



CORE CONDITIONS

VOLUME 2

Helpful Skills for Building Relationships

When a counselor can feel and communicate caring, understanding and acceptance for a client, they enhance their capacity to be of help to that person. A relationship is an experience between two individuals; the relationship you are asked to build with a caller or client is unique in many ways. It may come at a time when the consumer is particularly vulnerable and sensitive. The conversation may focus on painful feelings, losses, confusing situations, situations where they feel inadequate, unsolvable problems, etc. and may take place without the benefit of eye contact and physical presence. As a crisis counselor, you will put your understanding and caring into your verbal exchange and may have only a limited time with this person. Despite those obstacles, building a strong relationship will be an essential tool for working with this person.

Attending Skills

Paying attention physically

Attending is giving your physical attention to another person - listening with the whole body. Attending is nonverbal communication that indicates that you are paying careful attention to the person who is talking and involves being completely focused on the client. Attending can take the form of eye contact or ear contact, cooing, mirroring body posture and language, depending on how you are interacting with the client- in person or over the phone. Failure to attend correctly may result in the client feeling unsupported. Callers and clients are in a particularly vulnerable position: unlike sharing with a friend or family member, they are unaware of your belief system, values, abilities, and interests. When they use Crisis Center services, they are putting faith in the helpers available to them, and we must show that they've made the right decision by giving them the attention they deserve.



Eye/Ear Contact- Showing a client that you are fully engaged aids in building rapport. When you are not working with a client in person, it is important to maintain ear contact by “cooing”, asking questions, reflecting, and encouraging. Remember that in some cultures, direct eye contact can be seen as disrespectful.



Body Language- Be mindful of your posture, even if you are working on the phone. Keep your body relaxed, lean in, and orient yourself towards the client. When you are working with clients on the phone, you should continue to think about your body language. Your voice will often mirror your posture, so sit up straight, lean forward slightly, and keep an open posture.



Gestures- Remember that if you are on the phone, the client cannot see gestures or hear nods (even the most emphatic of nods!). When working with clients on the phone, try to give a sound to your gestures- a nod can become “I see” or “I’m with you”. When working with clients face to face, remember that survivors of trauma may have an exaggerated startle response and big gestures can cause unease.



Tone- Slowing down your speech may help the client feel more at ease and less rushed. It conveys that you have time to listen to the client’s concerns. An important part of crisis counseling is helping the client feel safe and secure.

Reflecting Skills

Paying attention mentally

Feeling understood, accepted, and cared for is important to each of us, especially at a time of crisis. Reflection is the process of identifying, making clear and expressing back feelings and thoughts. This process involves grasping what the other feels and means, and then stating this meaning so that the person feels understood and accepted.

While reflecting may seem contrived in our everyday ordinary conversation, it is an essential skill in counseling. Clients rarely report that it feels contrived. Rather, they seem to appreciate the degree of concern and focus. Except in extreme emergencies, you can never reflect enough.

Reflecting works because it is nonjudgmental and accepting. It conveys the desire to understand what the caller is feeling and saying by trying to understand the feeling behind the message and then reflecting that feeling back to the caller (e.g. “Sounds like you were really angry about that” or “It seems you were very scared when that happened”). This is also called “active listening.” Active listening helps clients clarify their thoughts and helps them process and better understand their feelings.

As you listen and reflect, you are conveying empathetic understanding, which validates the client’s experience. Often, clients are told that their understanding of a situation is wrong, stupid, silly, or an overreaction. When you reflect, you are neither agreeing or disagreeing with the client’s viewpoint, but rather helping clients gain insight into the situation.

New volunteers often report that practicing reflection is awkward or uncomfortable- this makes sense considering our societal norms regarding interpersonal communication. When speaking with a friend, it may feel more comfortable nodding or responding “mmhmm”, which may lead counselors to assume that they have conveyed understanding to clients in the same way. The best way to ensure that clients feel understood is to share what you have heard.

Tips for Effective Reflection

Name What You Hear

Clearly state these feelings and facts. If you use a question format (“Do you feel sad?”), you will sound unsure, unbelieving and perhaps patronizing. Questions also force a response from the client and may cause defensiveness. Rather than asking if the client or caller feels sad, try reflecting: “It sounds like you’re feeling sad”. They can correct you if necessary.

“You’re confused about her feelings toward you.”

“You’re afraid to be alone.”

“You’re really upset about your daughter.”

Name What You Hear, As Long As You Hear It

The client will introduce new feelings only when ready to deal with them; it may be necessary to reflect some feelings many times. View these reflections as a gradual release of pressure: some people

can let it all out at once, while others need a series of little releases. Multiple reflections may be a way of looking at something from different angles until the whole picture is seen.

Reflect Verbalized and Non-Verbalized Material

While some feelings are mentioned, others are perceived by tone, content, and word choice. It is preferable to reflect the feeling that the client has stated or implied. Sometimes, however, we may reflect feelings that we perceive beneath the flow of conversation. For example, the caller may be discussing the death of partner. While they may not explicitly state anger, the listener may perceive it because of an angry tone. By mentioning our perception of the tone, the caller may feel freer to discuss this feeling (“I’m hearing anger in your voice”). If the listener misinterprets, the caller will almost always correct the impression, perhaps disclosing more valid feelings in the process. Don’t let fear of being wrong silence you!

Be Aware of Incorrect Uses of the Word “Feel”

In general conversation, the word feel is used to express thoughts, as well as feelings. It can be used to express an indefinite thought (“I feel like having a drink”); as a statement of opinion (“I feel that Roger’s brashness is...”); or as a statement of belief (“I feel that all men are created equal”). Generally, anytime “feel” is followed with “that” (“I feel that...”) it has been used in a factual, not an emotional way. Avoid this usage when you are reflecting an emotion.

"I feel <i>like</i> ..."	→	Express thoughts, beliefs, opinions
"I feel <i>that</i> ..."		
<hr/>		
"I feel <i>ecstatic</i> ."	→	Expression of <i>emotion</i>

Reflective Listening is Active

Reflective listening may seem to be a passive process. To be successful, however, it relies on intense concentration. We hear more than just the words of the client- we also hear the feelings, values, and attitudes of an individual. To do this requires empathy and acceptance of the importance of the caller's concern.

Experiencing and expressing feelings are major ways of interacting with others. Effective communication occurs when people take responsibility for their thoughts, feelings, and behavior—when individuals own who they are and what they do. Many of us have conditioned ourselves to screen awareness of our feelings, blocking effective communication and self-understanding.

Empathy is Necessary

Empathy literally means "to feel in", to stand in another's shoes, to get inside their feelings. Empathy is a learned skill and can be improved through attention and practice. To improve your empathy...

- Pay attention to your own feelings
- Listen with genuine concern, interest, and full attention
- Listen first, then speak
- Understand and accept what another is experiencing; do not judge

Avoid Pity, Sympathy, Projection, and Transference

Pity, sympathy, projection and transference sometimes masquerade as empathy. Pity is feeling sorry for another and tends to patronize the client. Sympathy is feeling for another (becoming emotionally involved) and tends to cause one to be less objective and neutral. Projection attributes our feelings to another. ("I would feel this way in that situation, so you must also".) Transference is when we react to a client because they remind us of someone else. All of these situations interfere with and detract from our ability to empathize with another individual.

Why Reflection is Effective

- It is respectful. When you mirror emotions and thoughts, you help the speaker see their own image. The speaker can decide whether it needs alteration.

- It helps the speaker feel deeply understood, often getting at un verbalized feelings of which the speaker is sometimes unaware.
- It serves a supportive function by communicating to the speaker that you are in tune with them.
- It shows that you are paying attention. You cannot give an interchangeable response unless you are really listening. Careful listening is not an accident!
- Concentrating on how the other person feels eliminates the need for personal judgement. All feelings are legitimate even if you can't accept the person's behavior.
- Feelings can sometimes be the causes of behavior. If you can help someone with their feelings, it may help them to examine their motives as well.
- It provides the opportunity for emotional catharsis, or a feeling of relief from tension and pressure.
- When the speaker is free from having to defend their feelings, they can face their problems more directly.

Ways to Reflect

Verbatim

Repeat back to the client word-for-word exactly what they have just said.

→ Client	I just don't know what I'm going to do. I feel trapped.
→ Counselor	You just don't know what to do... You feel trapped.

Paraphrasing

Reflect the words that the caller has just stated, but change the wording a little bit.

→ Client	I just don't know what I'm going to do. I feel trapped.
→ Counselor	You sound like you're at a loss as to what to do because no options seem like the right one.

Reflection of Content

Use your understanding of what the client has said. If the caller sounds as though they are working from a cognitive approach or if it is difficult to connect with them around feelings, then reflecting content may be a more effective approach.

→ Client	I just don't know what I'm going to do. I feel trapped.
→ Counselor	It sounds like you're unsure about what your next steps should be.

Reflection of Feeling

Many mental health counselors believe that addressing feelings is the priority before any thoughts or actions can be had in problem solving. At the Crisis Center, we place a lot of importance on feelings as a way of affirming and empathizing. Reflect feelings often.

Instead of using the Reflection Formula, you go immediately to reflecting feeling. Remember, all feelings can be traced back to the primary feelings: SAD, MAD, GLAD and BAD.

→ Client	I just don't know what I'm going to do. I feel trapped.
→ Counselor	You feel anxious about your next steps. OR You sound scared.

Summarizing

When you need to reflect facts, so as to make sure that you're hearing the story correctly, reflect the facts, events, actions or behaviors as you have heard them.

→ Counselor

Let me see if I'm hearing you correctly. Your doctor told you that _____.

→ Counselor

I want to make sure we're on the same page. You were in a car accident and you have not been working for three weeks.

→ Counselor

I'm having a hard time following, let me make sure I'm understanding correctly.

Reflection Formulas

This is a lot like paraphrasing, but the counselor leads with a frequently used "formula."



Formula

When (situation or event) happens, you feel (emotion).

→ Client

I just don't know what I'm going to do. I feel trapped.

→ Counselor

When you don't know what to do, you feel uneasy.



Formula

It sounds like _____.

→ Client

I just don't know what I'm going to do. I feel trapped.

→ Counselor

It sounds like you feel stuck and unsure about next steps.



Formula

What I'm hearing you say is _____.

→ Client

I just don't know what I'm going to do. I feel trapped.

→ Counselor

What I'm hearing you say is that you feel stuck because you're not sure what you can do.

List of Feeling Words

AFRAID

Scared
 Alarmed
 Frightened
 Terrified
 Anxious
 Panicky
 Terror-stricken
 Fearful
 Apprehensive

CONFUSED

Perplexed
 Confounded
 Distracted
 Disconcerted
 Flustered
 Bewildered
 Mixed-up
 Puzzled

FRUSTRATED

Defeated
 Thwarted
 Exasperated
 Baffled
 Hindered
 Fighting a losing battle

HATE

Abhor
 Loathe
 Resent
 Dislike
 Detest
 Despise

HELPLESS

Powerless
 Defenseless
 Vulnerable
 Resourceless
 Crippled
 Dependent

ANGRY

Irritated
 Mad
 Enraged
 Hostile
 Furious
 Announced
 Exasperated
 Inflamed
 Provoked
 Incensed
 Infuriated

AMBIVALENT

Ambiguous
 Vague
 Undecided
 Unsure
 Uncertain

DISGUSTED

Nauseated
 Sickened
 Revolted
 Repelled
 Aversion

EMBARRASSED

Demoralized
 Disconcerted
 Humiliated
 Ashamed
 Degraded
 Lose face

HOPELESS

Futile
 Desperate
 Desolate
 Despondent
 Dejected
 Pessimistic
 Disappointed
 Forlorn
 Give up
 Despair

HURT

In pain
 Aching
 Alone
 Injured
 Wounded
 In agony
 Anguish
 Broken-hearted

SAD

Sorrowful
 Downcast
 Dejected
 Unhappy
 Melancholy
 Gloomy
 Dismal
 Heavy-hearted

TIRED

Weary
 Fatigued
 Exhausted
 Beat

LONELY

Solitary
 Alone
 Lonesome
 Desolate

LOVE

Fondness
 Like
 Admire
 Affection
 Idolize
 Care
 Attached

SHOCKED

Appalled
 Horrified
 Disgusted
 Revolted
 Surprised

WORRIED

Anxious
 Uneasy
 Fearful
 Apprehensive
 Concerned
 Disturbed
 Fretting
 Upset
 Tormented
 Trouble

WORTHLESS

Useless
 No good
 Valueless
 Miserable
 Lousy
 Good-for-nothing

HAPPY

Joyous
 Contended
 Ecstatic
 Glad
 Cheerful
 Pleased
 Lucky
 Fortunate
 Up

GUILTY

Bad
 At fault
 To blame
 Sinful
 Culpable
 Reprehensible

Reflective Response Exercise

Feelings and content are two components of communication. An important skill in counseling is the ability to discern feelings from content in a caller’s statements. A simple formula for reflection that includes feelings and content is:

“You feel _____ because _____.”

However, it would be unnatural to continue using only this formula; as the counselor becomes more skilled and relaxed, they will find a number of ways to say the same information.

In this exercise, please read each statement from a client. The first set of blanks asks you to fill in a response using the formula “You feel _____ because _____.” In the next set of blanks, you are asked to re-write the reply in your own words, making sure that you include feelings and content in your response.

1 Teen: “I really don’t want to lose them. We have been going out for seven weeks, and I don’t want to throw that away, but if I don’t have sex, we’ll breakup. I don’t know what to do.”

Formula	
Your own words	

2 Adult: “I really don’t know what my boss wants from me. I’m told I’m doing fine, and then my boss will blow up over nothing at all. I don’t understand this behavior. Maybe this job isn’t right for me.

Formula	
Your own words	

3 Adult: “When you get older, I guess you have to expect these things to happen. I broke my hip when I fell, but it could be a lot worse. Being in the hospital is a pain, but I guess I’m glad to be able to go to the hospital.

Formula	
Your own words	

4 Child: “My little sister is such a pest! She follows me everywhere I go. She even wants to come in my room when I have friends over.”

Formula	
Your own words	

5 Adult, “I’m going into the hospital tomorrow for some tests. I think they suspect an ulcer. But nobody has told me what to expect. I’ve heard others talk about the tests, but I’m not really sure what they’re like.”

Formula	
---------	--

Your own words	
6	Teen: "I mean, everything I do, my mom's on my back. She's always telling me to do something, and whatever I do it's wrong. If she doesn't stop pretty soon, I might just get pushed too far."
Formula	
Your own words	
7	Adult: "It was all I could do to come here. A friend told me to call the police, but then I'd become one of those stories you read on social media. Or they'd be asking me all sorts of questions and blaming me. I just want to forget it. I don't want to keep reliving it over and over again."
Formula	
Your own words	
8	Adult: "I know I should leave. I keep getting hurt and it will probably get worse, but after my parents divorced, I always promised myself that I'd stick it out and work through problems."
Formula	
Your own words	
9	Adult: "What do you think I should do about this? I just can't see any way out. What would you do if you were me?"
Formula	
Your own words	

Open-Ended Question Skills

With an expressive client, attentive listening and reflection may be all the communication skills you need. Some clients will not communicate as easily because they are not used to putting their feelings into words. Open-ended questions may help a reluctant person to talk more freely. An open-ended question is a question that cannot be answered by "yes" and "no" or single word answer. The question encourages the client to reveal something about themselves, or their feelings or situation. It serves as an invitation to talk and avoids the sharpness that can be contained in "why" questions. At times, the question may actually be a statement, though serving the same purpose. Some examples of open-ended questions are:

What do you think might happen when you talk to your husband?

How is living on your own different than living at home?

Who would you most like to talk to about this?

How would you like her to respond when you talk with her?

Some examples of statements used as questions are:

Tell me about your relationship with your boyfriend.

Tell me when you first began to feel uncomfortable.

I wonder what would be comforting to you right now.

I'm curious about what you were thinking at that moment.

A series of open-ended questions and reflections can help a caller to share their inner experience. The questions help them to explore the situation more thoroughly and perhaps express for the first time what they think or feel. The reflection acknowledges and accepts the point of view. If you find yourself asking a series of questions and sounding like you are taking a survey, check yourself out. Your questions are probably close-ended and need to be re-phrased.

Open-ended questions are designed to:

- Get the caller/client talking, telling the story
- Give definition in the caller's/client's terms about what "it" means to them
- Give the counselor information about what language to use in mirroring
- Reduces the counselor's temptation to do mind reading, which does not work.
- Give the caller/client a chance to give expansive information, rather than narrow yes/no responses. The more expansive the better.

Closed-ended questions are designed to:

- Limit how much a caller/client can say.
- Reduces the information to Yes/No responses.
- Assists when assessing for an emergency risk. (Do you have a gun? Is the gun loaded?)

It is better to avoid "why" questions when working with callers and clients. "Why?" can put the caller on the defensive and make them feel as though they need to justify their actions or feelings. Many times, counselors can rephrase "Why" questions into open ended questions, and if they cannot, it's likely the question satisfies their own curiosity and may not lend anything to the conversation. It's also possible that "why" questions are being used in an attempt to gain insight into a situation that neither the caller or counselor have access to ("Why do you think they said that to you?"). It is possible that the counselor can rephrase "why" questions into something more helpful.

Some examples of "why" questions rephrased or turned into reflections:

“Why do you think your boyfriend broke up with you?” can become “It sounds as though you were surprised when your boyfriend broke up with you. Tell me more.”

“Why did you accept a drink from someone you didn’t know?” can become “I’m hearing that you may be feeling some self-blame”

“Why didn’t you tell him what you needed?” can become “What is it that stopped you from expressing yourself in that moment?”

“Why don’t you just tell her how you feel?” can become “How would it feel to talk about your feelings with her?”

Advice Giving

Advice giving often comes naturally to helpers. We want to make people feel better, we want to share our stories and experiences, and most of the time, advice giving is done with good intentions. Helpers must accept that people seeking help are not looking for a quick fix, but rather to feel connected, empowered, and supported. We can accomplish this without having all the answers and relying on the callers and clients to know what is best for them.

Giving advice can be problematic for many reasons, especially in a crisis. When helpers give unsolicited advice, we assume that the caller does not have the knowledge or ability to address the issue themselves. We must respect that people are the experts in their own life and possess the ability to make decisions and plans on their own. Many callers and clients have ideas about what next steps should be and reaching out to a crisis worker is more about processing and working through than trying to get someone to make the decision for them.

An important part of crisis intervention is empowerment. Empowering the caller or client to take control and made decisions that are best for them can set the stage for healing and moving forward. Helping clients gain insight into their situation and then encouraging them to make the decision that is best for them is far more empowering than a helper taking over and telling the client what they should or ought to do. Recognizing and reinforcing our client’s strengths and abilities can prepare them for successful crisis resolution in the future.

As a helper, we often have a limited amount of information about the clients with whom we are engaged. Giving advice from a limited point of view can be dangerous. For example, if a helper tells a client who is struggling with coming out to family members is told that they should “just get it over with” and that “your family will love you no matter what” without any insight into that client’s family system, we run the risk of putting them in a dangerous or traumatic situation.

When we give advice, unsolicited or requested, we run the risk of receiving backlash when our advice does not work out the way we planned. Advice coming from a limited point of view as described above often has consequences that only the client or caller must deal with. It is easy for helpers to give advice from the comfort of their own experience and resources. When we present ourselves as experts and give advice, the client may not have access to the resource or support system that would make the advice effective.

When callers and clients ask for advice (and the will!), helpers aren't forced to shut the conversation down and tell the client "sorry, buddy, that's not what I'm here for", but rather, we can use the skills we learn as crisis counselors to aid the client in finding solutions on their own.

What Can We Do Instead?

Ask questions and listen: What have you tried so far? What's worked well for you in the past? What has stopped you from addressing this in the past? What's going on now that made you want to address this? Tell me about your support system.

Reflect: I'm hearing that you're having a hard time with this issue. It sounds like you'd like my input about what you're going through. When you aren't sure what to do, support from others makes it easier to move forward.

Be present: Use attending skills to make sure the client knows that you are paying attention and that you care.

Show unconditional positive regard and empathize: A caller or client may become frustrated that you aren't able to give advice. Treat them with unconditional positive regard and empathize with them. Try to understand where they are coming from. You can tell them *"I don't blame you for being frustrated- this sounds like a really difficult situation to be in, and you'd really like some help. You deserve support."*

Show confidence in the caller or client and acknowledge strengths: *"I'm sure that it took a lot of courage to make this call/come in today. You probably have some ideas about what your next steps are, and I'd hate to halt that momentum with my own ideas. Can you share yours? Not being in your shoes makes it difficult for me to think about what I would do. I really see you having the ability to work through this effectively"*

Roadblocks to Effective Listening

Over time most of us have developed a series of bad listening habits. In our efforts to become effective crisis interventionists, we must identify and unlearn them. If you are free of the following ten blocks to good listening, you are well on your way to mastering the art of crisis intervention.

1. There is our almost universal **tendency to judge or evaluate everything we hear**. A person speaks and, before they have started to express their idea, we, in our infinite wisdom, have decided either that they are incorrect and start to prepare our own verification or

rebuttal. From that point on, we simply are not listening to what the person is saying.

2. Another bad listening habit is our **tendency to jump to conclusions to supply our own details and ramifications** – to fill the black spaces, so to speak. This is called "non-critical inference". We put words in each other's mouths. We jump to our own conclusions as though our lives depended on it.
3. Still another bad listening habit is the "plural inference"—**our tendency to assume that everyone else thinks as we do**. We have certain beliefs and



Read "The Perils of Advice Giving" at onbeing.org

convictions, and we are so firmly fixed in these that we assume that others have the same beliefs.

4. One of the most serious bad listening habits is the **closed mind**. We KNOW the answer—we are happy in our belief that we know the answer—and no one can get through to us.
5. Unfortunately, many of us have an **extremely short attention span**. We are inclined to let our thoughts wander after a fairly short period of attention. We “listen” with our eyes, our ears, all of our senses—and it takes a real effort to concentrate our attention on the speaker over an extended period of time.
6. How about wishful thinking, or in this case “**wishful hearing?**” Aren’t we just a bit inclined to hear what we want to hear? Ever have someone try to put words into your mouth? Ever leave a meeting and find that there are a dozen different versions of what took place? Ever made a statement, “They hear what they want to hear?”
7. **Semantics**. The meaning of words, phrases, and terms is often very subtle and evasive. Professions, vocations, even avocations, have a language all their own. This matter of semantics is not only a personal and industrial problem; it is also a word problem. In any language, there are words that simply cannot be translated into another language.

8. Probably one of the most common bad listening habits is **our infatuation with the sound of our own words**. **We’re often not quiet long enough to listen to anyone else. The talker is NOT a listener!** Benjamin Franklin considered silence high on his list of virtues.
9. We must overcome **our own arrogance**—the idea that WE, the listener, are superior to whoever is doing the talking. **We** must listen to accept thoughts, ideas, and concepts from others. The teacher invariably learns more than his or her students do. We can learn from every single person with whom we come in contact.
10. **Fear! Fear of being changed**. Fear of having our ideas, our convictions, upset. We tend to seek out a black and white world—a world that simply does not exist. We are happy and comfortable in our ideas, and we resist anything that might change them.

The following ways of responding to a person are further roadblocks or barriers to communication. These responses have a negative impact on communication because they get in the way of an equal and open exchange. These responses imply that the listener is uncomfortable with the topic and that the listener is judging, feeling superior to, or condescending to the client’s feelings and the flow of the conversation. There may be some situations where these roadblocks are appropriate, but the listener should be aware of the effects of using them.

Listening



Avoid these roadblocks

Ordering, directing, commanding

Telling the client to do something, giving her or him an order or command: “You have to stop thinking about all the bad things that could happen!” or “You should call the police.”

Warning, threatening, promising

Telling the client what consequences will occur if she or he does something: “If you do that, you’ll be sorry” or “If you calm down, I’ll listen to you.”

Moralizing, preaching, “should,” “ought”

Invoking outside authority as accepted truth: “You shouldn’t act like that” or “You ought to tell her what you’re feeling”; “Think of all the women you will let down if you don’t report.”

Name-calling, labeling, stereotyping

Making the client feel foolish, shaming or categorizing her or him: “That’s a typical male way of thinking” or “You’re smarter than that” or “Police tend to be ...”

Interpreting, analyzing, diagnosing

Telling the client what his or her motives are or analyzing motives, communicating that you have the client figured out: “You’re just jealous of your friend” or “You only feel that way because he won’t give you what you want.”

Offering praise, reassurances

Trying to make their feelings go away, denying the strength of the feelings: “You’ll feel better tomorrow” or “Don’t worry, things will work out.”



Try these pro tips

Really want to listen

Almost all listening problems can be overcome by deciding to really hear and be interested in people.

Listen to understand

Don’t just listen to be listening; try to really understand what is being said.

React!

Be generous with applause, nods, comments, questions, and encouragement as appropriate.

Stop talking

You can’t listen while you are talking. In a conversation, let the other person finish and hear what he or she is saying before you go in.

Empathize with the speaker

Put yourself in the speaker’s place and try to clearly see that point of view.

Ask questions

When you don’t understand, when you need further clarification, ask questions. However, don’t ask questions that will embarrass or put down the other person.

Concentrate on what the other person is saying

Focus on the words, the ideas, the feelings being expressed, and the body language.

Look at the other person (when possible)

Facial expressions and body language will all help the other person communicate with you.

React to ideas, not the person

Don’t allow your personal attitudes to influence your interpretation of words. Good ideas can come from anyone.

Don’t argue mentally





If you are trying to understand the other person, arguments will set up barriers.

Self-Disclosure

The Temptation to Self-Disclose


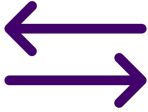


All counselors, professional and volunteer alike, must grapple with the concept of self-disclosure. Where does self-disclosure fit into counseling? What kind of self-disclosure is helpful? What kind of self-disclosure is harmful? Is there ever a time when it would be helpful to someone?

It is tempting to self-disclose as a counselor and even to convince oneself very earnestly that it is helpful. A caller may even encourage and thank you for self-disclosing. But let's think through the possible reasons why self-disclosure is tempting and potentially harmful to callers. Our volunteers would never intentionally hurt a caller, but the subtle temptations of resorting to self-disclosure might be found in the following.

	<p>If it worked for me, it could work for you</p> <p>When a counselor has had personal experience with a specific problem and has achieved resolution with it, it is tempting to say, "Hey, this worked for me.... it could work for you too! I want you to be happy (or in recovery) just like I am." In other words, the counselor is perhaps over-eager to facilitate towards the most expedient and solution based on personal experience. The counselor intends to help, but we all know about the road paved with good intentions...</p>
	<p>I feel your pain</p> <p>We have as our core conditions of counseling unconditional positive regard, empathy, and genuineness. Some textbooks liken genuineness to authenticity. It seems reasonable that one way a counselor can join with a caller is by stating a similarity, a shared point of view, or a history of similar suffering. This is not exactly what is meant by authenticity. The skilled helper must be aware of the thin line between self-disclosure and authenticity. It is not synonymous with self-disclosure. Rather, it is more in the realm of "use of self," not self-disclosure. Use of Self would be comments that suggest to the caller that "I am really here for you," "I am really trying to understand how it feels for you." Examples might include comments such as "I am really feeling scared for you right now" or "If I were in your shoes, I would be so sad" or "I'm worried for you as I hear you describe this situation."</p>
	<p>Bait and switch</p> <p>Even though our mission statement is to give a person in need a helping response, it is not uncommon for clients to turn the tables, to role reverse, to begin to interview you, the counselor, instead of the other way around. Clients often ask questions like, "Do you have this problem?" or "Do you have children?" or "Are you married?" or "What do you think?" Some callers use this as a distraction. Other people's problems are easier to examine than one's own. The caller may just want to see if you can connect with you, as if the questions are really about "Can you empathize with me?" Another possible reason may be the caller begins to see you as a friend. Friendship development is much more comfortable than facing one's problems.</p>
	<p>What was I thinking?</p> <p>Sometimes volunteers after the fact exclaim, "I don't know what came over me! I know I should not self-disclose, but I totally lost my sensibilities about it during the call!" This might be an occasion to examine how you are doing in your own life. What stressors, difficulties, or "issues" are going on currently that would make you vulnerable to forgetting who the caller is. We hope that volunteers and staff alike are helping each other on our shifts when our own "issues get stirred up." Counselors are often accused of being 'wounded healers.' This is a very real phenomenon for all counselors and so it is not abnormal; that's why being in counseling oneself is a routine for many counselors. Self-awareness, self-monitoring, self-containment and intentional awareness are better substitutes for self-disclosure.</p>

Alternatives to Self-Disclosure

If callers or clients tempt one into self-disclosing, there are four strategies to immunize oneself from doing so. Try these methods and review the grid below and the sample questions.

 <p>Reflect</p> <p>The counselor mirrors what the caller is saying, reflecting back to him or her what seems important, without answering the question directly.</p>	 <p>Deflect & Clarify</p> <p>The counselor puts emphasis back on the caller while asking the caller for more information about his or her needs.</p>
 <p>Obliquely Confirm</p> <p>One way to avoid self-disclosing is to offer a very broad and expansive confirmation that what the caller is asking for is something that you can understand. It is a truth that you can honestly confirm without revealing your personal story.</p>	 <p>Become an Ally</p> <p>I find that many want to know about their counselor so as to determine if he or she is safe, trustworthy or a potential ally or advocate. Encouragement is a way to affirm your interest in your caller's situation without self-disclosing.</p>

The following table is a synthesis of the many responses we might offer when callers ask us to self-disclose. I invite counselors to review and practice these, while putting them into your own words. Also, it is possible that we might employ more than one type of response to a caller and more than once during a call.

	 Reflect	 Deflect & Clarify	 Obliquely Confirm	 Become an Ally
Are you married (coupled, single, divorced, widowed)?	It sounds like you have a problem with an important relationship?	Tell me about your relationship. What is it that you need help with?	Relationships are very important to me.	I try to be very supportive of people in significant relationships.
Do you have children?	It sounds like you have a problem that involves children.	Tell me about your children. What is it that is bothering you about children?	Children are important to me and I also understand that they can be challenging.	I am an advocate for parents and for children.
Have you ever had this problem? Or are you a recovering alcoholic, (etc.)	It sounds like you want to know if I can understand your problem.	I'd like to hear more about you. Help me to know more about what you're struggling with.	It is true that I, just like everyone else, have had to face difficult times before.	I'm very aware of how people with this problem struggle.
How old are you?	You want to know if I can relate to someone your age.	Tell me what matters to you about age. How is age important to you?	I'm aware of how important it can be to feel as if someone close in age can relate to our problems.	People of all ages are really important to me. I try to relate to all age groups as well as I can.
Will you call me sometime?	No, but it sounds like you wish that we could maintain contact.	No, I can't call you back, but let's focus on what we can talk about right now. What would you need from someone who could talk with you on a more regular basis?	No, I can't call you back, but I can relate to the feeling of wanting a comforting and supportive person in life.	It's really important to me for every person to have a good support system. While I can't call you back, I want to help you expand your support.
Are you a Christian (Jewish, Muslim, etc.)? Or where do you go to church?	It sounds like your faith is very important to you and you want for me to be able to understand.	I'm really interested in your faith. Tell me about how your spirituality is important to you.	A guiding belief system or a set of values is important to me.	I know how important a belief system is to all people and I really want to understand yours.
Will you pray with me?	I'm hearing you really needing my support.	What would your prayer be for yourself?	I believe in the importance of prayer, contemplation, and reflection.	Many people find comfort in prayer, contemplation, and reflection and I really support that.
Are you gay, lesbian, or straight?	Am I hearing that if you knew my sexual orientation, you might feel I could understand?	Help me to know how I can be supportive with you related to your sexuality.	Being able to be free to be oneself is very important to me.	I want to be available to you and to all callers so that you do not fear judgment.
Where do you live?	You're curious about where I live.	What is important to you about knowing that?	Having a sense of community and belonging to a neighborhood is important to me.	I really believe in the concept of community for all people. Help me to know about yours.
What do you think about this issue?	You want to focus on my thoughts about this.	What are your thoughts about this issue?	I have some thoughts about this issue, but the most important thing to me right now is your thoughts.	Everyone has thoughts and feelings about life's challenges, and I really want to help you find your way through your thoughts.
What would you do if you had this problem?	You wish I could give you some advice about this.	If you had advice for a friend about the same problem, what would it be?	With problems, I find that I have to come to my own decisions through a process of reflecting. I'd like to help you to do that.	I believe that the best solution for most people is the one that they come up with for themselves. Let me try to help you.