



Self-Debugging: Support

How to witness without fixing

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Why You're Reading This

Everyone in your accountability relationship should read this guide. You'll be supporting each other — taking turns as both mirror and mirrored. These skills work in both directions.

By entering this relationship, you've each chosen to trust the other with something vulnerable. This is an honor. It's a great compliment. And it comes with responsibility.

Most people go through life without anyone who can witness their struggles without trying to fix them. You've agreed to be that for each other.

You don't have to read everything. It's here as an aid — something to return to when you're not sure how to help. But understand what's at stake: you're both working on patterns that affect your business, wellbeing, and results. You've asked each other to help stay accountable to changes that really matter.

How you show up in this role will shape your relationship. The cheat sheet below will get you started. The rest is here when you need it.

Why This Matters

People can't see themselves clearly. That's not a flaw — it's human. We need mirrors.

Your job is to be a mirror. Not to fix, not to diagnose — to reflect what you see, so they can see themselves.

When someone is doing inner work — with a coach, therapist, or on their own — they'll see things about themselves that are hard to hold alone. Your job as a peer is to help them **see** and **hold** what's

been revealed long enough to do something about it.

This is a learnable skill. This guide teaches it.

Cheat Sheet

Your job: Be a mirror. Help them see themselves.

The one rule: Reflect, don't fix.

Bearing phrases:

- "That sounds hard."
- "I'm here."
- "What do you need right now?"

Questions that work (from *The Coaching Habit*):

- "What's on your mind?"
- "And what else?"
- "What's the real challenge here for you?"

Observe, don't diagnose:

- Say: "I notice you mentioned X three times"
- Don't say: "Your X comes from Y"

When stuck: Name it. "I don't know what to say, but I'm here."

When it's too big: "This feels important. Have you talked to a coach or therapist about it?"

The rest of this guide explains why these work and how to do them well.

The Core Distinction: Bearing vs. Fixing

When someone shares something vulnerable, you have two instincts:

Fixing: "Have you tried...?" "You should..." "What if you..."

Bearing: "That sounds hard." "I'm here." "What do you need right now?"

Default to bearing. Fix only when asked.

Why Fixing Fails

Fixing feels helpful. It isn't.

When someone has just seen something painful about themselves, advice doesn't land. They're not ready to solve it — they're trying to **survive seeing it**. Advice in that moment feels dismissive: "Yes, but have you tried not having this problem?"

Fixing also puts you in the expert role. You're not the expert on their patterns — that's for coaches, therapists, or their own deeper work. Your job is simpler and harder: be present while they process.

What Bearing Looks Like

Phrases that bear:

- "That sounds hard."
- "I hear you."
- "What do you need right now?"
- "I'm here."

Phrases that fix (avoid unless asked):

- "Have you tried...?"
- "You should..."
- "What worked for me was..."

When to Fix

Fix when they explicitly ask:

- "I'm stuck. What would you do?"
- "Do you have any suggestions?"
- "I need advice on this."

Even then, offer tentatively: "I don't know if this applies, but..." You're not the expert.

Container Skills

A **container** is a support structure that helps someone hold difficult self-knowledge without being overwhelmed.

You are part of your partners' container. Here's how to do that well.

What Containers Do

- Create safety to feel difficult things
- Bear witness (someone knows, you're not alone)
- Prevent overwhelm (someone else is holding the edges)
- Enable processing (you can think when you're not drowning)

How to Be a Good Container

1. Stay regulated yourself

If you get flooded by their emotion, you can't hold space. Notice your own body. If you're getting overwhelmed:

- Take a breath
- Ground yourself (feet on floor, hand on table)
- It's okay to say: "I'm feeling a lot hearing this. Give me a moment."

2. Don't try to make the feeling go away

The goal isn't to help them feel better. The goal is to help them feel **what they're feeling** without being alone in it. Discomfort is part of the work.

3. Track, don't lead

Follow where they're going. Don't steer toward resolution. Ask: "What's coming up for you?" not "Have you thought about the solution?"

4. Name what you see (gently)

- "You seem really affected by this."
- "There's a lot of energy when you talk about that."
- "I notice you keep coming back to X."

These observations help them see themselves. They're not diagnoses — just mirrors.

5. Know your limits

If something feels bigger than you can hold:

- "This feels really important. Have you talked to your coach/therapist about it?"
- "I want to support you, but I'm not sure I'm the right resource for this."
- "This might need professional support."

Knowing when to escalate is a container skill, not a failure.

Feedback Without Diagnosing

You're not a therapist or coach. You're not trying to see their deepest patterns or name what's underneath. That's for professionals or their own deeper work.

Your job is **observation**, not diagnosis.

The Difference

Observation (Your Job)	Diagnosis (Not Your Job)
"I notice you mentioned pricing anxiety three times this week"	"Your pricing anxiety comes from a scarcity wound rooted in your family's financial instability"
"It sounds like the same thing happened with this client as with the last one"	"You have a pattern of attracting clients who don't respect boundaries because..."
"How did that feel in your body?"	"That's a freeze response from early attachment trauma"

Good Observation Phrases

- "I notice..."
- "You've mentioned X a few times — what's that about?"
- "What do you make of that?"

Questions > Statements

When in doubt, ask a question instead of making a statement.

Statement: "You're avoiding the real issue."

Question: "What do you think you might be avoiding?"

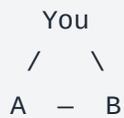
Statement: "That's your fear of rejection talking."

Question: "What are you afraid might happen?"

Questions invite exploration. Statements shut it down.

Small Group Dynamics

If you're in a group of 3, you have mutual relationships with both partners.



The Challenge

It's natural for one relationship to feel easier than another. But if you form a tight pair with A and neglect B, the group breaks.

How to Maintain All Relationships

1. Check in with both every week

Even if one partner is quieter or their stuff feels less urgent, reach out. "How's the week going? Anything coming up?"

2. Don't discuss one partner with the other

If you have concerns about A, bring them to A directly. Don't process them with B. This creates triangulation.

3. Notice if someone's fading

If one partner goes quiet, name it gently: "Hey, I noticed you've been quieter this week. Everything okay?"

4. It's okay if relationships are different

You don't have to have identical relationships with both partners. But both need to feel like real relationships, not afterthoughts.

What to Share (and What Not To)

Share with Your Peers

- What you're tracking: "Here's what I logged/noticed this week"
- Patterns you're noticing: "I keep seeing X"
- What's been revealed (if you want support): "I realized this pattern, and I'm struggling with it"
- Implementation challenges: "I tried a different response and here's what happened"
- Requests for accountability: "Can you check in with me about X?"

Keep Private (Unless You Choose Otherwise)

- Deep personal history (that's for coaches or therapy)
- Material that feels too raw to share
- Anything you're not ready to be held accountable for
- Details about clients/work that would violate confidentiality

The Test

Share if: You want support, accountability, or witness

Keep private if: You're not ready for anyone else to hold it yet

You control what you share. But remember: what you don't share, peers can't help with.

What to Do When You Don't Know What to Do

Sometimes your partner shares something and you have no idea how to respond. That's normal.

When You're Stuck

Option 1: Name it

- "I'm not sure what to say, but I'm here."
- "I don't have advice for this. I just want you to know I heard you."

Option 2: Ask what they need

- "What would be most helpful right now — just listening, or thinking through options?"
- "Do you want me to just be here, or do you want to problem-solve?"

Option 3: Reflect back

- "It sounds like you're feeling [X] about [Y]."
- "What I'm hearing is..."

Option 4: Sit in silence

You don't have to fill every pause. Sometimes presence without words is the most supportive response.

When It Feels Too Big

If what they're sharing feels beyond peer support:

- "This sounds really significant. Have you talked to a coach or therapist about it?"
- "I want to support you, but I think this might need a deeper conversation than I can offer."
- "This feels like it might need professional support."

Knowing your limits is wisdom, not failure.

Escalation Paths

Not everything can (or should) be handled by peers. Here's how to route things appropriately:

Situation	Route To
Normal weekly check-in	Peers (async)
Processing what you've realized about yourself	Peers
Implementation accountability	Peers
Stuck on something peers have already discussed	Coach or group session
Pattern going deeper than peers can hold	Coach or therapist
Feeling overwhelmed or destabilized	Professional support, possibly pause the work
Crisis (safety concerns)	Professional help immediately

How to Suggest Escalation

Don't say: "You need professional help."

Do say: "This feels really important. I wonder if this is something to bring to a coach or therapist."

Don't say: "I can't help you with this."

Do say: "I want to support you, and I think this might need more than peer support."

The Role Clarity Summary

Role	Responsibility
Professionals (coaches, therapists)	Diagnosis, revealing deep patterns, container repair, teaching
Peers	Support, accountability, bearing witness, noticing (not diagnosing)
You (for yourself)	Tracking, reviewing, trying alternative responses, asking for what you need

You're not trying to be a therapist. You're trying to be present.

Your presence — showing up, checking in, witnessing — is the support. You don't need to have answers. You don't need to fix anything. You need to be there.

Quick Reference: Check-In Format

If you're following Self-Debugging: OS: Your weekly reflection is your starting point. Don't read all your daily logs because you don't know what to say. Instead, point to the ONE thing that matters most right now — the pattern you're stuck on, the question you can't answer alone. Focus where it matters and invite help there.

Weekly async check-in (5-10 min each direction):

1. **Share:** "Here's what I noticed this week"
2. **Ask:** "What are you seeing in mine?" or "Any observations?"
3. **Offer:** "Here's what I notice in yours" (observation, not diagnosis)
4. **Commit:** "Here's what I'm working on this week"
5. **Request:** "Can you check in with me about X?" (if needed)

When a partner shares something hard:

1. Bear first (don't fix)
 2. Name what you see (gently)
 3. Ask what they need
 4. Escalate if it's beyond peer scope
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Your Practice

This week:

1. **Practice bearing** — Next time someone shares something hard, resist the urge to fix. Just be present.
2. **Try observation language** — "I notice..." instead of "You should..."
3. **Check in with your accountability partners** — Make sure no relationship is neglected.
4. **Notice your own limits** — When do you feel out of your depth? That's useful data.

Remember

Transformation works because of peer support. Not despite having "only" peer support, but **because** peers provide something professionals can't: ongoing witness, daily accountability, and the experience of not being alone with difficult self-knowledge.

You don't have to be an expert. You have to be present.

That's enough.

Want to debug your own patterns?

This guide teaches you to support others. If you want to see your own hidden patterns — the ones costing you money, time, and relationships — start with the free Self-Debugging: OS mini-course at brianbug.com



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