

WHEN THE CLIENT SAYS 'I DON'T KNOW'

*Not knowing can be an answer, a pause, a protection
or the beginning of finding words.*

1. PAUSE AND NOTICE

What happens inside me when I hear 'I don't know'?

- ☐ I want to ask another question
- ☐ I feel pressure to help
- ☐ I worry I have got something wrong
- ☐ I feel stuck or uncertain
- ☐ I want to fill the silence
- ☐ Something else

What do I notice in my body?

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2. STAY CURIOUS, NOT CERTAIN

'I don't know' might mean...

- ☐ I genuinely do not know
- ☐ I need more processing time
- ☐ I cannot find the words
- ☐ The question is unclear or too broad
- ☐ It does not feel safe to answer yet
- ☐ I feel overwhelmed, disconnected or numb
- ☐ I am unsure what you want from me
- ☐ I do not want to answer

*More than one possibility may be true.
I do not have to decide for the client.*

3. WHAT WAS HAPPENING AROUND THE MOMENT?

What had we been talking about?

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*What changed in the client's voice, pace, expression,
movement or connection?*

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What assumptions am I making?

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4. RESPONSES I COULD OFFER

- ☐ 'We don't have to know right now.'
- ☐ 'Would some time to think help?'
- ☐ 'Was my question clear, or shall I ask it differently?'
- ☐ 'Would it help to notice what is happening inside as you try to answer?'
- ☐ 'Are there any possibilities, even if none feel certain?'
- ☐ 'Would you prefer to stay here, move on or come back to it?'
- ☐ Allow quiet without withdrawing

*Choose a response that fits this client and this moment—
not a script that must be followed.*

5. ACCESS AND COMMUNICATION

*Could language, sensory load, memory, processing,
emotion, culture or communication differences be
shaping this moment?*

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*What adjustment or choice might make
responding easier?*

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6. WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

*How did the client respond when I slowed down,
clarified, allowed silence or offered choice?*

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What seemed to support connection?

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7. BRINGING IT TO SUPERVISION

What do I want help to understand?

Is this a repeated pattern between us?

*What might the moment communicate about safety,
trust, power or our relationship?*

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8. CARRY FORWARD

One thing I want to practise...

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One thing I want to remember...

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I do not need to pull an answer from the client.
I can help create conditions in which knowing—
or not knowing—can be safely explored.