

Normalizing Difficulties to Facilitate Open Discussion

For many of us, speaking about difficulties that we are having in attaining a goal can be uncomfortable because we feel we may be judged or viewed as weak. What could a counsellor do to make you feel more comfortable speaking about the difficulties that you are having? Usually, what helps us open up is feeling supported, accepted, and that we are not alone in our struggle. This last part... feeling that we are not the only ones who are having difficulty accomplishing something that we want to achieve... can be accomplished through **normalizing**. In normalizing, we make an empathic statement before asking about difficulties:

I know it can be very difficult to use condoms consistently. What is it like for you to use them?

As a counsellor, I hear from a lot of women about how difficult it can be to get their partners to use a condom. What is it like for you and your partner?

Or, as we discussed during the coaching calls...

As women progress in the study, we are noticing that for some of them, ring use has changed. For example, they start getting tired of using the ring, or they forget to change rings when they are supposed to, or they no longer have a partner and may not feel a need to continue to using it. How are you feeling about the ring as you near the end of the study?

Basically, normalizing accentuates the sense of support, understanding, and safety in discussing a difficult issue. I am always surprised by how powerful it is in helping individuals speak openly. Although we spoke about using it in the context I mentioned above, feel free to use this whenever you think it will help someone feel more comfortable opening up.



A warm hello
from the
COACH Raters!

