

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY • FRESNO

DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELING & SPECIAL EDUCATION

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Some Thoughts on the Counseling Process

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1. People generally have the resources to live effectively; they come to counseling because they are "stuck" and none of the apparent possibilities seem to work. Finding "better solutions" is not the counselor's job; the task is to help clients find and resolve what stifles their ability to manage their lives.
2. Counseling is difficult for clients who perceive the counselor's role as that of providing a "product" (e.g. mental health, happiness, harmony at home, etc.). Counselors need to educate clients early in the relationship that counseling is a "process" and to be successful requires a great deal of work on their part.
3. Work with families and individuals must emphasize here-and-now experiencing. A client's concerns, no matter when they originated, are important because of their influence on the present. Example; CL: "My parents abandoned me when I was fifteen." CO: "And the effect of that on you now is . . ."
4. Changes within the family must be experienced during counseling. Homework assignments in the absence of direction, modeling, counselor support and feedback are doomed to fail.
5. Success in family counseling rests largely with modification of the system. However, changes in the system will not be sustained in the absence of effective communication among family members on both content and affect levels. Counselors strive to stimulate an environment where openness and directness in communication can be encouraged and supported while deeply regarding each family member's feelings.
6. Many family problems result from educational deficiencies among otherwise well-meaning parents who, for example, are not familiar with developmental processes or what can be expected of children at various ages. Teaching interventions are appropriate when followed by active, guided implementation and follow-up. Teaching strategies should be abandoned as soon as possible in favor of directing communication and active listening.
7. The early effects of family counseling may prove to be neither positive nor linear. Systems often get worse before they move toward health, and counselors must be open to any number of responses that may result from early intervention.

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8. The stronger and more verbal members of client-families frequently diagnose the family turmoil. The "problem," in their words, tends to rest with "him (or her), over there . . ." While the self-diagnosis may shed light on the family process, it is rare when the diagnosis is accurate. Counselors must listen to all members of the family and formulate a diagnosis that is independent of the coercive forces of stronger family members. The sensitive reframing of a diagnosis opens the door for change within the system; the blamers are given a new perspective on family problems, and the downtrodden are given support and feel understood.
9. As an "environmental engineer" counselors must understand that facilitative client interaction and/or emotional experiencing results from a feeling of safety; the counselor does not "make" the client come forth with information and feelings, but creates the environment which allows for such. Better counselors concentrate on structuring environments; poor ones go digging for facts and feelings.
10. Many counselors struggle with the notion of "respect," and some find it difficult to accept that others can be happy and fulfilled while pursuing a lifestyle (or adhering to a value system) foreign to the counselor. Counselors who come to terms with "respect" issues are not threatened by their client's moves toward independence; they can be supportive of client efforts to implement new strategies for better living. Counselors who do not resolve the issue of "respect" tend to preach their values and are uncomfortable with client gestures toward personal growth and independence.
11. For the most part, children who "disappoint" their parents are driven to do so; acting-out behavior among children has its roots within the family environment, rather than a poor family environment resulting from "bad" children. Most parenting problems are attributable to interpersonal crises with parents, or chronic results of "non-genetic heredity," such as inappropriate parenting models within the families of origin, "ACA" issues, etc. Children are rarely counseled in the absence of the parent(s). Remarkably, when adults become effective parents, their children follow with changes of equal significance.
12. It is frequently desirable to temporarily remove children from the counseling process to address "adult" issues beyond the developmental level of children. It is also appropriate to offer separate services to parents or adult children when their own developmental or personal issues preclude their full participation in family therapy. The goal is to reunite the family as soon as possible and continue work with the unit.