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6 Helping skills for understanding

This chapter will focus on techniques that promote understanding of self and others. The outcomes you can expect from studying this chapter are competencies to: (1) identify seven helping skills that contribute to helpee self-understanding; (2) cite subskills and give examples from helping interviews; and (3) with practice, use effectively seven basic skill clusters in helping relationships.

The final criterion of success will be your demonstrated performance of the skills such that the helpee feels understood and confirms this feeling with appropriate verbal or nonverbal behavior. You may expect helpees to respond positively to you when they feel you understand them. You can expect that they will talk about themselves and you more freely. They will share their new understandings with you. Later, you may expect helpees to try to change themselves or their circumstances on the basis of their new understandings, skills, and changed environments.

Skill cluster 1: Listening skills

At first glance the term "listening" implies a passive act of taking in the content of the helpee's communication, but actually it involves a very active process of responding to total messages. It includes not only listen-

ing with the ears to his words and with the eyes to his body language, but a total kind of perceptiveness which is best described by Reik's (1948) term "listening with the third ear." It means also that we are silent much of the time and that the helpees talk. When the helper can answer in considerable detail the question, "What is going on in this person right now and in his life space?" he is listening with all his perceptual capacities. Listening skills are basic to all interviewing whether the purpose be for gaining information, conducting structured depth interviews, or open informal helping.

ATTENDING

Attending has several subcomponents, which have been studied intensively by Ivey and others (1968). The first of these is *contact*, principally through the eye. The helper attends to the helpee by looking at him, usually at his eyes. It is a way of indicating intense interest in the other person because eyes are one of our key vehicles for communicating. This does not mean that eye contact must be a fixed stare to be effective. If the helper is honestly interested and at ease himself, he will look naturally at the helpee while he is talking. Simply writing about eye contact does not do justice to the power of the eyes to communicate caring and understanding as well as to maintain attention. Think of your own experience when someone looked at you intensively. Sometimes it was done in a vacuous sort of way just to hold your attention. At other times they said with their eyes in a warm way, "Look at me; I hear you; I understand," so that you felt they really cared about you and understood how you were feeling.

Distance between helper and helpee needs experimentation before the most comfortable distance for the two is discovered. Some helpees are very uncomfortable, for example, if the eye contact is less than three feet or so, because they are so socially conditioned against close contact. Helpee nonverbal behavior should be watched for signs of stress or discomfort.

A second element of attending is *posture*. This is usually a natural helper response to interest. Usually he leans toward the helpee in a relaxed manner. Relaxation is important because tenseness tends to take his focus from the helpee to himself, in addition to provoking an empathic tension response in the helpee.

A third related element of attending is *gesture*. The helper communicates much with his body movements. If he flails wildly with his hands, or if he crosses them over his chest in a rather pontifical manner, he will very likely communicate some unintended messages. The purpose for mentioning this obvious fact is to help you be more aware of the messages you send to helpees with gestures. Are the messages ones you intend to communicate?

A fourth attending component is *verbal* behavior. The key characteristic of this component is that it relates to what the helpee has said. The helper does not ask questions, take the topic in a new direction, nor add to the helpee's meaning. An example would be to mention a word or reflect a phrase, from the statements of the helpee to focus further on an idea. Some confirming, yet not too personal, comment such as, "I see what you mean," or "I can appreciate what you went through," or "That certainly seems to tie things together," often helps to keep him exploring and assures him that you are listening.

Why does attending behavior work so well? It is very rewarding according to studies, and helpees like it. The *effect on the helpee* of attending behavior is to *encourage* him to go on verbalizing his ideas or feelings freely. It has a powerful *reinforcing effect*, in other words. It allows the helpee to explore in his own way and tends to build a sense of responsibility for the interview. This is one difference between helping and conversation. In social interaction there is more give and take of opinions, questions, and feelings. Conversely, *selective inattention* by the helper can serve to discourage further exploration of the topic. For example, the helpee may be on a rambling intellectual description of an historical event. You may think it more productive to have him focus on how he feels now about that event, so you attend when he focuses on feelings and ignore him when he is on a story-telling trip. You can see how *controlling* attending behavior can be. Helpees control helpers, too, by giving them verbalizations that hold their attention, and helpers certainly control helpees by their attending behavior.

If the helper is relaxed, the helpee will tend to be more at ease also. One of the most difficult tasks for the beginning helper is to let the helpee tell his story without profuse questioning and jumping from topic to topic in a tense manner.

Attending behavior, furthermore, is a kind of "fail-safe" method to use when opening an interview because it furthers the goals of helpee self-exploration and minimizes the chances of making destructive interventions. Even if an awkward silence takes place, the helper can acknowledge what has just been stated or refer to some earlier comments.

The following list is a summary of guidelines for effective attending behavior:

1. Establish *contact* through looking at the helpee when he talks.
2. Maintain a *natural relaxed posture* which indicates your interest.
3. Use *natural gestures* which communicate your intended messages.

4. Use *verbal statements* which relate to his statements without interruptions, questions, or new topics.

PARAPHRASING

Paraphrasing is a method of restating the helpee's basic message in similar, but usually fewer, words. The main purpose of paraphrasing for the helper is to test his understanding of what the helpee has said. (It is a practical test of your attending tool) A second purpose is to communicate to the helpee that you are trying to understand his basic message, and if successful, that you have been with him during his verbal explorations. A paraphrase executed to the helpee's satisfaction is one objective definition of understanding.

The helper translates his raw perceptions of what the helpee is saying into more simple, precise, and culturally relevant wording. The helper repeats, or feeds back only the helpee's message, and avoids adding his own ideas. To help in this process the helper should ask himself the following question constantly: "What is this person's basic thinking and feeling message to me?" The helper, at the time of a natural break in the flow of ideas and feelings gives his concise summary of what he has been hearing. Usually the paraphrase has heavy cognitive content, although it includes feelings if these are an important part of the helpee's message. The helper should look for some cue that his paraphrase has been helpful. Examples of paraphrasing are:

He: I really think he is a very nice guy; he's so thoughtful, sensitive, and kind. He calls me a lot. He's fun to go out with.
Hr: You like him very much, then.
He: I do, very much.

He: I just don't understand. One minute she tells me to do this, and the next minute to do that.
Hr: She really confuses you.
He: Yeah, she sure does, and besides . . . .

There are some problems in using paraphrasing and other listening component skills. If the helper is not careful, he develops a highly stylized way of responding which may be annoying to the helpee. He may say repeatedly, for example, "I hear you saying. . . ." Using a paraphrase seems a bit artificial at first until the helper experiences some rewards in the form of encouraging responses from the helpee. After a while it feels like a more natural form of communication than the usual questions, opinions, veiled threats, or bland conversation fillers.

The helpee experiences a feeling of being understood as a consequence of paraphrasing. He also may experience more specific results in the form of a clearer perception of what he said and a sense of direction to rambling statements. He tends to like the helper who uses paraphrases skillfully, The final effect of paraphrased statements is that he feels encouraged to go on. When learning paraphrasing skills in a laboratory setting, the students should practice until the "helpee" indicates that the paraphrase is accurate to his satisfaction in at least two out of three trials. Appendix 2 contains a brief illustrative exercise to learn paraphrasing.

Here is a summary of guidelines for paraphrasing:

1. Listen for the *basic message* of the helpee.
2. *Restate* to the helpee a concise and simple summary of his basic message.
3. Observe a *cue,* or ask for a *response,* from the helpee which confirms or disconfirms the accuracy and helpfulness of the paraphrase for promoting his understanding.

CLARIFYING

Clarifying brings vague material into sharper focus. It goes beyond simple paraphrasing in that the helper makes a *guess* regarding the helpee's *basic message* and offers it to the helpee. He may also ask for clarification when he cannot make sense out of the helpee's responses. The message may have been so vague, the wording so confusing, the reasoning so circuitous, or the style so complex, that it is a strain to try to paraphrase. Following are some examples which might follow after one of those rambling helpee monologues: "I'm confused, let me try to state what I think you were saying, . . ." "I lost you there; I'm not clear how you feel about your job; could you give me a brief repeat and an illustration?" "It seems to me you were trying to focus on something there, but the ideas just seemed to tumble over one another." "I'm not sure I understand; could you tell me more?"

This method has a touch of interpreting or explaining how the helper sees the situation, and this interpreting need is one of the strong temptations to which helpers must not submit in the early stage of the relationship. The clarifying remarks are stated in terms of the helper's feelings of confusion thereby avoiding implications of criticism at this tender stage. After all, the confusion may be due to the helper's inattention rather than confusing helpee statements. The effect of clarifying responses or requests on the helpee should be more clear helpee statements, such as efforts to rephrase, to summarize, or to illustrate.

General guidelines for clarifying are:

1. *Admit confusion* about helpee's meaning.
2. Try a *restatement* or *ask for clarification,* repetition, or illustration.

PERCEPTION CHECKING

Perception checking asks the helpee for verification of your perceptions of what he said, usually over several statements. Ask for feedback about the accuracy of your listening. The reason that perception checking is so effective as a listening skill is that it is a method of giving and receiving feedback on the accuracy of the communication. Assumptions that understanding is taking place are checked out with the helpee. Here again, ordinary social conversation differs from a helping interview. We are conditioned to chatter onward socially, even to deliberately confusing the meaning with inuendo, humor, and metaphor. We rarely check with one another about what we really are trying to say. In helping relationships we reverse this process and put a heavy premium on direct and clear communication aided by frequent perception checks.

Examples of helper perception checks are: "You seem to be very irritated with me; is that right?" "I was wondering if the plan you chose is the one you really want. You expressed some doubt; did I hear correctly?" "I want to check with you what I'm hearing. You said that you love your wife, yet in the last few minutes, you said that you can't stand to be with her. I detected strong contradictory feelings toward her; is that the way it appears to you too?"

The effect on the helpee is a feeling of being understood. Listening, followed by perception checking, is a method of clearing up confusing communications quickly. Perception checking thus serves to correct misperceptions of the helper before they increase to misunderstandings.

In summary, guidelines for perception checking are:

1. *Paraphrase* what you think you heard.
2. Ask for *confirmation* directly from the helpee about the accuracy of your perception of what he said.
3. Allow the helpee to *correct your perception* if it was inaccurate.

Listening is the key skill in this cluster. To use it naturally and effectively, the helper must want very much to understand the helpee, to communicate meaningfully with him, and to relate to him with acceptance and trust. Effective listening requires much confidence in helpees' abilities to solve their own problems and to establish their independent identities.

Skill cluster 2: Leading

The purpose of leading is to invite or encourage the helpee to respond to open communication. Although leading skills are used throughout the helping process, they are useful particularly in the opening stages of a relationship to invite verbal expression. The helper slightly anticipates the helpee's direction of thought as a method for stimulating talk. It is analogous to the football passer who anticipates the receiver's path so that the ball and the receiver arrive at the same point. The helper's interventions thus appear to the helpee appropriate to where he wants to go.

Leading sometimes is described in helping literature as the helper's degree of impact upon, or thinking ahead, of the helpee. All helping skills can be rated on the amount of leading involved in their use, but for purposes of this discussion, leading will mean the more specific act of anticipating where the helpee is going and the act of responding with an appropriately encouraging remark.

More specific objectives of leading are: (1) to encourage the helpee to explore his feelings and to elaborate on those he has discussed already; (2) to allow the helpee freedom to explore in a variety of directions and to respond freely to what is going on; and (3) to encourage the helpee to be active in the process and to retain primary responsibility.

INDIRECT LEADING

The main purposes of indirect leading are to get the helpee started and to keep responsibility on him for keeping the interview going. One common use of this idea is to open an interview. Examples are: "What would you like to talk about?" "Perhaps we could start by your telling me where you're at now." "Please tell me why you are here?" Later interview examples are: "Tell me more about that." "You were saying (pause)." "What do you think that means?" "How did you feel?" "Is there anything more you would like to discuss?" The generality of these leads allows the helpee to project his own ideas and direction into the interview. Sometimes, pausing and looking expectantly at the helpee serves as an indirect lead.

The helpee's response to indirect leads is to realize he has an invitation to tell his story or elaborate on what he has said. This is encouraging to most helpees, because they experience more responsibility for the relationship. To others it is threatening or annoying since they

often expect the expert to be more active and to do most of the talking, advising, and questioning.

The following are guidelines for indirect leading:

1. Determine the *purpose* of the lead clearly.
2. Keep the lead *general* and deliberately vague.
3. *Pause* long enough for the helpee to pick up the lead.

DIRECT LEADING

Direct leading is a method of focusing the topic more specifically. This method also encourages the helpee to elaborate, clarify, or illustrate what he has been saying. Sometimes a strong element of suggestion is included. Some examples are: "Tell me more about your mother." "Suppose we explore your ideas about teaching a little more." "How do you mean—funky?" "Can you think of an illustration which happened recently?"

The behavior of the helpee in response to a direct lead usually is to comply with the specifics of the lead, particularly if the helper's attitude manifests interest to match his words. The main longer range consequence, however, is to enhance his awareness and, later understanding through more elaborate exploration of his feelings.

The guidelines for direct leading are:

1. Determine the *purpose* of the lead.
2. Express the *purpose* in words which elicit specific elaboration.
3. Allow the helpee *freedom to follow* your lead.

FOCUSING

Focusing serves to pinpoint the talk on something that the helper thinks would be fruitful to explore. It is used when the helpee is rambling vaguely and seemingly without focus. Often, in the early stages, helpees will wander over numerous topics, sometimes in circular fashion. Occasionally, the helper's indirect leads have encouraged this wandering. If allowed to continue for several minutes it tends to become confusing for both. When the helper thinks that the helpee has explored the main topics of his concern, the helper deliberately focuses on one aspect of the helpee's talk which he feels could be elaborated productively. Sometimes he stops the helpee and asks him to choose an aspect on which to focus since another purpose of focusing is to emphasize a feeling or idea from a vast array of intellectual verbiage. It is also a way of aiding the helpee to get in touch with his feelings.

Some illustrations of focusing leads are: "Please elaborate more specifically on those feelings about your mother." "You have been discussing many topics the last few minutes; could you pick the most important one to you and tell me more about it?" "How would you choose one word to describe the last five minutes talk?" "We have been talking about words, words, words, but I haven't detected much feeling yet; could you name a feeling you have right now?" "What were your feelings as we've been talking?" "Let's not talk for awhile. I suggest you close your eyes and try to get in touch with what you are feeling. . . ."

Focusing can sometimes be done by picking out one word or a short phrase from the helpee's talk and repeating it with a question mark or with emphasis. For example, after he has been talking about how confusing his relationships with his supervisor have been, you might say, "Confusing?" The effect is, "Tell me more!" The one word focusing method can be effective in keeping the helpee going. The helper can say, for example, "And?" "Then, what?" "But?"

The effect of focusing on helpees is that the method tends to reduce confusion, diffusion, and vagueness. Again, the ultimate outcome expected is more meaningful verbalization, and eventually, increased understanding. Another immediate outcome expected from leads focusing on feelings is that the helpee will talk more about his feeling experiences. This skill, like all in the leading cluster, has a controlling effect on the helpee. This awareness should result in cautious judgment about the degree of leading the helper should exert.

In summary, guidelines for focusing are:

1. Use your *own feelings* of confusion and sense of helpee direction as a guide to decide when to focus.
2. Be alert to *feedback* from the helpee about priority of topics.
3. Assist the helpee to *focus on feelings* which may be hidden in the discussion.

QUESTIONING

Many of the leads described above have been illustrated in the form of open questions which lead the helpee to further exploration. Such questions are not those used to obtain information nor those which can be answered with "yes" or "no." They are open-ended questions that leave the helpee free to explore and to take the interview where he wishes, rather than into areas of helper interest. This method of questioning assumes that the questions are to assist the helpee to understand rather than to promote the helper's understanding.

An example of an open question is "Could you explain more about

your relationships with your parents?" *not,* "Do you get along well with your parents?" Other examples are: "What do you mean by 'failure'?" "How do they indicate their feelings?" Note that questions beginning with "how" or "what" tend to elicit elaborated responses. The effect is different from those starting with "are," "is," or "do." It would be difficult to answer the illustrative questions above with a single helpee "yes" or "no."

The following list summarizes guidelines for question types of leads:

1. Ask *open-ended questions* which cannot be answered with "yes" or "no."
2. Ask questions that elicit *feelings* from what the helpee just said rather than information.
3. Ask questions that lead to *clarification for the helpee* rather than information for the helper.

Skill cluster 3: Reflecting

Reflecting is one way of expressing to the helpee that we are in his internal frame of reference and that we recognize his deep concerns. There are three areas of reflecting—feeling, experience, and content. The main purpose of using reflection from the helper's viewpoint is to understand the helpee's experience, and to tell him that he is trying to perceive the world the way the helpee is viewing it.

REFLECTING FEELINGS

Reflecting feelings involves expressing in fresh words the essential feelings, stated or strongly implied, of the helpee. The purpose of reflecting feelings are to focus on feeling rather than content, to bring vaguely expressed feelings into clearer awareness, and to assist the helpee to "own" his feelings. So often helpees talk about their feelings as "it" or "them," as if feelings were not part of themselves. This is why we usually begin the reflecting method with "*You* feel . . ." as an attempt to help him reown the feeling. You will know when your reflection is accurate because the helpee will tend to respond with something like, "Yeah, that's it."

Skillful use of reflecting depends on the helper's ability to identify feelings and cues for feelings. He must experience feelings himself and be in touch with those feelings. Feelings are more subtle than emotions, which we usually think of as anger, love, disgust, fear, or aggression.

Examples of feelings would be affection, pleasure, hostility, guilt or anxiety. When a helpee is expressing strong emotion it is so obvious to both that reflecting is unnecessary. The more subtle feelings however, are often disguised behind words. The helper looks for these hidden feelings and brings them out in the open for the helpee to recognize more clearly.

Examples of reflecting feelings are: "In other words, you hate his guts." "You've always wanted to be a doctor." "He makes you feel guilty all the time.' "It really hurts to be rejected by someone you love." Sometimes two contradictory (ambivalent) feelings are expressed, and a reflection clarifies this condition as, "He makes you angry when he punishes you, yet you feel relieved about it, too."

REFLECTING EXPERIENCE

Reflecting experience goes beyond reflecting verbalized feelings in that the helper reads the body language that is expressing implied feeling nonverbally. He responds to the *total* experience he observes in the helpee. The helper notes, for example, the rapidity of speech, the heavy breathing, sighing, flushing, changing postures, and darting glances as cues to the helpee's feeling. When reflecting feelings implied in body language, it is a good idea to describe some observed behavior first, then reflect the feeling. Examples are, "You are smiling (behavior description); but I sense you are really hurting inside" (reflection of feeling). "You say you really care about her (description); but almost every time you talk about her you clench your fists (description); it seems you strongly resent her" (feeling).

REFLECTING CONTENT

Reflecting content is repeating in fewer and fresher words the essential ideas of the helpee, and is like paraphrasing. It is used to clarify ideas that the helpee is expressing with difficulty and resulting confusion. He may lack vocabulary, for example, to express ideas simply and clearly; so, reflecting content is a skill to give him words for expressing himself. Sometimes it helps to repeat the helpee's statement, emphasizing a key word. The helpee says, for example, "Her remark really cut me." The helper responds, "It *really* hurt."

The three reflecting skills are presented together because in actual practice they blend into one another. The helper is paying attention to *what* the helpee is saying (content), but also *how* he is saying it (feeling tone). The helper usually responds with a mix of feeling and content to suit his process goals at that moment. He may judge, for example, that

the helpee is not ready to face his deeper feelings implied in his body language, so he will emphasize more of the content in his reflections. It is a way of controlling feeling awareness and expression in the helping interview. On the other hand, in the early stages he may wish to emphasize recognition and exploration of feelings, so he will emphasize reflection of the total feeling impressions he gets from feeling words and observations of body movements and postures.

The helpee experiences the reflecting helper as a person who understands what he, the helpee, is experiencing. This adds considerably to the possibility that the long range outcomes of understanding self and others will be reached. A more immediate outcome is that the helpee will be able to identify and express feelings more effectively. Furthermore, he will be able to own his feelings as indicated by more "I feel" statements. In other words, he will be more ready to continue expressing feelings.

COMMON ERRORS IN REFLECTING

Some common errors in using reflecting methods are, first, getting into a rut, or *stereotyping* your responses. This means that helpers tend to begin their reflections in the same monotonous way, such as, "You feel . . .", "You think . . .", "It seems to you . . .", "I gather that . . .". This style rut tends to give the impression of insincerity or an impoverished word supply The implication is clear that we need to vary our styles of reflecting.

Another error is *timing*. Beginning helpers sometimes get into a pattern of reflecting after almost every statement the helpee makes, or they wait for a long monologue to finish and then try heroically to capture the complex feelings in one statement. It is not necessary to reflect every statement, yet it is effective to interrupt the helpee occasionally to reflect. Usually it helps to nod acceptance or give a slight "uh huh" or "I see," to encourage continuation until a reflection seems appropriate.

Overshooting with too much *depth* of feeling for which the helpee is unprepared may retard the interview. We may read more interpretations into his statements than are there. The helpee says, for example, "I don't know if I can stay overseas for a year without her." The helper who read more depth of feeling than was there responded, "You feel you can't function at all unless she is with you."

The *language* must be appropriate to the cultural experience and educational level of the helpee. He says, "I can't make it with girls; I'm so shy." The helper rather inappropriately responds, "Your inferiority complex really shows with girls then." At the same time the language of

reflection must be natural for the helper too. If he is a traditional type, for example, he would appear as a phoney to use "mod" language.

It may be reassuring to realize that helpees usually are not as critical as these illustrations imply. As helpers, we can be wide of the mark in reflecting, but if our sincerity and interest shines through, helpees are amazingly tolerant of bungling efforts. Occasionally, an inaccurate reflection will elicit a correcting response from the helpee so that the net effect is clarification and progress even though the reflection was not accurate.

A summary of guidelines for reflecting is as follows:

1. Read the *total message*—stated feelings, nonverbal body feelings, and content.
2. Select the best *mix* of content and feelings to fulfill the goals for understanding at this stage of the helping process.
3. *Reflect* the experience just perceived.
4. *Wait* for helpee's confirming or disconfirming response to your reflection as a cue about what to do next.

Skill cluster 4: Summarizing

Summarizing skills include attention to *what* the helpee says (content), *how* he says it (feelings), and the *purpose*, *timing*, and *effect* of his statements (process). It is commonplace in most helping interviews to wander widely over many ideas and feelings. This may be part of the helpee's manner of showing his discomfort by resisting direct discussion, or of keeping the helper at a safe emotional distance for awhile. It may reflect also the helpee's unwillingness to terminate the interview. Summarizing still involves a process of tying together into one statement several ideas and feelings at the end of a discussion unit or the end of an interview. It is much broader, therefore, than paraphrasing a basic message as indicated in the following example. Following a discussion of the helpee's vague feelings of inadequacy the helper says, "From your talk about family, school, and now your new job of selling, you appear to have experienced feelings of personal failure in all of them."

Summaries of an interview, or series of contacts, may include a paragraph, but the idea is to pick out the highlights and general themes of the content and feelings. Summaries of *process* include statements of where the helping process has been going and where it is now. The helper may say, for example, "You've been discussing your ideal jobs and what things you have liked and disliked about your past work; you've also

talked about your plans for more training. Are you ready to take a look at some other considerations in planning for a new career?"

The main *purpose* of summarizing is to give the helpee a feeling of movement in exploring ideas and feelings, as well as awareness of progress in learning and problem solving. Summarizing also helps to finish an interview on a natural note, to clarify and focus a series of scattered ideas, and to clear the way to go on to a new idea. It permits the helpee to put the pieces together. Summarizing has the effect also of reassuring the helpee that you have been tuned in to his messages all along. For the helper it serves as an effective check on his accuracy of perceiving the full spectrum of helpee messages. Summarizing the previous sessions at the beginning of an interview often provides needed continuity.

The helper tries to get the helpee to do the summarizing, if possible. This is a test of his understanding as well as a method of keeping responsibility on him. The helper may say, for example, "How does our work look to you at this point? Try to pull it together briefly." "Let's take a look at what we've accomplished in this interview; how does it appear to you?" In terminating a relationship it is likely that the summarizing will be a joint effort to capture the essential points explored, progress achieved, and next steps planned.

Guidelines for summarizing are:

1. *Attend* to the various *themes* and emotional *overtones* as the helpee speaks.
2. Put together the key ideas and feelings into *broad statements* of his basic meanings.
3. *Do not add* new ideas to the summary.
4. *Decide* if it would be more helpful to state your summary or ask him to summarize the basic themes, agreements, or plans.
5. In deciding how to do four above consider your *purpose:*
   Was it to *warm up* the helpee at the beginning of the interview?
   Was it to *focus* his scattered thoughts and feelings?
   Was it to *close* discussion on this theme?
   Was it to *check* your understanding of the interview progress?
   Was it to *encourage* him to explore the theme more completely?
   Was it to *terminate* the relationship with a progress summary?
   Was it to *assure* him that the interview was moving along well?

Skill cluster 5: Confronting

Confronting is a complex cluster of helping skills consisting of:

1. *Recognizing* feelings in oneself as a helper.
2. *Describing* feelings in oneself and sharing them with the helpee.
3. *Feeding back* reactions in the form of *opinions* about his behavior.
4. *Meditating* as a form of self-confrontation.
5. *Repeating* as a form of emphasizing and clarifying.
6. *Associating* as a method of getting in touch with feelings.

The idea of confronting is to honestly and directly recognize and point out to helpees what is going on or what you infer is going on. The effects are challenge, exposure, or threat. Resulting emotional effects are sometimes anxiety when challenged with feedback from the helper, and sometimes pleasure with his honest opinions and expressions of caring. In other word, confronting skills involve risk—resulting either in unwanted resistance from helpees or in desired openness of communication. It is a kind of "telling it like it is" method which may threaten or thrill, depending on the timing and readiness of the helpee to be confronted with feedback honestly offered. We will look at the subskills of the confronting skill cluster in more detail below.

RECOGNIZING FEELING

It is very apparent in helping relationships that one's ability to recognize and respond to feelings in helpees is based upon the ability to recognize feelings in oneself. The helper must hear what awareness of his own inner experience is telling him. What do his tenseness, sweating palms, twitching muscles, and fluttering eyelids tell him about his own anxiety, guilt, anger, pleasure, or pain? Therefore, the helper must be aware of fine shades of feeling in himself. These feelings frequently are reactions to what the helpee is saying and can serve as guides to responses. If the helper experiences annoyance, for example, at what the helpee is saying, he must decide whether the goals of the relationship would be enhanced or retarded by expressing those feelings. As indicated in earlier discussions of countertransference feelings, the helper must make two judgments: Is this feeling of annoyance indicative of problems I have as a person, or is it a reasonable reaction to what the helpee is saying? Depending on his theory of what is helpful, the helper usually *expresses* the feeling he is aware of experiencing since the helpee senses it anyway from cues like frowns and agitation.

DESCRIBING AND SHARING FEELING

The principal value in describing feelings in oneself as a helper is that such a description helps to clarify how the helper feels. It also serves as a *model* for the helpee to recognize and express his feelings. Helpees

frequently do not understand the idea of expressing feeling, especially to near strangers—as helpers often appear initially to them. The condition of *trust* is dependent on an open sharing of feelings. Again, the helper can accelerate the process of building trust by sharing his own feelings. This "sharing of experience" as described in Brammer and Shostrom (1968) is one of the best ways to model the idea of "being a person." Some examples are the helper saying, "Your continuing on and on like that is boring me and I find myself getting sleepy." "I feel angry when you talk so much about wanting to hurt other people and not giving a damn about them." "It makes me feel good when you talk about yourself that way." You can see that this kind of response could have a reinforcing effect on the helpee, because he is getting some rewards in the form of helper response for expressing feelings even when that response has a critical tone.

The *values for the helpee* of sharing feelings are considerable. He experiences relief from the tension, (sometimes called emotional catharsis), satisfaction that he had the courage to face the feeling, and release of new creative energy.

The *limitations* of free expression of feelings by helpees (often called ventilation) are that he feels so good afterward that he considers it is unnecessary to go on actively solving his problems. Sometimes, as we will see in the next chapter, expression of feeling is a goal in itself to provide relief from suffering. Most helpees have protective mechanisms for preventing them from revealing more feeling than they are able to tolerate, and helpers should be alert to occasions when it is not so. There are times when the helpee's defenses are overwhelmed, so to speak, and where his behavior deteriorates under prolonged emotional catharsis. This is why it is necessary for helpers offering their services to have colleagues, or specialist referral resources, to call upon in such emergencies.

Some guidelines for knowing how far to let helpees ventilate and some cautions to observe follow. Be cautious about free expression of feeling if:

1. he is known to have severe emotional disorders—hysterical tendencies, delusional thinking, extreme anger, for example;
2. his life is frought with crises and emotionally demanding pressures such that discussing them mobilizes more feeling than he can handle;
3. his past history in dealing with emotional crises is known to be shaky;
4. strong resistance to exploration of feelings is noted;
5. adequacy of your own experience as a helper of disturbed people is doubtful;
6. your own emotional life is in turmoil;

7. time available for working through the feelings all the way is not adequate;
8. specialist support services are not available or adequate;
9. policies of your agency for exploring intense emotional life of clients is discouraged;
10. attitudes and expectations of parents or guardians of young helpees are not explored.

These guidelines are included to enhance your awareness of possible hazards in free expression of feeling, not to discourage you nor make you fearful about dealing with helpee feelings, and also because of the common idea in helping circles that sharing strong feelings always has desirable outcomes. If you find that sharing your own feelings, or working with helpees who are sharing their feelings, is uncomfortable or interferes with your effectiveness, it is a signal to do more work on your own feelings through means described in chapter 2.

An issue more common than excessive sharing of feelings is the helpee's underexpression or ignoring of his feelings. This condition is manifested when the helper focuses on *content* or when the helpee uses the phrase "I feel . . ." when he is referring to an idea. Thus, he is unaware that he is avoiding feelings. An example is, "I feel that the best thing to do is not to go to college at this time." Depending on the tone, this statement expresses an opinion or a conclusion rather than a feeling. A feeling statement would be more like, "I'm afraid of going to college now. High school was such a bore." The principal goal of the helper in using the confronting skill is to challenge the helpee to include honest feeling in his statements. One of the keys to this condition is to model expression of feeling yourself.

A confrontive way to get helpees to express feelings is to ask them to do so. Some examples are: "What are you feeling right now?" "You've described some facts about your situation; how do you feel about it?" "You have been saying how you feel about your job, but I haven't sensed your true feelings about it yet. How strongly do you feel about it?"

In summary, guidelines for describing and sharing feelings are:

1. *Share* your own feelings as a model.
2. *Ask* the helpee to share his feelings.
3. Be *cautious* about the depth and extent of sharing.

FEEDBACK AND OPINION

One of the most confrontive skills is honest reaction to the helpee on how he affects you. Its value lies in its potential for enabling the

helpee to understand himself and to change his behavior. We acquire our definitions of who we are by the reactions of other people to us. Our personalities are the total of our parents' opinions, chidings, and praises. Our helping relationships merely continue this basic process in a more focused fashion.

Feedback is a term borrowed from electronics and physics where information is fed back into a system so that corrections can be made. Examples are thermostats which use information about temperature to activate the furnace switch, or guidance systems in space vehicles which feed information into the navigation equipment to correct the astronauts' course. Similarly, we give information in the form of opinions and reactions to helpees. As a result, they have a better idea of how they are performing, and they can use the information, if they so wish, to change their behavior. Reactions from others are the means for establishing our identity and answering the question, "Who am I?" The main *guidelines* for giving feedback are:

1. Give opinions in the form of feedback only when the helpee is *ready*. This means that in most cases he will ask for feedback, but if not, the helper will ask if he would like some of his reactions. An example is, "We have been talking about your plans for the future, while you were listing your limitations I had some reactions." (Helpee's interest is aroused and he responds, "Oh . . . tell me.") "Well, I'm convinced from what you have told me about yourself that you are vastly underestimating your capabilities here; from my observations I think you express yourself very clearly and concisely, for example."

Feedback may be in the form of critical commentary, also, as in the following illustration: "We have been talking about your problems in getting along with people. You may be interested to know that I have been feeling increasingly irritated with your persistent quibbling about almost everything I say. I feel that I don't want to listen to you anymore. Do you think my reaction is typical of those of other people you know?"

Giving opinions without helpee readiness to make use of them is only likely to arouse resistance, resentment toward the helper, or outright denial since it would not fit the helpee's current opinion of himself.

2. *Describe the behavior* before giving your reaction to it. Note in the illustrations above that the helper described the specific instance and then gave his feeling about it. This keeps the responsibility for opinions on yourself. Often it is difficult to determine when the feedback is a projection of your personal prejudices and problems and when it is the kind of reaction that the helpee generally would get from people. This is why the feedback type of confronting must be done with caution, tentativeness, and the clear understanding that the helper is offering his *personal* reactions to the helpee's behavior. Keeping your reactions descriptive rather than evaluative leaves the helper free to use them as he sees fit.

3. Give feedback in the form of *opinions about his behavior* rather than judgments about him. It may seem like quibbling to separate his behavior from him as a person, but it is vastly different to say, "I don't like the way you constantly interrupt me," from "I don't like you because you are constantly interrupting me."

4. Give feedback about things that the helpee has the *capacity to change*. It is not helpful to give feedback about physical characteristics or life circumstances, for example, which he would find very difficult to change.

5. Feedback should be *given in small amounts* so that the helpee can experience the full impact of the helper's reaction. Too many items may overload him and create confusion and possible resentment. An example of such an overload would be, "I didn't like the way you spoke to me; I felt put down. Besides, you have been late consistently to our staff meetings and your progress reports have been getting skimpier which has been irritating me even more." Feedback given in this cumulative manner serves more as ventilation of hostility for the giver, and less as a helpful gesture to the helpee.

6. Feedback should be a *prompt response* to current and specific behavior, not unfinished emotional business from the past. Being told, for example, that he is "too forceful" is not as helpful as saying, "Just as we were about to decide what to do, you pushed your idea and seemed not to hear the other suggestions. I was conflicted about whether to resist you or just give in."

7. Ask the helpee for *reactions* to your feedback. Was it helpful or not? Did it enhance the relationship or diminish it?

MEDITATING

Meditating is a form of self-confrontation which has ancient origins. Many philosophical groups in the Orient such as Zen, Yoga, and Sufi, along with the Christian and Hebrew traditions of the West, emphasize the values of self-understanding inherent in meditational forms. The main feature and principal value of meditation for the helping process is that it stops the active flow of ideas and actions. It is a kind of "stop time" where the helpee can get in touch with himself. Meditation opens the possibilities of awareness of self in relation to the world, which is different from the usual rational sensory types of awareness. Our Western languages have few forms in which to express these nonrational or esoteric experiences. Zen, for example, emphasizes awareness through a state

of "no mind" where the flow of consciousness stops. Various styles of meditation are aided by special postures, mantras (repeated vocalizations), contemplating an object, or breathing exercises, but the basic idea of stopping action and thought to allow other forms of experience is the same among them.

If you decide that this meditational form of self-confrontation would be useful to your helpees, you should become familiar with at least one of the styles mentioned above and experience it first yourself. There are a few general principles which can help, even if you are relatively unsophisticated about specific meditational forms. A helpee who is flitting from topic to topic and who is having difficulty getting in touch with his feelings, for example, might be helped through some kind of meditation. You can ask your helpee to stop talking, close his eyes, get in a comfortable position, and just be quiet awhile. You might ask him to focus on his breathing—how he inhales and exhales and to let the ideas flitting across his awareness just fade away.

The value for the helpee of this method is that it should open new doors to his feelings and awareness of himself in relation to others and his physical environment. If nothing else, it should help him to calm down and should prepare him for a new approach to his problems. To obtain maximum value from meditational methods, helpees should practice them in everyday life.

Here is a summary of guidelines for using meditational forms of self-confrontation:

1. Be familiar with one or more styles through *personal experience.*
2. *Explain* the value of the method to the helpee.
3. Ask him to assume a relaxed *comfortable position* with eyes closed.
4. Ask him to be *quiet* and to let his thoughts fade away.
5. Ask him to focus on his *breathing* as a means of getting in touch with his body processes and feelings.
6. After a few minutes ask him to open his eyes and *describe the experience* using leads from feeling statements to encourage further exploration.
7. Ask him to *practice* this confrontational form at home if he finds it productive and satisfying.

REPEATING

Repeating is another method of self-confrontation, prompted by the helper, which comes out of the Gestalt tradition. He asks the helpee to merely repeat a word, phrase, or short sentence one or more times. The helper suggests that the helpee focus on one of his statements that appears to have intense meaning for him. The helper then asks him to repeat it in simple direct form. The purpose is to generate more feelings associated with those words as the repetitions continue. The helper asks him to try to hear what he is saying emotionally with the repetitions. Then either they discuss the feelings precipitated or the feeling spills out in a form such as tears.

The value for the helpee of this kind of confronting is that he can tap feelings that are obscured behind long sentences and constant topic changes. It breaks up his usual method of discourse suddenly, which usually serves to provoke intense feelings. The simplicity of the repetition method evokes little resistance from the helpee. It puts him into a simple childlike frame of thinking which cuts through his sophisticated adult verbiage. Finally, it offers to the helpee a means of focusing on significant feelings and of avoiding the temptation to move quickly on to safer topics.

The judgment involved is knowing when to ask the helpee to repeat and then simply asking him to "Say it again," assisting him with further requests simply as, "Again . . . again." This process is continued until the feeling comes out in verbal or nonverbal form such as crying or striking. The same process can be used with gestures. If you see the helpee shaking his fist, for example, you might ask him to "Do that again." It focuses his attention on the emotional impact of the gesture. An example of the repeating method of self-confrontation is:

He: I don't have any friends; people don't love me, I guess.
Hr: Say that again, "People don't love me."
He: People don't love me. People don't love me. (Pause) Maybe I'm not very lovable.
Hr: Say again, "I'm not lovable."
He: I'm not lovable.
Hr: Again.
He: I'm not lovable.

This kind of repeating opens the possibilities for significant confrontation of self-regarding attitudes that are hindering effective personal and interpersonal functioning. It brings painful feelings to the point where they can be discussed directly.

Guidelines for the repeating method are:

1. Note *statements* or *gestures* with feeling implications.
2. Ask the helpee to *repeat* the key word, phrase, or short sentence one or more times until feelings are evoked.
3. *Encourage* the helpee to keep the repetition in the present active verb tense.

4. Allow sufficient *time* for the emotional impact to be felt and sorted out meaningfully by the helpee before going on to another topic.

ASSOCIATING

Associating is another skill to facilitate the loosening of feelings. It is a more precise form of the old "free association" method where the helpee was encouraged to say whatever crossed his awareness. The goal was to get the helpee loosened from his precise, logical, planned statements and into the more fragmentary and illogical realm of feelings. You suggest, for example, "Tell me what is on your mind, and say it even if it seems vague and unimportant." "Let yourself go." "Just give me pieces of ideas; don't try to be logical."

Another variation of associating method is to pick out a word from the helpee's statements that seems to have emotional significance for him. You then ask him to let himself go with the word and give all the other words that come to awareness in rapid order. You note them for discussion later. An example is:

Hr: You seem to be fixed on your mother's influence on you. I suggest that you say the word "mother" and follow it with as many words as you can think of in rapid order. Do you understand?

He: Yes, I think so. Mother—love, soft, fun, spank . . . .

The main outcome expected for helpees is a freeing of feelings so they are more available for direct discussion. It also gets to feelings faster than usual discussion methods.

In summary, guidelines for association skills are:

1. Ask the helpee to *say what comes* to his awareness.
2. *Explain* that the flowing ideas do not need to be logical or consistent.
3. *Use the results* to aid the helpee into further exploration of feelings or discussion of the results of his associating.
4. As a variation, *pick out a word* with possible emotional significance from the helpee's statements and ask him to say freely all the thoughts and feelings evoked by that word as fast as they come.

Skill cluster 6: Interpreting

Interpreting is an active helper process of explaining the meaning of events to helpees so that they are able to see their problems in new ways. The main goal is to teach helpees to interpret events in their lives by

themselves. In *paraphrasing*, the helpee's internal frame of reference is maintained, whereas, through *interpretation* the helper offers a new frame of reference. Interpretation is used more in formal psychotherapy than in simpler styles of helping because of the therapist's need to think diagnostically. He must be formulating hunches all the time about what is going on and what might be a logical explanation for this helpee's behavior. He does not always share these thoughts since they serve primarily to help him understand what is going on in the helpee. Many helpers feel this kind of thinking gets in the way of the helping process because the helper becomes preoccupied with thinking *about* or *ahead* of the helpee rather than *with* him. This shift to the external frame of reference in the helper is one of the main limitations of using interpretive skills.

Helpers need to be constantly alert to the meanings of the behavior they observe, but they must strive also to keep in touch with where the helpee is now, emotionally and intellectually. Examples are those situations when the helpee is describing his behavior such as theft, and you have a hunch as to some of the underlying factors motivating this behavior. He may be describing his anger toward his wife's dominating behavior. You have noted his earlier statements about similar feelings toward his mother. You now hypothesize a connection between the two feelings. You keep these hunches to yourself as an hypothesis, look for more supporting data, and then, when the relationship is well-established and your hunch has more support, you might offer it to the helpee as an interpretation. Until this time all diagnostic and interpretive thinking is for the helper himself.

The explanations in interpretation often are given in terms of some special theory of personality change held by the helper. Usually these explanations are expressed as hypotheses or hunches about what is happening. These are the reasons why there are so many styles of interpreting. Seeing filmed or taped examples is the best method of becoming familiar with these styles, because interpretation is no single simple skill which can be illustrated by a short excerpt.

Interpreting is closely related to reflecting, the main difference being that interpreting adds the helper's meanings to the helpee's basic message. The final decision about the usefulness of an interpretation is whether it aids the helpee to understand himself or his problems more clearly, and then whether this understanding prompts him to act more effectively.

When you decide that an interpretation might be helpful, look for the basic message of the helpee (as in reflecting and paraphrasing), restate it in capsule form, then add your understanding of what the helpee has said (the interpreting). If the interpretation makes sense to the helpee it will accelerate the interview. If the interpretation is not mean-

ingful, try again. You must also be confident that your interpretation was essentially accurate, since it may take some time before its significance to the helpee sinks in. Interpreting means that you are out in front leading him to seek wider understandings of his feelings and broader perceptions. You must recognize that occasionally you will be way out there by yourself, and that then you will need to try again a little closer to the helpee's level of awareness. It should be understood clearly that the *goal* of all interpretive effort is *self-interpretation* by the helpee.

Some examples of interpretation at a simple level without an elaborate theoretical rationale are: "You have told me about your family as if you were a disinterested observer. You have no specific feeling about them then?" "It is possible for a person to both love and hate his father at the same time?" "I wonder if you see that your feelings of hostility toward men might be at the root of your marital difficulties?"

INTERPRETIVE QUESTIONS

Some interpreting is done in the form of questions such as, "Do you think then that you distrust women because your mother treated you so badly?" This questioning form implies a more tentative quality than the more declarative statements and makes interpreting less risky for the helper. Interpretive questions have a focusing effect also, such as in the following illustration where the helpee has been avoiding discussion of his self-concerns.

Hr: When are you going to be concerned about yourself too?
He: That is a selfish attitude.
Hr: So, what's wrong with that?
He: I don't like selfish people.
Hr: Because . . . ?
He: Selfish people aren't very popular.
Hr: So, popularity is important to you; and if you are too self-centered, people won't like you. Is that getting close to where you are?

FANTASY AND METAPHOR INTERPRETATIONS

Another stylized way of introducing an interpretation is to put it in the form of a fantasy (daydream), even using picture language like a metaphor. An example is, "I have a fantasy about what you have just said. I picture you walking down a path in the woods, coming to a fork

in the path, and being undecided which one to choose. You unconcernedly flip a coin and run joyfully down the path chosen by the coin. How does this fit?" Hopefully, the fantasy is close to his awareness and triggers new ways of perceiving himself through further discussion. The limitation is that in using this skill the helper shifts all the way into his frame of reference, thus forcing the helpee to deal with him (or his fantasy). Sometimes it is useful just to give one's reaction in the form of a metaphor, such as, "Most of the time I perceive you as a great big soft teddy bear who stays in any position he is placed."

I have mentioned the idea of *levels* of interpreting several times. Interpreting could be placed on a continuum from reflecting, where you stay at the meaning and feeling level of the helpee, through elaborate theoretical explanation of his behavior in depth interpretation. Even in so-called "depth" interpretation we do not dig deeply into the helpee's psyche and come up with brilliant insights which unfold the mysteries of his personality. This is the popular view that came from distorted perceptions of psychoanalytic methods. There are levels of meaning however, in interpretive methods. The following illustration offers a few of these ways of responding at different levels. The helpee says, "I was at a party last night where I drank too much. I broke into tears and cried and cried. I acted like a child who wanted to go home to mother. I feel so ashamed." Your response, at different levels, might be one of the following:

1. You drank to the point where tears came freely. You're ashamed now as you talk about it. (content paraphrase)
2. You feel very badly about what happened last night. (general feeling reflection)
3. You feel badly that you lost control of yourself last night. (mild interpreting—adding the idea of control)
4. You drank until you lost control of your feelings. As you look back on the evening now you want to punish yourself for acting that childish way. (interpreting—adding idea of punishing and reverting to childhood patterns)
5. Your drinking, crying, and mentioning mother, makes me wonder if you want to go back to mother—like being dependent on her for comfort and feeling you can't stand on your own two feet. (deeper level interpreting—desire for a comforting mother and dependency)
6. (Interpreting his statement according to some theoretical framework, like Gestalt, which might explain in terms of giving up dependency on others and substituting self-dependency; or the Rational-Emotive approach for getting rid of self-defeating and self-punishing feelings about one's behavior; or Psychoanalytic interpretations

about wishes to go back to the womb. Behaviorally oriented helpers might inquire about the helpee's desire to change his drinking or crying behavior.)

There are myriads of verbal forms for couching interpreting skills. The topic is really too complex to cover in detail in this basic helping skills book, but it would be wrong to understate the significance and usefulness of interpreting skill for the average helper. We should know not only the possible uses, but also the implications for misuse. Further readings in the references at the end of this chapter will add to your understanding of various styles of interpretation.

The main consequences for the helpee of being confronted through interpretation are broadened perceptions of meaning of his behavior and different ways of viewing his problem and possible solutions. Generally speaking, the helpee can expect a deeper understanding of his problem as a result of the added perspectives of the helper. If you get the "Suddenly, I realized . . ." reaction, you know your interpreting has been successful. Interpreting also has the effect of intensifying the emotional involvement of the helpee so that he will take more responsibility for his own interpreting.

Guidelines for interpreting are:

1. Look for the *basic message(s)* of the helpee.
2. *Paraphrase* these to him.
3. Add *your understanding* of what his message means in terms of your theory or your general explanation of motives, defenses, needs, styles, etc.
4. Keep the *language simple* and the *level close to his message*. Avoid wild speculation and statements in esoteric words.
5. *Introduce* your ideas with some kind of statement indicating that you are offering *your ideas tentatively* on what his words or behavior means. Examples are: "Is this a fair statement . . . ?" "The way I see it is . . ." "I wonder if . . . " "Try this one on for size . . ."
6. Solicit the *helpee's reactions* to your interpretations.
7. Your main goal is to *teach the helpee* to do his own interpreting. Remember, you can't give insight to others.

Skill cluster 7: Informing

This skill of information-giving is so commonplace that it needs no elaboration. It is included here to indicate that there are times when sharing simple facts possessed by the helper is the most helpful thing he could do. There are some kinds of information in the expertise category,

such as information from test instruments. The special skills required in this type of helping for planning and decision making are beyond the scope of this general helping book. Further information may be obtained about skills for informing about interests, aptitudes, and personality traits from Brammer and Shostrom (1968) and the suggested readings section at the end of this chapter.

There is another category of information about services to solve the myriads of human problems from financial planning, to career planning, to family planning which need to be handled by specially informed people through referral skills to be described in the next chapter.

ADVICE

There is a common type of informing activity by helpers called *advice giving*. The helper is thrust into the role of the expert in so many areas by helpees who expect some kind of expert pronouncements in the form of sound advice on what to do. A common experience of beginning helpers is to perceive their function as giving "common sense" advice.

There is a long tradition of advice giving in the helping folklore. It is a common occurrence between persons who know and trust one another. This time-honored function among friends is often beneficial. Issues arise, however, when a helpee consults a helper in his larger environment at work, church, or school. These institutions have many natural self-styled advice givers who often have attractive charismatic qualities. As a consequence, they are sought out by confused and troubled people, largely because they are attractive people with a reputation for being helpful. These persons could just as well be janitors or clerks as well as those with titles such as minister or teacher. Helpees without serious emotional disabilities often do not want psychotherapy or counseling, but seek advice mainly on a particular problem. What they often search for is an empathic listener who will not attempt to "psych them out," "play the therapy game," or become a psychological version of "wet nurse."

In an informal study of what Korner * called "indigenous counselors" he found that almost all bureaucratic organizations had such an informally appointed advice-giver in the small group structures. This person's function, according to Korner's data, is to become the organization's human behavior lay-expert. His data from people who consulted these indigenous advisers indicate that such advisers enjoy talking to people, appreciate the respect and confidence people place in them, appear self-

* Korner, I. Unpublished paper "About Advice Giving."

confident and dignified, are very willing to give of their store of accumulated problem-solving experience in a no-nonsense neutral manner. They had an unusual quality to get to the core of the matter and inspire confidence and trust. The advice was offered in a manner which did not obligate the receiver to follow it or seek subsequent meetings for further help. Receivers were careful to indicate that this adviser was not the same kind of person who offered solace and support to reduce psychic discomfort. The main contributions of the indigenous advice-givers were to crystallize and focus issues, to clarify decision processes, and to move beyond the impasse. It appears that persons perceived as helpful "advice-givers" use helping skills far beyond sheer conventional advice. These findings suggest also that such indigenous helpers in organizations are performing useful services to people informally and could probably enhance their effectiveness with additional work on helping skills. Unfortunately, Korner's data did not reveal the nature or the consequences of "bad advice."

Giving advice in the traditional manner is a controversial topic in helping literature. Some writers condemn advice dispensing as a counseling tool without reservation. Critics claim advising reflects some arrogance of the helper who assumes he is so all-knowing that he can advise another person on a course of action. Critics also claim ineffectiveness and fostering of dependency. Others assert that advice-giving is helpful under some circumstances. Advice can be helpful if it is given by trusted persons with expert opinions based on solid knowledge of a supporting field such as law, medicine, or childrearing. Sometimes helpees need a recommended course of action supported by wide experience, and hopefully, facts. There is a place for suggestions which leave their evaluation and the final decision about courses of action completely open to the helpee. You can suggest "hunches" or "hypotheses" that need checking before acting. You can suggest ways of approaching problems. Examples are situations in which parents are exploring ways of handling rebellious children or students are weighing choices about courses. The use of considered suggestions is appropriate when the contact is short and the decision relatively inconsequential in the person's life.

Advice is often appropriate in crisis situations where several people must cooperate to prepare helpees for major readjustments of their life circumstances, such as family reorganization after hospitalization, divorce, imprisonment, unemployment, or financial loss. Advice is wholly inappropriate for dealing with major individual choice questions, such as, "Should I get a divorce," or "What career should I enter?"

Most people object to advice given in the form of "father knows best," or offhand suggestions tempered with strong persuasion. Usually, the person giving the advice has a strong stake in the helpee's following his advice so he puts some persuasive punch into it. This attitude often generates hostility in helpees.

The principal limitation of advice giving is that helpees usually don't follow it. They often seemingly ask, or even beg, for advice but they are most often asking themselves the rhetorical question, "What shall I do?" They may be expressing dependent feelings, knowing full well what to do, actionwise. If the helper falls into this trap he justifiably incurs the wrath or contempt of the helpee. A more productive strategy, especially if there is time, is to deal with the feelings involved first. The main task is to distinguish between the honest and direct request for information or suggestions and the expression of indecisive or dependent feelings. When in doubt, it is more productive to try a reflecting approach with the presumed feelings first, and then deal with the request itself.

Some other limitations of giving advice are that they reinforce dependency on experts which shifts responsibility to the helper for solutions. Frequently, the helper who takes the "If I were you . . ." approach is projecting his own needs, problems, or values into the advice rather than keeping the helpee's needs foremost. Experience in group forms of helping indicates that when participants begin giving advice they often do so because they unconsciously perceive the other person's problems as their own. Therefore, they are really speaking to themselves. Another limitation, furthermore, is that the helpee may take the helper's advice and later find that it was invalid. The helper then is blamed when things don't turn out right in the helpee's life.

A summary of guidelines for informing skills is as follows:

1. Be *informed*, or know the sources of information, in your area of advertised expertise.
2. Do not use educational or psychological test instruments without thorough *training* in their uses and limitations.
3. Don't use advice unless it is in the form of *tentative suggestions* based upon solid expertise.

Outcomes you should expect from studying this chapter

Now that you have read this chapter you should reasonably expect to: (1) list the seven main clusters of skills for promoting awareness of understanding self and environment; (2) cite subskills in the clusters and illustrate their uses and misuses with examples from helping interviews; (3) apply the skills after practice and feedback from associates according to strategies suggested in chapter 5.