

Working from Your Strengths ...

Some Notes on a Model for

A 'POWER WITH' APPROACH TO SHORT TERM HELPING

(Revised Edition)

BY: SUZI QUIXLEY

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**HELP IS THE SUNNY SIDE OF CONTROL -
AN INTRODUCTION TO SHORT TERM HELPING¹
INTERACTIONS²**

The quote in the title - *Help is the sunny side of control* - was a comment made by a youth worker (Alison Farnsworth) many years ago. The assumption that *helping* is automatically useful seems to be made quite often. In fact, *helping* may be in direct conflict with someone's long term development and choices in life. *Helping* can undermine or reinforce constructive change for people. **It can be useful or destructive ... it is unlikely to be neutral!**

Generally, people ask for help at a time when they are particularly vulnerable. What is said and done, can have a greater impact on the person than it might at another time. Because the person is more open to change than they might otherwise be, the actions they take at this time may well have a long term impact on their life. **Whether or not they feel they can control their own process of change may have a significant affect on their future ability to take charge of their life.** That is why people who promote their role as helping others have an especial responsibility to make careful judgements about how they *help*. Are they enabling people to feel more confident about their ability to make and act on choices? Or, are they simply telling them what to do, and implying that they are not capable of making good judgements themselves?

Helping can be productive if ...

- it broadens the person's picture of the choices available to them
- it provides people with the means and confidence to take greater control of their own lives
- it supports the person in distinguishing between the parts of *their* problem that they can, **and can't**, control
- it enables them to better understand the parts of the situation influenced by other people, or wider social/political/economic factors
- it challenges inappropriate self-blame
- it challenges inappropriate blame of others
- it looks at ways they can contribute to change in external factors affecting them
- it links people with similar needs/concerns/situations

¹ There is some debate about the language that should be used here. Some people would describe this as short term *counselling*; others, as *problem solving*; others as *conversation*! The transition from *conversation* to *counselling*, particularly in informal settings, is another whole topic (... and the subject of another handout!) I have used the term helping to describe any conversation held with the explicit purpose of improving another person's situation, in which one person is clearly understood to be the *helper*.

² This handout is Copyright, S. Quixley, 1987 (Revised 1995).

The number of these factors that can be explored depends upon the depth of the helping interaction. However, regardless of the level of interaction, some small contribution can always be made toward these goals in really simple ways (eg. through listening to the person and treating their dilemma seriously, or through affirming their strengths).

Approaches to Short Term *Helping*

There are a myriad of counselling and therapeutic models. A number of these are able to be adapted to short term interactions. However, very few models exist which were explicitly designed for short term helping.

Those which have been designed for short term situations generally fall within the school of thought called ***Non-Judgmental*** or ***Non-Directive Counselling***. The main people who developed approaches in this area are Carkhuff, Egan and Rogers³. Terms like *active listening*, *reflection* and *empathy* come from this school of thought. Carkhuff's model, in particular, is often taught in community counselling training courses.

Essentially, these theories argue that the most valuable way to help someone is to work from their frame of reference. They typically suggest some, or all, of the following steps:

1. build trust
2. clarify the situation/problem
3. challenge any inconsistencies and explore options
4. plan for change, refer or provide information
5. terminate the interaction.

In one sense, these approaches give people more power in resolving their situation than many other models/approaches. This is particularly because they emphasise working from the person's frame of reference, rather than imposing a pre-established idea of how human beings should *be*. It is my experience (and the contention of theorists in this school of thought), that **people will only act on a problem if they feel that they own the solution. They will only own the solution if it is consistent with their beliefs, values and life.**

There are 2 key weaknesses in the approach proposed, however:

1. whilst these models propose that people should control the **content** of the interaction, they prescribe the **process** that should be used. It is argued that a helping conversation cannot occur unless trust is built, and that information should not be provided unless a series of steps have been

³ Recent editions of books which outline the main theories of Carkhuff and Egan are:

- Carkhuff, Robert R (1987), ***The Art of Helping VI***, Sixth Edition, Human Resource Development Press, Amherst, Massachusetts.
- Egan, Gerard (1990), ***The Skilled Helper: A Systematic Approach to Effective Helping***, Fourth Edition, Brooks/Cole Publishing, Pacific Grove, California.

Rogers was an early theorist, and many of Carkhuff and Egan's ideas are a further development of his thinking.

undertaken first. Taking power over the process can generate a sense of powerlessness and frustration in the person. **They** know what they want to talk about ... and it doesn't necessarily start with building trust! *Warm and fuzzy* conversation, when the person is ready to tackle a problem, can be a barrier to the relationship, and to the person's desire to *get on with it*.

They may well experience your control of the process as patronising or devaluing! If they believe they know what the problem is, then your insistence that they go through a process of clarification can be a similar barrier. If you allow the person to work on the area **they** feel ready for, **they** will soon recognise that something else is needed before they can proceed ... and you've shown through your behaviour that you are willing to work from *where they are at*.

2. Working entirely from the person's **existing** frame of reference, can take away an opportunity for them to learn new things. These may be quite compatible with their existing frame of reference. Our frame of reference comes from our experiences within this society. Unless our frame of reference is enlarged, we are unlikely to make decisions which challenge the dominant values of society. This raises real problems when we are working with people who *miss out* within the current social structure (ie. people who are *disadvantaged* by the current system). **This can lead to people becoming their own police, and believing they have no-one to blame for the situation they are in, but themselves!** A typical example is where someone is unemployed:

*The person believes that this is because they are lazy, stupid or unskilled ... this is the message that they are hearing in the media every day. **If you work entirely within their existing frame of reference**, you may focus on ways they can overcome their laziness (eg. get motivated) or learn new skills. However, you may be aware that a likely factor in their unemployment is the current level of unemployment. **You may extend their frame of reference**, by saying things like:*

"it's awful, isn't it. I've talked with 3 people this week in the same position ... and they all seemed really intelligent, motivated and skilled ... just like you! Are you aware that there is only one job for every 200 people with secretarial skills at the moment?"

This could lead to a conversation about how difficult it is to be unemployed, and a strategy for surviving unemployment without losing your sanity ... or getting together with other people, who are equally intelligent and competent, as a support group.

The model proposed below draws heavily on the thinking of the Non-Directive Counselling approach, but also seeks to overcome these weaknesses. It seeks to enable the person to have significant power in the process of the interaction. It enables the provision of additional information/perspectives which are compatible with their values⁴.

⁴ There is an important distinction here between *values* and *beliefs*. **Values** are thought-through - an essential part of the person's sense of place in the world. **Beliefs** are

An Alternative Model for Short Term *Helping*

This section describes a 5 phase model. It is designed to provide a **tool** for helping conversations. **It is not intended as a prescription.** The model is a useful backup for times when your approach with a person, or a group of people, seems to have lost direction, or when you feel you are going around in circles, or when you just can't think of what to do next.

The **pace** at which you work through the model, and the **circles you use** in a particular situation, will depend entirely upon the needs of the particular person, and the situation you are in. The point at which you *enter* and *exit* the model will likewise be affected. Whilst some people are simply seeking information, others may have a deeper concern which requires substantial trust building before you begin to get the first hints of what the real problem is! **This model is about maximising the power the person you are helping has.** Ideally, they should determine where you enter and exit the model, what you concentrate on during the interaction. We only accept help when we're ready!

The model is based on the person doing most of the work in resolving their own problem/need/situation. This is important, because their solution will best deal with their problem. **We know that the solution that sounds simple doesn't necessarily work for us in our own lives.** (When was the last time someone gave you advice? Did you take it? Generally, we don't!) **To assume that our easy answer will work for other people is equally illogical.** It can be useful to be open with the person about the process you're using to help them resolve their situation. This offers them a tool they can use themselves in future.

This is designed to be a flexible model, which provides a smorgasbord of processes and skills that can be used. The lines on the diagram indicate possible process directions during an interaction. They also represent an ongoing process of contracting⁵/negotiation about the process of the interaction. It is the helper's responsibility to ensure that the process is constantly negotiated.

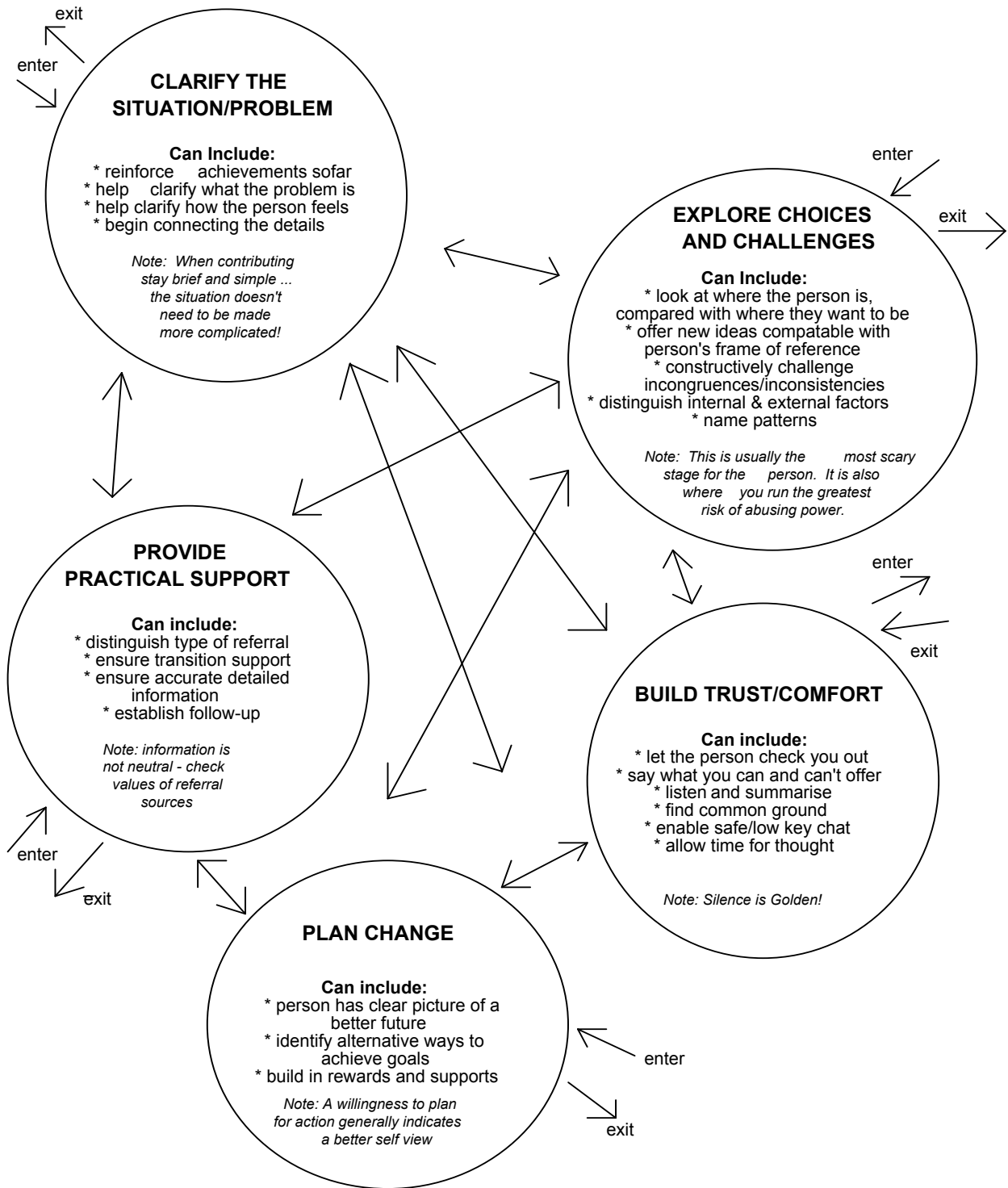
assumptions - things that the person has always simply thought were true, that they haven't thought about in any depth. It is generally destructive to challenge someone's values, however, it can be quite useful to question their beliefs. This is particularly true where their values and beliefs are in conflict.

⁵ CONTRACTING is the process of establishing a mutual deal to define what the person would like, that you can offer. When used as part of an ongoing helping process, it is a way of clarifying *where you're up to, and where you're going*. It helps define achievement that has occurred already. Examples are:

- *If you want to just talk, I'm happy to listen and help you figure out what's happening at home*
- *I'm happy to get you some information about that, though I'm not sure that I know the 'perfect' place to go.*

Often people indicate their satisfaction with the *deal* by beginning to talk immediately. On other occasions, they might say something like:

- *Yeah, that'd be OK ... did you hear about our team on the weekend!* (indication of need to build comfort)
- *Dad's just a pig ... there's no point in talking about it! But I do want to get a job, so I can go back to school Got any ideas?* (indication of preference to plan)



A POWER WITH MODEL OF SHORT TERM HELPING

EXPLORING CHOICES AND CHALLENGES

In summary, this circle is about:

Accepting the person's role in the situation, identifying who has control over each component of the situation (them? others they know? society?), identifying the areas of the situation over which they have control, and confirming their ability to act to improve their situation (in the short, immediate or long term).

In other words, you could explain it to someone like this:

Identifying where you are at ...
and
Where you want to be ...
given
As many options, consistent with your thinking, as possible.

A Possible Process for this Circle:

1. Encourage the person to identify who controls each area of their situation. This can be a very appropriate time to extend their frame of reference, through provision of information on ways in which society, for example, may contribute to their situation. *(A good example of the need for this is in the area of unemployment. Many people have accepted social messages that they must be lazy, unskilled or stupid, if they are unemployed. Yet, this assumption is quite inconsistent with the statistics about unemployment. It may well be that whether or not they have a job is outside their control ... a job suited to their skills may not exist ... or may be so competitive that it's ridiculous to see it as a matter of personal weakness.)*
2. Consider which aspects of their situation they can act on now, in terms of both their long and short term needs. Aim to ensure that the person owns/acknowledges the areas of their lives in which they have the power to affect change, as well as those in which they don't. *(Sometimes, acknowledgment of different parties' ability to influence the process of change is difficult for people. This is where constructive challenge can be really useful.)*
3. Encourage the person to generate as many options as they can, which might improve their situation, or help deal with the problem. *(This is another ideal time for extending their thinking. An essential pre-requisite to this is ensuring that you understand, or are willing to ask about, their frame of*

reference. It can be useful for you to suggest choices they may not have considered, **provided that the ideas you suggest are consistent with their values.** This might be the perfect time to help them distinguish between their beliefs and values. It may also be an OK time to constructively challenge their inconsistent beliefs **if these are a barrier to constructive change for them.**)

4. Work out which of the person's options are priority. This might involve working out which involve the most personal risk, effort and time, compared with the likelihood of success and/or gains that can be achieved. *(Often this is best achieved by asking the person to put their immediate reaction about which is the best option aside for a minute. Then help them list the advantages and disadvantages of dealing with each area of the problem. You might even encourage them to go away, and get some ideas from other people who they trust, on (dis)advantages.)*
5. Support the person in making their own decision about which area(s) they will do something about. It is generally unrealistic to undertake more than two specific areas in the first instance, and one is usually preferable. *(They can always tackle another issue in a week's time, if their priority is going OK. Sometimes, if your relationship is fairly structured/formal, it is useful to write down their exploration goal in the form of a measurable objective. This means they can test their progress in a very concrete way ... and see that they really **are** tackling their problem/situation! It also gives you an easy means of providing affirmation/support throughout the process.)*
6. Once they have drawn some conclusions about where they would like to be, they may wish to act to try to achieve change. *(This can be an appropriate time to negotiate your contract with them ... do they want to do some planning for change together? do they need further information? or referral to someone with more appropriate expertise?)*

Characteristics of this Circle

Given the implicit challenge involved in this phase, you will often find that having a clear definition of the problem/situation, and a trusting relationship needs to happen first. But this does not mean you necessarily need to go through those two circles to get here! The person may already have defined the problem/situation clearly ... alone, or with someone else. Even if they haven't, this will soon become apparent to them, and **they** can initiate the need to be a bit clearer, before moving on. In terms of comfort they, again, may prefer to trust you by virtue of your role, rather than needing to explicitly go through a trust-building process. **Where the person wants to launch into exploring options, you will probably need to do lots of checking out of their frame of reference, before offering your ideas.**

Effectively, **this circle pressures the person to make a commitment to change. This is scary! Accordingly, people frequently get into avoidance behaviour during this phase.** This is generally an indication that:

- they didn't really want to start looking at their role in the situation ... maybe they just said this because it sounded good or responsible. You can quickly negotiate moving to a different circle (eg. by saying *I'm not sure that I completely understand the problem ... would you be willing to run through it for me!?! or I wonder if this is the **real** problem?*)
- they thought they were ready to start looking toward change, but didn't realise how threatening/personal it would feel. (In this instance, they may very well need to spend some time working out whether they really want to tackle this ... and whether they want to do it with you ... and if so, whether they need to know you a bit better first!)

If you pressure someone to stay in this circle, when they don't want to, you can do a lot of damage. The person is likely to deny any role/responsibility in the situation ... so you won't get anywhere anyway! They may well go away feeling angry, blamed and intruded on.

Fundamentally, this circle is about moving the focus of the conversation from seeing the situation as an external one (ie. *all these things are 'happening' to me*) to an internal one (ie. *I can do something constructive about my situation ... if only I could work out what's best to do!*) Egan called this process **personalising**. It is really important that the personalisation is not undertaken at the expense of acknowledgment of the impact of outside forces on the person's life/options. On the other hand, there's no guarantee that anything will improve for the person unless they take some sort of action to improve their situation. **So ... you are walking a tightrope!**

This phase gives the power to act on, and improve, their situation, to the person. In the case of social inequalities, the **power** or ability to act should be clearly distinguished from the **responsibility** to act. **The person should see a much bigger picture of their situation and its context by the end of the phase.** They should have a sense of having gained **insight** into their problem/situation.

Helper Responsibilities in the Process

Because of the possibility that the person will interpret this phase as blaming them for their situation, **it is critical that you approach the phase with a great deal of tentativeness, a non-accusatory manner and care.**

This is not your opportunity to tell the person everything you always wanted to. It is not an appropriate time to off load your ideas on their weaknesses! It is not an appropriate time to give answers.

Any choices you suggest should be given very cautiously (even *discountingly*) to ensure that it is **their** thinking that ends up being the basis of their solution. A successful adoption of any ideas you have suggested is generally indicated by the way they talk about them - as if they were their own idea. If the person keeps referring to your idea, as though they have to follow it, this indicates that you have not used sufficient caution in presenting the idea.

Any challenges you offer should be equally cautious and non-imposing. They should be presented as a **side-thought**, rather than **the answer**. Language such as *I wonder if...* or, *a friend of mine in a similar situation found ...* or, *I don't know if this is useful, but ...*, can be helpful. **Be very ready to back off**, if the person is not ready to hear your challenge.

What is **your** investment in entering this circle? What do **you** hope to get out of it? **Examining your own motivation for helping is critical to working effectively in this circle.** It can be really tempting to try to *fix up* someone's life with your easy solution. We all know that this is rarely useful, and it can be damaging. If you are fully aware of your own motives in working with people, you are likely to be better equipped for offering choices and challenges that are **useful to them**, rather than simply meeting your own need to influence others. **This circle is at the crux of the distinction between a power with and a power over approach to helping.**

Constructive Confrontation

Constructive confrontation is an **invitation** to explore your defences! Confrontation is often used in a destructive manner. A whole session can lose its value if the person is inappropriately confronted, even once.

Confrontation should grow naturally from the process of conversation, and should be delivered with the same care and respect for the person as the rest of the helping process.

Confrontations are not punitive accusations.

They are opportunities to explore the possible discrepancies in the person's life/behaviour. They are invitations to employ unused strengths and resources, not shameful exposures of inadequacy.

Constructive confrontation is more related to curiosity than anger.

Overall, constructive confrontation is a worker's tool for encouraging someone to extend their self-understanding and move toward effective change.

Constructive confrontation can include:

- responsible unmasking of discrepancies, distortions and games, of which the person may **or may not** be aware.
- challenge of underdeveloped or undeveloped potentials, skills and resources.
- encouragement to acknowledge/utilise used or misused potentials, skills and resources.

In other words, confrontation can take the form of well-supported positives, as well as negatives. **Affirmation can be a form of confrontation.** Therefore, giving positives has some of the same risks as given negatives ... watch out for adverse reactions! Use of this skill, too, can include extension of the person's

frame of reference (eg. information about skills or resources which they may be able to use constructively in action on their situation.)

Some examples:

IRRESPONSIBLE CONFRONTATION:

Why don't you start being honest? You feel so damn sorry for yourself most of the time, and it's messing up your whole life. You keep moping around, but you never really face any of your problems. No wonder you're always down in the dumps ... you cause most of your own misery!

OR:

How on earth can you expect to get a job if you didn't do maths and sciences at school. Everyone knows that 63% of jobs require at least some maths. What on earth did you drop out of maths for. You're going to have to do something about that if you want a job!

RESPONSIBLE CONFRONTATION:

Let me check something out with you. You're depressed, because as you put it, you 'don't do anything'. It seems that sometimes you get to feeling pretty sorry for yourself. I can understand why. But then, this makes you feel even more passive and depressed. Perhaps you're in a vicious circle? Does this make sense?

OR:

It's a real bummer you didn't finish Year 11 maths. Did you know that a recent study found that the majority of jobs require maths? It's rough, because I know that girls aren't encouraged to do maths. If you really want a job in computing, then this might be one area worth thinking about.

Some Other Useful Skills in this Circle

Drawing Conclusions

Testing logical conclusions about the person's possible role in a bad situation is OK in this circle **provided that what you are saying is drawn directly from the person's input (rather than from your imagination or assumptions!)** All conclusions should be based on, or linked with, what the person has actually said previously, rather than your feelings about their role. A sign that they are ready to accept this type of feedback is the lack of *Yes ... but ...* in their responses.

Responding to Hints/Implications

This can be a good time to make sense of hints that have arisen earlier in the conversation (*eg. constant jokes about sex, when they are ostensibly claiming that their main concern is school!*) This skill can initiate a return to the process of clarification, or if the person has entered at this circle, a suggestion that a process of clarification might be useful.

Implications are simply less subtle hints. For example, someone who has broken up with a lover, been chucked out of home and failed an exam ... all within 3 weeks ... might be *feeling inadequate because they are constantly failing*. The ownership of partially acknowledged feelings or behaviours can be consolidated through treating them tentatively as implications rather than facts.

Identifying Themes

Frequently a person will have described several situations in the course of the conversation. Sometimes these will have elements in common. They may be behavioural or situational.

Behavioural Themes: Perhaps, whenever the person is in a social situation, they avoid personal contact with other people, no matter how much the other person's interest is evident, and no matter how much the person reciprocates that interest in their head. Some possible responses in this situation might be:

Sound like you must be pretty shy, because you seem to avoid personal contact like the plague!

OR:

Seems like you don't like yourself very much ... you're prepared to miss out on socialising with someone you like quite a lot ... I wonder if you assume you're boring?

OR:

I wonder if you're setting yourself up for failure in social situations. It seems that whenever someone attempts to get close to you, you run away. Maybe you're trying to protect against the risk of them rejecting you later!

Situational Themes: These themes are more straightforward to respond to, because they are not so personally threatening for the person. They could include lack of finance from being on a low income, underlying a series of problems. Other similar examples would be problems arising from limited access to childcare or loss of self esteem resulting from unemployment or imprisonment.

SKILLS & PROCESS SUMMARY

| EXPLORING CHOICES AND CHALLENGES | |
|---|--|
| POSSIBLE PROCESSES | POSSIBLE SKILLS |
| Assess Your Readiness to Interact | Contracting/Negotiation |
| Assess Your Motivation | Affirmation |
| Contribute Choices and Challenges Consistent with the Person's Frame of Reference | Active Listening |
| Identify Locus of Control for each Area | Appropriate Voice |
| Identify Possible Problem/Situation for Exploration | Limited Talking |
| Assess Advantages and Disadvantages of Prioritising Each Area | Brief/Concise Feedback |
| Establish 1 or 2 Areas to Explore | Establish Specifics |
| Explore Options within each Area | Draw Conclusions |
| Ensure Person has a Clear Vision of How They'd Like Life to be Better | Respond to Hints/Implications |
| Contract Further Work Together or Termination | Identify Behavioural Themes |
| | Identify Situational Themes |
| | Identify Partially Acknowledged Feelings/Behaviours |
| | Confront Constructively |
| | Identify Discrepancies/ Distortions/Games |
| | Challenge Undeveloped/Underdeveloped Potentials/Skills/Resources |
| | Encourage Use of Under-rated Potentials/Skills/Resources |
| | Extend Frame of Reference |
| | Willing to Request Further Information |
| | Willing to Request Help from the Person |

CLARIFYING THE SITUATION/PROBLEM

IMPORTANT: Throughout this circle you are constantly reinforcing the achievements of the person sofar ... if they don't present them, use the same process as those outlined below (for identifying the situation/problem) to identify their achievements sofar.

The two major elements of a person's experience are their **feelings** as they relate to their **situation**. Frequently, someone overwhelmed by a problem has not identified or clarified either. Linking the two adds depth and perspective to their understanding of the situation they are dealing with. **To confront the two simultaneously can be very threatening, because it comes so close to the core of the problem.** Therefore, it can be useful to clarify the situation of a person in 3 sub-steps:

1. CLARIFY CONTENT - What is happening?
2. CLARIFY FEELINGS - How the person feels about themselves or the situation
3. COMBINED - Which feelings are specifically directed toward themselves and others, in relation to the specific problem?

These 3 steps rarely happen in discrete stages. Content gives substance to the feeling ... helping to clarify the basis for the feeling ... providing a reason for the feeling, ... putting the feeling into context.

Clarifying Content

Content is the more obvious part of a problem. Generally this is more readily and immediately expressed. It covers situational facts and perceptions. It details the story, problems or events. These generally include:

- Who's** involved
- What's** happening/has happened
- When** it happening/has happened
- Where** it's happening/has happened
- Why** it's happening/has happened
- How** it's happening/has happened.

Where someone is having difficulty exploring their situation, **it's generally more effective to concentrate on the how? or what?** of the situation, than the why? It is easy to become hooked into rationalisations, before really discovering the problem(s)!

Some Content Clarification Skills:

- Listen and remember the person's account of what's happening. So you don't interrupt their account, it can be useful to take brief notes.
- Accurately communicate back the essentials of what the person has expressed. They will accept or reject your version and in the process restate/clarify their own perceptions.
- Establish common ground between the issues/comments made by the person. Often they will be describing apparently disconnected factors. Often these can be drawn into a general picture (eg. a series of different stories about rejections by close friends).
- Establish the specifics arising from a situation which is presented as a general one. (For example, the person may say their problem is relating to all their friends, but they keep mentioning Mary as an example.)
- Be as brief and concise as possible - your job is to simplify/clarify the person's thinking ... not add a whole heap of irrelevant/peripheral details!
- Ask for more information if you need it, rather than providing your own analysis on the basis of little input from the person. (Skills such as positive reinforcement, open-ended questions, mirroring and continuing responses, can be helpful here.)

Some Standard *Formulas* for Clarifying Content:

You're saying ...
In other words ...
You think ...
So you reckon ...
So what's happened is ...
So, overall ...
So what you mean is ...

Once the problem (or the key/priority problem) is clearly stated, and mutually agreed to by both you and the person, it can be useful to negotiate/contract where the person would like to go from here.

Clarifying Feelings

At any given time, we are all experiencing feelings, whether positive or negative. However, we tend to spend little time acknowledging or identifying these. Accordingly, to do so, is more threatening than describing a situation. A situation (content) is, no matter how bad, able to be externalised and depersonalised. Feelings are a part of you ... they cannot be separated from the person expressing them.

Feelings are expressed in a range of different ways. They are reflected in behaviour, whether the person is consciously aware of them or not. They can

be expressed either **verbally/directly** or **non-verbally/indirectly**. For example, if a close relationship breaks up, some of the possible feeling reactions are rejection, sadness, grief, loss, anger, hurt or relief. These feelings may be expressed in behaviours such as getting drunk, withdrawing, crying, going for a walk, having an affair, becoming violent or talking with another friend.

Feelings are dynamic. When a person is experiencing a high level of emotion, they are unlikely to be able to be fully logical/rational. However, upon expressing some of these emotions, the level of emotion may lower, allowing the person to more readily deal with the problem.

Some Feeling Clarification Skills:

Most of the skills used in content clarification, plus:

- A breadth of feeling words in your vocabulary that can adequately and accurately describe the range and shades of emotions experienced by the person.
- A willingness to respond equally readily to both positive and negative feelings being expressed by the person. This protects against over-dramatisation/escalation of the situation, and ensures that you don't impose your values/assumptions about their feelings on their situation. (For example, is it necessarily true that a gay or lesbian person in the process of coming out will feel isolated? or depressed? or confused? It may be that they feel excited, relieved and more centred than ever before!)
- A willingness to respond to the full range of feelings expressed by the person, even if they seem contradictory initially ... it's OK to feel confused, or emotionally torn.

A Caution:

Most people are scared of accepting and exploring emotion. Community Service Workers are not likely to be an exception. We can do people a dis-service by avoiding discussing feelings. This can lead to intellectualisation of the problem, rather than resolution.

Once it seems that you've *finished* exploring feelings for the moment, it can be useful to renegotiate the process of the conversation.

Linking Content and Feelings

This can be a particularly scary process for the person, because it places their situation within the arena of their control/responsibility. It's a lot easier to talk about a situation/problem, than to consider doing something about it!

Often, people need to develop a deeper level of trust with a helper before embarking on this process. They will unexpectedly start talking about their garden ... or the cricket! An essential part of a *power with* approach to

working with people, is to allow this to happen. The more comfortable they feel, the more likely they will genuinely explore their situation in some depth. If you pressure them to pursue the problem when they are not ready to, they may well begin denying things that you felt were already clarified ... that is, they will begin to protect themselves from your intrusion! **It takes a lot longer to re-establish broken trust, than to allow people to go back into their *comfort zone* when they need to!**

Some Standard Formulas for Linking Content and Feeling:

You feel ... because ...

It's ... when ...

So ... has happened, and now you're feeling ...

So ... has happened. That must really ...

Yeah, I really get ... when ...

Wow! You must really feel ... when ...

And now you're ... about ...

Again, check out where the person wants to go, once their situation is clarified - both in terms of content and feelings. It may be that they are happy to simply feel settled/clear about what's going on. They may want to decide which areas to focus on, and explore further. They may want to build trust further, before talking any more. They may want to plan action to improve their situation ... or be referred ... or get information!

Summary Example

CLARIFYING CONTENT:

Last night didn't go too well for you

CLARIFYING FEELING:

So, you're feeling dejected at the moment

LINKING CONTENT AND FEELING:

You feel dejected because last night didn't go well for you

SKILLS & PROCESS SUMMARY

| CLARIFYING THE SITUATION/PROBLEM | |
|--|--|
| POSSIBLE PROCESSES | POSSIBLE SKILLS |
| Reinforce Achievements | Contracting/Negotiation |
| Clarify Content of Problem/Situation | Affirmation |
| Clarify the Person's Current Feelings | Active Listening |
| Clarify the Connections between Feelings and Content | Accurate Reflection |
| Define Priority Area of Concern | Brief/Concise Summarising |
| Contract Termination or Further Work Together | Establish Specifics |
| | Establish Common Ground between Different Concerns |
| | Willing to Request Further Information |
| | Willing to Request Help from the Person |
| | Use Broad/Accurate <i>Feeling</i> Vocabulary |
| | Acknowledge Contradictory Emotions |

PROVIDING PRACTICAL SUPPORT

Effective *Practical Support* is NOT a short cut to a constructive helping interaction. Provision of quality practical support is often more demanding, technically-skilled and complex than processes in other circles of the model.

The broad category of *Practical Support* can include provision of:

- Information
- Practical resources
- Referral

Is Information Provision automatically a *Good Thing*?

Whose needs are you seeking to meet, when you provide information?

Information provision would seem a fairly safe thing to do ... after all **Information is Power**. Surely ANY information provision is *empowering* of the person ... a *good* thing to do! If accepting the idea that *information is power*, the key question that arises is *power for whom?* **Information provision can be used to take power away from someone, as well as to empower them.** For example:

Someone calls you to ask about ways to respond to their pregnancy. You provide a whole lot of information about how to avoid getting pregnant (ie. what they COULD have done)! They end the call before you have a chance to discuss their pregnancy.

How do you think this might make the person feel? It seems likely that the person could well go away, with information they cannot use at the moment, which makes them feel stupid, and doesn't assist them with their situation at all. They may no longer trust you ... and your interaction may have made them more cautious about approaching **anyone** in a helping role (either now, or in the future).

How might it make you feel? It is possible that you may feel that you gave the person useful information, that they could use in future. Why did you do this? Maybe, you were avoiding dealing with the **real** information request of the person, for reasons of your own. Or, perhaps responding to their request would place you in dangerous legal territory? Or, maybe your agency's policy prohibits you from offering certain options that you think the person might need? Regardless of the overt or covert reason for your response, **your approach has empowered you, rather than the person.**

Yet, many workers go away from interactions like this feeling OK, because *at least they were able to offer the person something before they hung up!* But is

this the case? If the person went away feeling mistrust for you, it may well be that they mistrust the information you gave as well. And, what's worse ... they may mistrust anyone else who gives them the same information!

Responding to Requests for Factual Information

Much of the *information* we provide is not *factual* in the strict sense of the word. **A fact is something which can be proven ... against which there is no evidence.** Generally, when we are providing answers to factual questions, there is some level of judgement in our response. This certainly applies to many medical, legal and financial questions.

The extent to which your response to someone's factual question is empowering for them, depends upon whether you proportionally weight your position to the evidence.

An Opinion is a personal view, for which evidence is not stated, which may or may not be shared by the person.

Giving Advice involves adding your personalised view to information in a manner that suggests than one particular point of view should be taken. The evidence for other points of view is not given, or is given in a way that discounts it!

Information Provision is about contributing ideas which are strongly supported by the existing evidence, which you have good reason to believe are true. Alternately, information can involve provision of data about a number of different views and the level of evidence to support each.

Imposing your opinion on a person could constitute an abuse of your power. **Giving advice** runs the risk of undermining their power. **Providing information** is about sharing power with the person, which contributes to their empowerment, provided that the information relates to their perception of their information needs.

Ensuring Constructive Information Provision

Information is useful to people when ...

- The information given is consistent with their frame of reference/values/culture.
- The information given is concrete and focussed.
- The information given is specific to their current, stated needs.
- The quantity of information given is manageable for them.
- The information is given in a format that they can use.

There is considerable anecdotal evidence that much of the information provided by human services agencies is not used. **Providing information has not been *useful*, until the person has made use of it!**

Giving information that falls outside someone's frame of reference is, at best, a waste of time.

Giving broad, generalised information demands a significant commitment from the person, after your discussion, to find out the details themselves. (This also requires a skills level that they may or may not have.) Giving people too much information can daunt them ... again, it involves them doing further work after your conversation to sift through the data. They may or may not be skilled/motivated/confident to do this.

Giving information about areas outside their current concern runs the risk of being lost/forgotten. (It can be useful to tell people about the kinds of information you COULD give in future ... this is different to giving information beyond their current concern, now.)

Feeling overwhelmed by an *information overload* can be depowering. Being given information in unfamiliar language, too, can make someone feel more inadequate than when they made the information request!

If you are giving written information, check the person's language *comfort zone* and literacy level. It is especially important, with written information, that you check that the data actually answers the person's **specific** question, in sufficient detail for their needs. Check too, that any referral sources are current, including details such as phone numbers. Relying on written information to meet someone's needs is a high risk strategy. (How many pamphlets, newsletters, or articles have you received in the last 5 years that you are still intending to read!)

Practical Resource Provision

This includes the provision of goods and services such as money, food or housing. Many of the skills in the Trust Building Circle are relevant to the effective provision of practical resources.

Values determine the attitude with which practical resources are provided. Do you believe people have a **right** to the resources you can provide? Or, is this **charity**? Do you seek to offer as much as possible, or do you minimise resource distribution? Why? Your answers to these ideological questions will profoundly affect **how** you provide services, and your expectations of the person:

- if you believe that the resources you offer are things that everybody in society should have, without question (ie. a *right*), you will seek to maximise the resources you can give to each person. You will not expect them to be grateful, because this is the least of their entitlements!
- if you believe that providing resources is a generous act (on your behalf, or on behalf of whoever funded the services), you will probably consider the resources a *gift* to the person. It is reasonable to expect people to be

thankful for gifts, and to show appropriate appreciation. Their attitude may well influence how much you give them!

The values that underlie your service provision will profoundly affect the attitude you show to the person. This, in turn, will influence your ability to build trust with them. If your values are compatible with theirs, trust is likely to be built more readily than if your values are incompatible. Where your values are incompatible, it is particularly important to be conscious of this, and to focus on the skills recommended for building trust/comfort.

2 Types of Referral

Referral is typically even more complex and risky than information provision. There are 2 types of referral, which are generally quite differently motivated, and give different messages to the person you are talking with:

Functional Referral

This is the referral of a person to an agency or person who can provide for **physical or practical needs** (eg. money housing, benefits, food, facts). Whilst there might be some values conflicts involved with this type of referral (eg. the likely treatment of someone within the social security system), it is generally an area where you cannot provide a response to the specific need of the person, and an area in which limited referral options exist.

In order to be able to undertake this type of referral effectively, a worker needs to be up to date with the practical conditions and processes for accessing resources. Directories and the phone book are helpful resources.

Don't give people the run around ... make sure you **know** that your referral will produce results!

Developmental Referral

This is the type of referral that concentrates on **change for the person, or in relation to their situation**. Most often, developmental referrals are concerned with counselling/therapy, problem solving or personal development. This type of referral is a mine-field for the worker concerned with values.

In order to be able to undertake this type of referral effectively, a helper needs to have considered and responded to a number of key questions. You may find you need to raise policy issues within your agency as part of this process.

Practical Questions for Helpers Offering Developmental Referral

- What makes you believe that this person needs further counselling/therapy?
- What do you think the person will gain as a result of the referral?

- Are you referring on the basis that the person has a problem, or because they are a problem to someone else? (eg. society? you?)
- Are you referring on the basis that the problem is within the person's individual control, or might this be a problem imposed on them by social values/norms? or, by others' behaviour toward them?
- What is your view of the person to whom you are referring, in terms of their:
 - values base?
 - skills base?
 - information base?
 - the effectiveness of their approach?
- Are you assuming that *professional* support will inevitably be helpful in some way? Have you weighed your assumption against the harmful possibilities?
- Are you sure that they have more knowledge/skills/information to offer the person than you have in this area?
- Have you considered the risk that the person will not make use of the referral, and will therefore have less support than if you had worked with them?

Policy Questions for Agencies Allowing Developmental Referral

- Have you considered a policy in response to the *social control/power over/treatment oriented* approach of many helping professionals? Would you consider placing limitations on the autonomy of workers in selecting referral outlets? Why? What if these values are inconsistent with your agency values?
- Are you a welfare agency? What are the implications of your answer for the manner in which you view people, and they view you?
- Have you considered the pragmatics of being an effective referral agency? Do you consider **follow-up** of all people referred an integral part of your process? If so, how should this occur? If not, what alternate mechanisms do you have in place to generate quality control in your referrals, from a consumer perspective?
- What role should people's feedback play in future use of referral resources? Why?
- How much staff time are you prepared to devote to the development of a name-specific referral resource bank of values-consistent people? How much staff time are you prepared to devote to follow-up of people referred? How does this weigh up against the option of training/enabling staff to undertake developmental work with consumers?
- Is it viable for you to offer developmental referral? Why? Why not? If not, what are the alternatives in your response to peoples' presenting needs/wants?

Some Ideas on Referral Planning and Transition Support

1. **Information provision does not necessarily lead to information use.** It can be valuable to conduct low-key self-managed planning about how the information can be used, as part of the information provision process.
2. **Referral doesn't always work.** Often people need added reassurance about the value of a referral, contact over the phone (an introduction) to be confident about making use of the referral, or, where confidence is very low, the involvement of the helper in the first visit.
3. **Referral can be experienced as rejection.** If talking with you in the first instance was a significant risk for the person, then they may react particularly badly to you, effectively, saying *I'm not willing to talk to you ... you should talk with someone else*. There is no simple answer to the risk that the person will experience referral as a rejection. Being aware of the possibility is helpful. Sometimes, naming your fear to the person can be a good strategy (eg. *I can feel that it was really scary for you to mention this to me ... and I'm worried that you might take my suggestion the wrong way*). Another approach that sometimes works is to personalise your referral (eg. *This is obviously a really big issue. I'm really glad you talked to me about it. The bummer is that I really don't know much about ... But I know this great woman, Bev, who's much more clued in about it. How would you feel about me introducing you?*) Giving the person the chance to talk about their feelings about the referral can be helpful too ... don't avoid this out of fear of their reaction!
4. **Don't forget *practice runs*.** They can be very useful in allowing people to gain confidence in their skills to approach a new person/agency. You could role play their first interaction with the person to whom you've referred them, or rehearse a telephone call. (Remember, it might have taken every bit of nerve they had, to contact you in the first place!)
5. **Does the person have all the information and resources they may need to make use of the referral?** This is particularly important if people are fairly unconfident, or have limited life skills. (e.g. *Do they know how to use the phone book? Have you given them the precise organisational need, as it appears in the phone book? Do they know how to find out which bus route to use to get there... or to use a Street Directory? Do they have the exact time, date, address and name of the person they are to see - written down? - in a safe place?*)
6. **Have you considered the possible need for advocacy on behalf of the person.** This is likely to be relevant where the situation of the person is significantly caused by someone else (eg. a Government Department). Whilst referral to the Ombudsman or an Appeals structure might be relevant, it is important under these circumstances to ensure that you don't effectively *blame the victim*. **Advocacy is the process of translating, with the person themselves, their views to others with some power over them.** Whilst advocacy aims to foster the development of resources, knowledge and skills such that the person can assert themselves, negotiate their claims and participate in the processes affecting their lives, the skills

required to do this successfully are extensive. To expect a person to undertake significant dealings against the system prior to developing these skills is to potentially *set them up for failure*. Accordingly, it may mean acting, at least in part, on their behalf with authorities. This particularly applies where the time-frame for action (or appeal) is too short to allow time to provide the person with all the personal development, skills/knowledge/resources and confidence they need to develop a strategy to deal with *the system*. **This is a situation where it may be legitimate to agree to act on behalf of people, individually or collectively. There is a big difference between encouraging dependency and setting someone up for failure.** It might even be irresponsible and disempowering not to act on someone's behalf in some circumstances!

SKILLS & PROCESS SUMMARY

| PROVIDING PRACTICAL SUPPORT | |
|--|---|
| POSSIBLE PROCESSES | POSSIBLE SKILLS |
| Identify Your Expectations of the Reaction of the Person Receiving Practical Resources | Contracting/Negotiation |
| Assess Your Values re: Provision of Practical Resources | Affirmation |
| Assess Your Motivation for Providing Information | Active Listening |
| Ensure Response to Factual Questions is Proportional to the Weight of Evidence for Your Position | Establish Specifics |
| Assess Consistency of Information You Plan to Provide with the Person's Values and Beliefs | Concrete/Specific Information Provision |
| Ensure you Provide an Appropriate Level/Quantity of Information | Clear Information Provision |
| Assess Cultural Appropriateness of Information | Detailed Information Provision |
| Assess Person's Literacy Level | Appropriate Information Provision |
| Enable Person to Restate Information to Check Their Comprehension | Extend Frame of Reference |
| Assess your Motivation for making a Referral | Low Key Planning |
| Assess Advantages and Disadvantages of Making Referral | Reassurance |
| Assess "Rejection Impact" of Referral on Person | <i>Practice Runs/Role-Playing/Rehearsal</i> |
| Identify your Assumptions/Expectations/Values in Relation to This Referral | Advocacy |
| Assess Person's Expectations/Assumptions/Values in Relation to This Referral | Willing to Request Help from the Person |
| Assess the Person's Motivation to Act on This Referral | Willing to Request Further Information |
| Assess the Skills/Values/Knowledge/Effectiveness of Referral Source | Use Directories/Phone Book |
| Offer Transition Support | |
| Establish Follow-up Arrangements/Options | |
| Determine the Need for Advocacy | |
| Contract Further Work Together or Termination | |

PLANNING CHANGE

Before beginning to plan action, it is important that the person is genuinely ready to act. As a worker, it is understandable that we want to see the situation improve for the person. Sometimes, we even feel we want to *fix it!* However, unless they are ready to act, planning action can be counter-productive.

If a person plans action because they feel obliged to, they may end up feeling less powerful - a failure - because they didn't succeed.

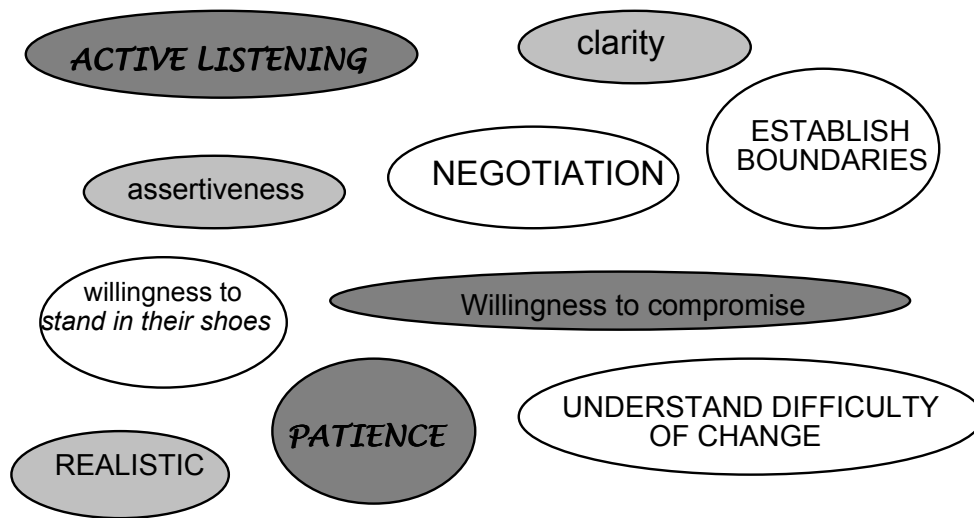
In order to be able to undertake concerted, self-managed action, **the person needs to have moved from viewing themselves as inadequate** or powerless, in relation to the situation they want to change. As a result, they may express constructive anger, a sense of determination to change themselves or something in their environment, or a willingness to learn the skills/processes necessary to achieve change. **A critical measure of readiness is that the person can identify a clear vision of a better future for themselves.** They can articulate their own ability to have a part in making that future.

Where these conditions exist, it can be useful to check out with the person whether they would like support during the process of planning (or implementing) their actions. If so, contract accordingly.

Planning to Change Factors External to the Person

Changes in environment or other people are frequently loaded against success. The person has less control over the change than they would have over personal change. In order to protect against *setting the person up for failure*, it is crucial that they enter the situation with as many skills as possible.

The following are some of the skills someone might need if they want to generate change in another person's behaviour:



This chart outlines some of the possible skills pre-requisites for effective involvement in social/cultural action:

| AIM | AREA OF ACTIVITY |
|---|---|
| Personal Development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • self concept/confidence/esteem • vision of a better future • awareness of options/extended frame of reference • movement of view of self as inadequate to anger |
| Increased Knowledge, Skills and Resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understanding of power structures • assertiveness skills • conflict management/interpersonal skills • management/organisational/interaction skills • planning/prioritising/decision making skills |
| Strategy Development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • group goal-setting commitment and skills • lobbying skills • information/resource gathering |

Planning Personal Change

Personal change can involve changes to personal behaviour, or new learning. **The aim is to develop plans which the person can wholly control themselves.** In other words, they are responsible for their own development and change, and do not need to rely on others' response as part of their anticipated outcome.

The lack of dependence upon others has the advantage of giving the person complete personal power within the process. **It has the disadvantage of potentially establishing a *blame the victim* situation, should the process/person fail.** Therefore, it is especially important to develop a plan which is as realistic as possible. This may involve examining the skills, motivation and ability of the person to achievement the objectives/goals they are setting for themselves. It may be important to encourage the person to minimise the amount they try to achieve initially ... overambitious plans which create *make or break* situations can be damaging. If a person *fails* in their attempt to make major change in their life, they may end up less confident or motivated than prior to the attempt. Encourage the person to develop very gradual steps (that they think will be easy!) leading to minor change ... they can always add to them following initial success. Every success will significantly add to their confidence in relation to change and themselves.

So ... as the result of their development of a self-managed plan/process, the person may end up more disillusioned than ever .. or, if careful, unambitious planning has occurred ... able to congratulate themselves on an achievement they made completely by themselves!

Effective Objective/Goal Setting:

Prior to setting objectives and goals, it is important to be clear about the overall/long term aim/vision of the person. This may represent where they would like to be a year, or 10 years, away. It might even include a picture of where they would ultimately like to be (ie. a lifetime vision).

Objectives describe **how** one aspect of that aim/vision (however small) could be achieved. Objectives look at achieving something over a relatively short period (between a few months and a few days, depending on the priorities of the person). The person should be encouraged to choose carefully the level of objective appropriate to their situation. Where the person is unconfident, a very short term goal, which is readily achievable, is likely to be most useful. The longer term the objective, the less gradual the steps, and the more motivation, skill, and commitment required to achieve it. The longer term the objective, the more likely the person will not achieve it ... *failure*, in their terms.

Characteristics of an Effective Objective or Goal:

- It's CHOSEN - if someone else's values are imposed on the planning process, then the person is likely to lose motivation to carry it out.
- It's MEASURABLE - in other words, it must centre on behaviour or action, not on more abstract factors such as feelings. It should also include time restrictions on each step, and be presented in a positive way.
- It's REALISTIC - not too hard! Flexibility is crucial to an effective outcome. You may need to build in an additional step if an existing one is too daunting. If a step feels unrealistic, the person is likely to abandon their efforts, unless it is modified.
- It's SUPPORTED - building rewards into planning can be a useful way to ensure support, as can ensuring that you have something to do each day toward achieving the outcome. It may be useful for the person to let

another person, whom they trust, know what they're doing, and ask them to give encouragement/support during each step of the process.

- It's GRADUAL - spectacular leaps and bounds might make for exciting planning ... but problems generally emerge during implementation. During planning, it is very easy to overestimate the ease of change.
- It's SINGULAR - focussing on one activity/change, so the person can do really well at it!

One Format for a Self-Managed Plan

The next page provides an example of how a long term objective could be developed into a plan. The following page is a *DIY Plan*, which can be used in your work with people. The person can take the sheet away as a measurable result of the helping session, and as a guide to their plan of action.

A Possible Step-by-Step Process:

1. Determine the overall Aim toward which you are heading
2. Look at all the ways in which you could start to achieve this Aim - that is, develop a series of possible Objectives
3. Choose and define your preferred Objective
4. Plan the Objective so you can undertake it in a series of realistic steps (Goals)
5. Make a deal with yourself - eg. about the time by which each Goal will be accomplished; perhaps about the rewards/supports that can help maintain your motivation.

DO IT YOURSELF GOAL SETTING - AN EXAMPLE

Aim: *To feel healthier*

- Possible Approaches/Objectives:
1. *Go on a diet*
 2. *Do an Aerobics Class*
 3. *Personal fitness program*
 4. *Go dancing more often*
 5.

Chosen Objective: *To run a mile every day in 10 minutes, within 3 months*

| | GOAL | week/ day no | Reward/ Support |
|--|--|-----------------|--------------------------------|
| | Goal 6: <i>A mile in 10!</i> | 11/12 | <i>take a sickie!</i> |
| | Goal 5: <i>Run a mile per day in 12 mins</i> | 9/10 | <i>buy a pair of runners</i> |
| | Goal 4: <i>Run a mile each day (no time limit)</i> | 7/8 | <i>buy a track suit</i> |
| | Goal 3: <i>Keep doing Goal 2, but run as much of it as possible</i> | 5/6 | <i>ask Sue to shout dinner</i> |
| | Goal 2: <i>Walk a mile each day (no time restriction)</i> | 3/4 | <i>go to movies</i> |
| Goal 1: <i>Walk around the block each day</i> | | 1/2 | <i>buy an avocado</i> |

DO IT YOURSELF GOAL SETTING - A FORMAT

Aim:

.....

.....

Possible Approaches/Objectives:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Chosen Objective:

.....

.....

| | GOAL | week/ day no | Reward/ Support |
|---------|------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Goal 6: | | | |
| Goal 5: | | | |
| Goal 4: | | | |
| Goal 3: | | | |
| Goal 2: | | | |
| Goal 1: | | | |

SKILLS & PROCESS SUMMARY

| PLANNING CHANGE | |
|--|---|
| POSSIBLE PROCESSES | POSSIBLE SKILLS |
| Reinforce Achievements | Contracting/Negotiation |
| Has Person Overcome Feelings of Self-Blame? | Affirmation |
| Does Person have a Clear Vision of a Better Future? | Active Listening |
| Is there a Clear Distinction between the things they Can and Can't Control | Constructive Confrontation |
| Do They have the Skills/Knowledge/Resources needed to Influence External Factors? | Skills Assessment |
| Aim/Objective/Goal Setting re: Plan | Establish Specifics |
| Check Ambitiousness of Plan against the Skills/Motivation/Confidence of the Person | Challenge Undeveloped/Underdeveloped Skills & Resources |
| Ensure that Plan has Realistic Timeline and Reward/Support Structure | Extend Frame of Reference |
| Ensure Adequate/Scheduled Opportunities to Review/Adjust Plan | Facilitate Detailed Planning |
| Contract Further Work Together or Termination | Logical Thinking |
| | Break Ideas Down into Small Steps |

BUILDING TRUST/COMFORT

A wide range of different factors contribute to the development of trust/comfort in a helping interaction. Sometimes, an explicit process/period of trust building is required. On other occasions, the person seems willing to operate on an assumption of trust (eg. because of your formal role). Or, a person progressively trusts you more and more because of your attitude during discussions.

Conventional *Non-Directive Counselling* models generally argue that trust/comfort building is a pre-requisite, or first step, in the process. Often, this is not consistent with experience. People will sometimes ask a stranger, who is a worker in a particular role, for information ... or simply start *off-loading* when overwhelmed by a problem/situation. This does not mean that they may not need to establish a deeper trust relationship, **implicitly or explicitly**, at some point in time. It simply indicates that they are willing to work on the assumption of trust at this particular point.

The skills/attitudes/values required for effective trust building, therefore, should be present throughout any helping interaction. They should underpin the way you interact with people.

Some Trust Building Strategies and Skills

READINESS TO INTERACT - Ensure that you are in a suitable situation to respond to the person's needs - a distracting environment, or one where you are asked to do other tasks at the same time, might end up making the person feel de-valued, and therefore undermine trust.

STATE OF MIND - Ensure that you are in a relaxed, yet alert, state - if you appear tense or conscious of the time, the person may question their right to take up your time, and may again feel unimportant and/or never raise the issue which is bothering them.

PHYSICAL SETTING - Ensure that this is **mutually** comfortable. Some people prefer a situation where the atmosphere is chatty (eg. doing a task together, or driving somewhere). This can help them feel less pressured. Alternately, some prefer to be in an environment which is heavily focussed on them (eg. a room set up with direct eye contact, coffee, a pleasant temperature, and pen/paper readily available).

VOICE - A warm, friendly tone, pitched to suit the person's state of mind is ideal. If they are quiet and anxious, or over-excited/aggressive, a deep/slow/soft/calming voice is appropriate. If they are enthusiastic and motivated, stay with your usual voice.

TALKING - Keep your input to a minimum, and focus on listening to the person's needs. Sometimes people need silence/space/thinking time. This may seem a long time to you, but for them, it may be exactly what they need. Deal with **your** discomfort with silence, without imposing **your** problem on them!

DESIRE TO HELP - This seems self-evident, but we often launch into problem solving because we feel we have to, and resent the intrusion into time planned for other tasks. Often the person can pick this up. Check your own state of mind to ensure that you can project a **real** desire to help. Often people can measure your **genuineness** through your ability to be honest, open, spontaneous, natural, and willing to self-disclose where appropriate.

RESPECT - Someone can usually judge whether or not you respect them through your willingness to give them *credit for intelligence* - that is, to be self-determining and use their own resources to work out their dilemma. Show confidence in the person you're talking with.

AFFIRMATION - This is linked with showing confidence in the person. Be careful not to be patronising, or to use *false positives* as a way of dealing with your negative feelings toward someone. It is important to note that **affirmation is a form of confrontation**. Some people find it quite threatening. Be willing to back off! One way to ensure that your affirmations are appropriate is to be **very specific** in your feedback, and only to comment on areas that you have actually seen or the person has told you about.

USE OF SILENCE - Often we are in such a rush to help someone, that we don't give them enough time to simply think things through. The use of silence as a constructive contribution (rather than a measure of your inability to fill the gaps) is very important to a person's comfort. Allowing silences to happen as a natural part of a helping situation has several advantages:

- It gives you time to think of the best response
- It gives the person time to think through what they've just said
- It keeps the emotional level of the interaction/person down
- It contributes to a calm/relaxed environment in which problems can be dealt with constructively.

In particular ...

- It contributes to the idea that the helper is a real person - not a *god* with the answer to everything.

This contributes to enabling a *power with* approach, and can help overcome the problem of the person looking to you for easy answers (which they'll probably reject!).

CLARIFYING - This involves either the helper feeding back to the person what they think they're saying, or asking the person to go through the area again, and re-explain it. The latter can be particularly useful for the person, by helping them to clarify their situation for themselves, and, like using silence, to give a human sense of the worker.

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS - These are questions requiring more than a *yes/no* answer. They are designed to encourage someone to talk further. Generally, you can ask a question on the same topic in either an open or closed fashion, for example:

Open - *Could you tell me more about your relationship with Maureen?*

Closed - *Have you got a good relationship with Maureen?*

Open-ended questions can also be used as a way of getting the person to elaborate on something they've just said.

BEGINNING THE SENTENCE - With this technique, you start off a sentence, and the person completes it and, hopefully, keeps talking after that! (eg. ... *and after that you ...* or, ... *and then he said? ...*)

SUMMARY REFLECTION - Summarises the overall content of what the person has been talking (... or rambling) about, for the past 10 minutes! Using this skills tends to re-centre the conversation, and it confirms/negates whether the helper is on the right track in assessing the crux of the person's problem or need. If you've missed the point, the person is likely to correct you with *Yes, but ...* or, *That's true, but ... is more important.*

MIRRORING - This involves repeating a word or phrase exactly as the person stated it. Mirroring shows a partial understanding by the helper, and if a crucial word is mirrored, it can prompt the person to go on talking and further explore the area.

CONTINUING RESPONSES - Are a useful way of letting the person know that you are still there/listening/interested, without interrupting their train of thought or conversation. Some examples are *hmmm, go on..., I see* or *a-haa.*

CASUAL COMMENTS/CONVERSATION - Are frequently underrated as a part of effective support. Often people are hesitant to disclose much about themselves until they feel safe. Casual interaction can enable the development of a relationship on a much less threatening level, or provide a *break*, when the conversation is very intense ... or is about to hit a crucial point!

CONTRACTING - This should be constantly occurring, as part of the process of *power sharing* the **process** of the interaction. When explicitly building trust/comfort, you might typically negotiate any of the areas above. Some standard opening lines are:

If you want to talk, I'm happy to listen and perhaps I can help you work out what's happening at home ... or,

If you'd like information, I'll try to find some for you ... or,

Where would you like to chat - we can get on with the dishes ... or, we can go somewhere quiet and just talk. What do you think?

BOUNDARIES/LIMITATIONS - This is similar to contracting. Sometimes, it is just not possible to respond to needs immediately, or in the context of the particular service offered by your agency. It is much more useful to be immediately honest about your limitations, than to cut off support at a critical time for the person. Some typical lines in this area might be:

I'm really sorry. I'm already booked up with appointments this morning ... but I'd love to talk with you this afternoon. The good news is that if we make a time, I can really concentrate on your problem, instead of being distracted by other things or,

It sounds like you want to talk about some pretty personal things. You need to know from the beginning that I'm not trained as a counsellor. But there's this fantastic woman, called Betty, that I know, who's great to talk to. Would you like me to introduce you?

SELF-DISCLOSURE - There are many different points of view about the extent to which it is appropriate to self-disclose when you are in a helping role. Regardless of the conclusions you draw, it is important to examine **why** you are self disclosing. **Who is it for?** If it is designed to help the person feel more comfortable, and feel that you have some common ground, this can be useful. Sometimes, though, self-disclosure is more about the helper's desire to have a relationship with the person, than about the person's need!

And this leads to a critical question about the whole area of comfort/trust building - WHO IS IT FOR? Very often, it is the helper who feels uncomfortable talking with someone they don't know. Often people prefer not to make a personal connection with the person who is helping them! Trust Building is not always a good thing ... it can even generate a barrier, and undermine comfort, for people who would prefer some distance between them and their helper!

SKILLS & PROCESS SUMMARY

| BUILDING TRUST/COMFORT | |
|--|--|
| POSSIBLE PROCESSES | POSSIBLE SKILLS |
| Assess Your Readiness to Interact | Contracting/Negotiation |
| Assess Your State of Mind | Affirmation |
| Negotiate Physical Setting | Active Listening |
| Identify Boundaries/Limitations | Appropriate Voice |
| Judge Usefulness of Self-Disclosure | Limited Talking |
| Assess Your Desire to Help | Desire to Help |
| Identify the Basis of Your Respect for the Person | Respect |
| Develop Strategies to Deal with Your Discomfort with Silence | Use of Silence |
| Draw Conclusions about the Usefulness of Casual Conversation | Clarifying |
| Contract Further Work Together or Termination | Open-Ended Questions |
| | Beginning the Sentence |
| | Summary Reflection |
| | Mirroring |
| | Continuing Responses |
| | Casual Comments/Conversation |
| | (Culturally) Appropriate Body Language |
| | Boundaries/Limitations |
| | Appropriate Self-Disclosure |

SOME FURTHER RESOURCES RE: HELPING

Books

There are lots of books about counselling. Most of the ones focussed on short term counselling use a linear model - that is:

- STEP 1 - build trust (or similar)
- STEP 2 - clarify the problem (or similar)
- STEP 3 - explore options or challenge perceptions (or similar)
- STEP 4 - plan action or give information/referral (or similar)
- STEP 5 - (sometimes) end the session/relationship (or similar)

There are none that I have been able to find, that enable people to control BOTH the content and process of the counselling interaction. However, the actual skills that are covered can be very useful within a more lateral (power with) approach.

A useful introduction is:

Geldard, David (1989) **Basic Personal Counselling: A Training Manual for Counsellors**, Prentice Hall, New York.

A couple of more detailed books which are fairly easy to get are:

Carkhuff, Robert R. (1987) **The Art of Helping VI**, Sixth Edition, Human Resource Development Press, Amherst, Massachusetts

Egan, Gerard (1990) **The Skilled Helper: A Systematic Approach to Effective Helping**, Fourth Edition, Brooks/Cole Publishing, Pacific Grove, California.

The following is a FANTASTIC starting point to thinking about values/ethics/professionalism and counselling (and 9 different therapeutic approaches):

Corey, Gerald (1991) **Manual for Theory and Practice of Counselling and Psychotherapy**, 4th Edition, Brooks/Cole Publishing, Pacific Grove, California.

These are generally available through University libraries, COPE Bookshop (S.A.), inter-library loan, or University Bookshops.

Courses

There are many courses which teach introductory communication and counselling. The 2 which base their teaching on this 5 circle model are:

- Advanced Certificate in Youth Work (TAFE – South Australia) – in a unit entitled *Counselling, Communication and Values in Youth Work* (which is now offered on several campuses, and to Aboriginal students as an external unit through Port Augusta Aboriginal Study Centre).
- Bachelor of Arts, Youth Work Studies (Edith Cowan University, WA) in a unit entitled *Helping Skills in Youth Work* (available as an external unit nationally).

There are pre-requisites to enrolling in both these courses.

Movies

One that raises lots of interesting questions about counselling is *Equus*, where Richard Burton plays a psychiatrist.

You can be your own best resource

Remember, *do unto others ...!* Think about how you would like to be treated in a particular situation. Think about the range of different responses that might have been helpful to you at different times.