence but won't complain for fear of upsetting them and causing trouble.

**This could be me:** not at all rarely sometimes often always **(Please circle)**

3. **Genuine and vulnerable or safe but less real:** either (a) I show feelings and feel genuine but somewhat vulnerable or (b) I safely hide feelings, appear professional but less the real me.

**This could be me:** not at all rarely sometimes often always **(circle for a) underline for b)**

4. **Either it's my way or the wrong way:** If I think I am helping in the right way I can stick to it stubbornly and find it hard hearing it could be done another way.

**This could be me:** not at all rarely sometimes often always **(Please circle)**

5. **If at first I don't succeed:** I will try and try again to help until I am defeated or successful.

**This could be me:** not at all rarely sometimes often always **(Please circle)**

6. **Lose perspective:** I get so involved in the detail I forget the big picture

**This could be me:** not at all rarely sometimes often always **(Please circle)**

7. **Let it be and wait and see :** When I am not sure what to do so I tend to do nothing and wait and see.

**This could be me:** not at all rarely sometimes often always **(Please circle)**

8. **Silenced or silencing:** Either a) I mostly listen quietly and find it hard to interrupt or b) I have lots to say and risk controlling the conversation too much.

**This could be me:** not at all rarely sometimes often always **(circle for a) underline for b)**

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9. **Tell me what to do:** I feel so uncertain about how to help that I can rely too much on reassurance and guidance

**This could be me:** not at all rarely sometimes often always **(Please circle)**

10. **Switch off:** When I am upset by the suffering of those whom I help and cope by switching off.

**This could be me:** not at all rarely sometimes often always **(Please circle)**

11. **Who's who?** If I help too many people in a day, my feelings and understanding of one person can get mixed up with my feelings and understanding for another

**This could be me:** not at all rarely sometimes often always **(Please circle)**

12. **Mostly a hero rarely a villain:** When it is going well it is usually thanks to me but when it is not going well I tend to think it must be someone else's fault.

**This could be me:** not at all rarely sometimes often always **(Please circle)**

13. **Jump in or hold back:** either a) I am in at the deep end as a helper and tend to give my all or b) I am not so involved and hold back, miss the moment to help or watch on from the side-lines.

**This could be me:** not at all rarely sometimes often always **(Circle for a) underline for b)**

14. **My hands are tied:** With a freer hand I could be more helpful but I must follow the rules.

**This could be me:** not at all rarely sometimes often always **(Please circle)**

15. **If I don't help no one will:** Other people won't see the need, or have the knowhow to help so it is left up to me to provide the care that someone needs.

**This could be me:** not at all rarely sometimes often always **(Please circle)**

16. **Involved, busy and needed or at a loose end and bored:** If I am not busy helping people all the time I can be at a loss to know what to do with myself, feel bored and/or not needed so best to keep busy!

**This could be me:** not at all rarely sometimes often always **(Please circle)**

17. **Lack of resources frustrates me:** I know what needs doing and how to help but often the money, the treatment or support is not available and I feel frustrated, angry or helpless.

**This could be me:** not at all rarely sometimes often always **(Please circle)**

18. **Looking after others means neglecting myself:** I put so much into looking after others that their needs take over and I forget to look after myself enough and am at risk of stress.

**This could be me:** not at all rarely sometimes often always **(Please circle)**

19. **Not here, not now:** I see the need to talk about what is happening between us but find it unpredictable or embarrassing and tend to wait and miss the moment to name it.

**This could be me:** not at all rarely sometimes often always **(Please circle)**

20. **Where were we?** I can get so involved in the relationship I forget the purpose for meeting

**This could be me:** not at all rarely sometimes often always **(Please circle)**