Hi, it's Brooke Castillo from The Life Coach School, and in this video I'm going to talk to you about the concept of holding the space.

One of the most important things we do for our clients is hold the space for them to explore themselves. What we mean by that is it's not a physical, literal space that we're holding, because a lot of the coaching that we do is over the phone, but it's an emotional space. Most importantly, it's a non-judgmental space.

Now, it sounds like something that might be very easy to do, something that maybe we do with our friends. But this is actually very different than the work that you will do with any friends that you ever work with. Here's what I mean by that. Before you ever meet with a client, and I like to do this maybe an hour before my session, is I sit down and I write down any thoughts, opinions, or judgments I have of my client.
Many of my new students will come to me and they say "Oh, I don't judge people. I would never judge my client." Well that's not true. As human beings we're always judging. It doesn't necessarily mean that you're going to be having negative opinions of your clients. Your opinions may be very positive of them, but any kind of opinion, any kind of judgment, any kind of thought that you're having about what your client should or shouldn't do will interfere with your ability to coach them.

What I like to do is before I meet with the client, is I sit down and I write down all of my thoughts, all of my opinions about the client. I have a look at them because I need to be aware of them. Then symbolically what I do is I put them to the side and I say "None of those are relevant. It is not my job to tell my client what they should or shouldn't be doing." You can tell when you're coaching because you start feeling this sense of wanting to control your client, control maybe what they are doing. Then you know that you're not holding the space properly.

Then you go into your session and you wipe your mind of any kind of opinion or thought and you let the client figure out their own opinions and their own thoughts about their own life. You help them because you have perspective. One of the best gifts that you have as a coach is you're not in your client's life. You're not in there feeling their emotions. You don't have all of the invested interest in what's happening or what's not happening. That gives you a beautiful way to be able to see it from an objective place.

Then, as they're exploring their own thoughts and their own ideas, what you do is reflect those thoughts and those ideas back to your client. It's not your job to argue with their thoughts. It's just your job to show them "Hey, when you think this way, notice what you feel. Notice what you do." That is your job of holding the space.

Now one of the concepts that I like to use with my clients is the pool, like if you picture a swimming pool. You as the coach, your job is to stand outside of the swimming pool. Your client is in there and sometimes that pool is like a mire of trouble. With our friends what we do is we jump in the pool with them and we commiserate with them.
We like "Oh, this does suck. This is terrible." But what we do as coaches is we stay outside of the pool and we don't jump in. We can empathize with their pain. We can understand what they're going through but we don't buy into their story. We don't agree with what they present with. We stay on the outside and just show them what they are doing and what they are creating.

As I teach I'll sometimes say "Oops, you're totally in the pool with the client." Let me give you an example. If a client comes to you and they present with a problem, "My husband and I are having a lot of trouble in our marriage because he has a very bad temper." Now, if you jump in the pool with them what you're going to be doing is agreeing with them. "Oh, your husband has a bad temper." Now you're in the pool agreeing with your client's story that her husband has a bad temper. From there it's very difficult for you to coach because now you're in the pool, you're agreeing with your client, and you're going to try and wrestle your way out of it.

Now if you stay outside of the pool you don't agree that the client's husband has a bad temper. You don't think that he doesn't. You just show your client that when she thinks that way, when she believes that way, this is how she responds. We can't coach the husband because the husband's not in the room. We can't make assumptions about the husband based on the perception of your client. But what we can do is stay out of that pool, not agree with any of the client's story, and reflect back to them what they are thinking and the effect that it's having in their life.

The other really important piece of holding the space is when your client is in tremendous amount of pain. A lot of times your clients will come to you on the phone and they will be crying and they will be very upset about what's going on in their life. They will have this whole story about it. Now, as a coach who loves your client you may feel the need to empathize with them. "Oh, that is horrible. I'm so very sorry to hear that," and to match their emotional state. That is not something that we encourage you to do. We encourage you to stay in a very loving and neutral place with your client so they can explore their pain without you becoming involved in it, without you then sharing in it or commiserating in it.
What that does for clients is it's really powerful because then they can see their pain without your reaction to it. That is what holding the space is. No one else in their life is going to be able to stay in that neutral space unless it's another trained professional and not get involved with it. By you staying neutral they have the space to, what I like to call clean out their ugly. They can look at their ugly without you getting involved in it.

The last, very last, piece is: If you are not in a space where you are feeling love for your client and unconditional support for your client, you are not holding the space. A lot of times you might just need to take a pause, especially if they are going through something that you can relate to or maybe you've gone through yourself so you're having what we call a blind spot, that's when you might just need to take a deep breath, back up, notice if you have any judgment, anything preventing you from holding that loving space for your client, because that is one of your best assets as a coach: holding the space.