

### COUNSELLING

Counselling is made up of two-way communication. In counselling, two people (or more) talk together, listen together, share together. Another way of saying this is that in counselling we build a relationship with another person by communicating with him. We try to understand the other person, help him clarify what he is trying to do, or trying to say, we encourage him to express how he feels about himself, his life, and other people. We try to help him explore, and we encourage and support him in taking constructive action.

### CONSTRUCTIVE ACTION

It is important to know that there are many types of "constructive action". For example, taking steps to get a new job, sitting down with a marriage partner to seriously and cooperatively try to work out marriage difficulties, deciding to try to live by a budget, deciding to show an interest in a child's schoolwork by going to visit the school on open house night are all examples of fairly "big" actions. Sometimes very small constructive acts are just as important--expressing how you really feel, taking time to rest, having a new "insight" into oneself or into a problem, learning to speak up in a group, or talking things over with an attentive listener.

## PERSONAL COMMUNICATION

In all of our counselling actions, personal communication is important. Of course, what people talk about is important. Some people always seem to talk about vague or trivial things--they may be afraid to risk talking about what is really important to them because they fear that no one will listen, or that they will be made fun of. Or they may simply not know how to talk about really important things.

## HOW WE TALK

How people talk is even more important than what they talk about. You may know someone who is always able to communicate well (both expressing and listening) no matter what is being talked about. Such a person has become a master of the "how" of communication.

## OPENNESS

In counselling, we work for "open" relationships and "open" communication. An open relationship is one in which a person feels safe, one in which he feels free to comment on anything he wants to, and one in which he feels accepted and paid attention to.

Open communication is honest, direct, clear, relevant and responsive. The keys to open communication are attention, careful listening, and honest or "true" expression.

In open communication a person has a healthy respect for himself--and he has a healthy respect for other persons. He believes in the other person's capacity to grow, make decisions, use his intelligence, and develop his talents. These attitudes are named by the words, "liking" or "respect for".

In open communication people "level"; that is, they speak in a truthful or believable way. They do not beat around the bush or speak with a forked tongue. In open communication people respond to each other with words, with actions, with gestures and smiles, even with thoughtful silence. There is an old saying, "When you have nothing to say, don't speak." This kind of respectful silence is certainly a healthy response.

Open communication is "congruent". That is, an individual's words, actions and feelings all "match" or fit each other. A congruent communicator doesn't give you two messages at once. His face says the same thing that his words say.

#### UNDERSTAND FIRST!

An effective, open communicator enters into conversation with an attitude of "I'll do my best to understand what you are trying to get across to me, and I will not let my disagreement or my opinions or my judgements get in the way of my listening to you." He

tries to understand rather than to debate, or win a point.

#### FREEDOM TO DISCUSS

When talking with an open communicator, it is OK to bring up anything for discussion --even painful, unpleasant, or fearful thoughts, ideas, and feelings. He will not brush you aside but will pay attention to what you say, help you explore, clarify with you, and try to assist you to get more insight and understanding about whatever it is that you are talking about.

In Table 1 I have tried to contrast "open" relationships with its opposite, "closed" relationship. We can keep in mind that relationships are built from communication. We "relate" to each other by speaking, listening and acting toward one another. Relationships don't "just happen", they are built. Of course they are often poorly built. To say that we have a poor relationship is also to say that our communication is faulty.

In counselling we can see that blaming, placating, computing, and distracting are to be avoided and we should seek honest, direct, clear, understanding/levelling communication. (See Table 1.)

Table 1.

<u>TRAIT</u>	<u>CLOSED RELATIONSHIP</u>	<u>OPEN RELATIONSHIP</u>
Self-worth (good feelings about what one is and does)	low	high
Communication	evasive, muddled, unspecific, incongruent	direct, honest, clear, specific, congruent
Main communication roles	placates, blames, computes, distracts	levels, clarifies, understands, takes responsibility
Rules about who may say what, and when	hidden, unstated, cannot be discussed, out-of-date, fixed, based on authority	openly stated, discussed, agreed upon, changed when need arises, up-to-date, full freedom to comment on anything
Outcomes	destructive, resentment, chaotic, accidental, rebellion, passivity, revenge	related to reality, constructive, appropriate, personal clarify, choices and growth

A placater says things so that other people won't get mad. He covers up, hides and smooths things over.

A blamer is an expert in making sure that the other guy is at fault.

A computer is long winded. He gives lectures, editorializes and quotes scientific explanations and theories instead of paying attention to the specific situation.

A distractor ignores what is going on, says irrelevant things, jokes at the wrong time, and changes the topic.

Consider Jack and Jill going up the hill to fetch a pail of water. Jack bumps Jill's arm and she loses her hold on the bucket.

Jack: (Placating) "Please forgive me. I'm a clumsy oaf, I won't ever do it again."

Jack: (Blaming) "Can't you see where you are going, get your stupid arm out of the way, now you've dropped the bucket, you are always doing that."

Jack: (Computing) "According to a recent survey on work cooperation, we can expect to bump into each other about six times each half-day and I believe that we both realize that it cannot be avoided."

Jack: (Distracting) "I wonder if its going to rain today." Immediately starts to whistle for his dog.

Jack: (Leveling) "I bumped your arm. Are you OK? I'll get the bucket."

A leveling response allows you to act and communicate as a whole person--with your words, your heart, your feelings and your body.

#### PERSON (AL) OPENNESS

So we can speak of open relationship, open communication and openness in counseling. We can also explore "openness" in a person. When a person seriously tries to "understand" himself, he can quickly make some surprising discoveries. He can discover that:

- 1) he knows many things about himself (and other people know the same thing about him). For example, I know that my hair is dark brown and you know (if you look) that my hair is dark brown,
- 2) he knows some things about himself that no one else knows,
- 3) there are some things about him that others know but that he doesn't know (for example, bad breath),
- 4) and there are a great many things about him that neither he nor other people know.

We can show this in the following way:

	(known to others)	(not known to others)
(known to self)	I OPEN	II SECRETS
(unknown to self)	III BLIND	IV DARK

COUNSELLING FOR OPENNESS

Counselling proceeds on the assumption that, usually, the more light which is shed, the clearer and more intelligent our decisions, feelings, actions and lives are. Therefore we are constantly trying to enlarge area I, the open area. We can do this by letting go of our secrets, by finding out what others know about us, by trying to uncover what no one knows, or by combinations of all these. (See Figures B, C, D, and E.)

Figure A

(Letting others know what we know)

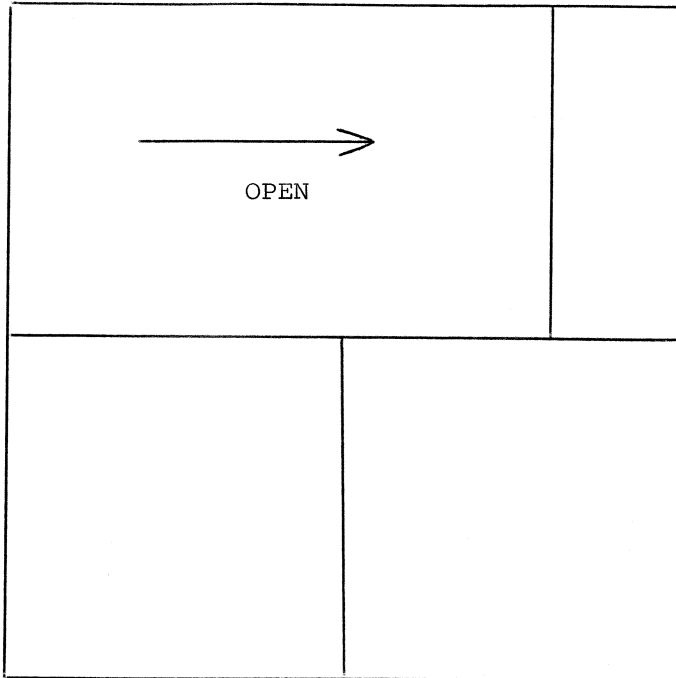


Figure  
B

(Finding out what others know)

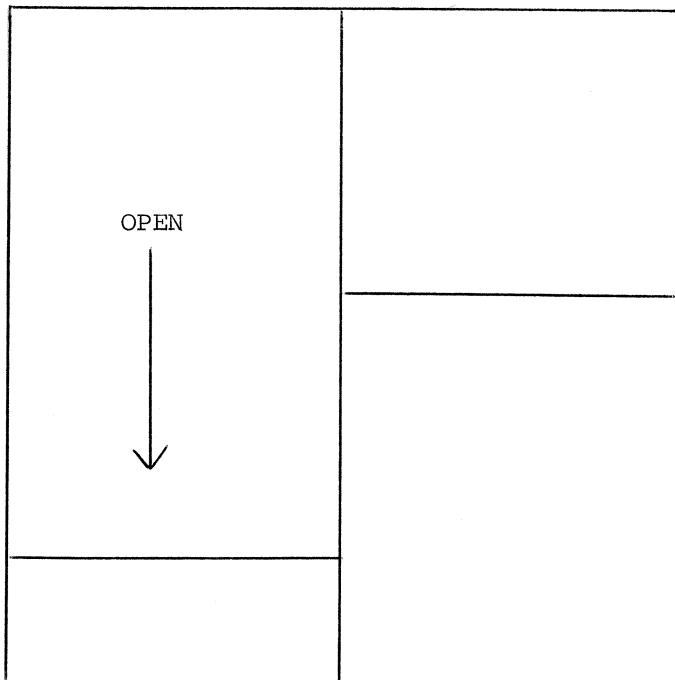


Figure  
C

(Shrinking the unknown)

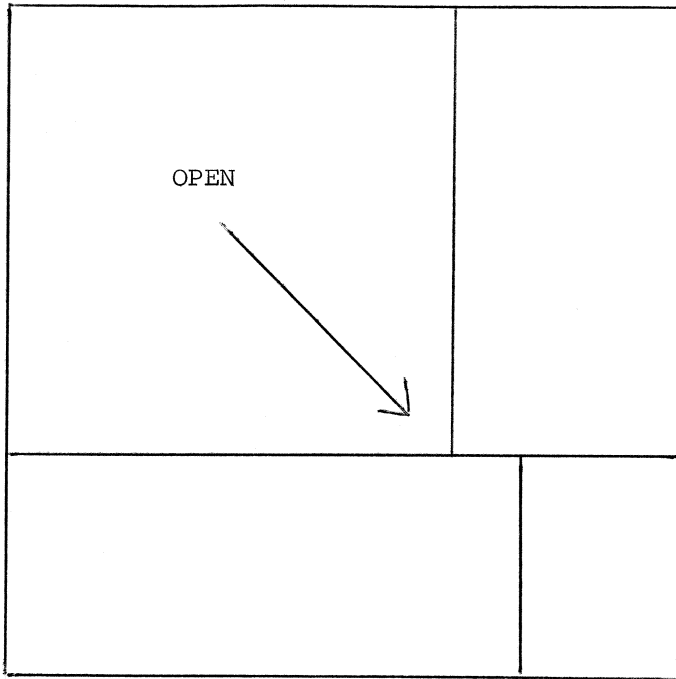


Figure  
D

(Moving back all barriers)

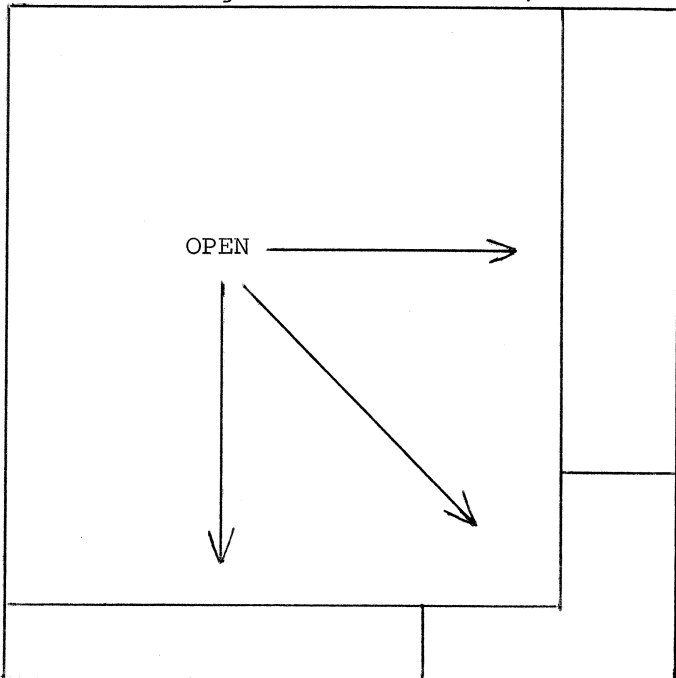


Figure  
E

Now we can try a little experiment to see how this works. First make a list of five things about yourself that you believe are very important. When you have a list made, try to put them in order of importance from most important to least important. As you do this you may think of other things which seem more important than those which you first thought of. If so, just change them. When you have put them in order of importance, then decide whether each one is something you

- a) wouldn't tell anyone else,
- b) would only tell to someone close to you,
- c) would easily tell to anyone.

Next, try to make up a list of five things which you have never told anyone but which are very important to you. You don't need to show any of these to anyone else.

Think about (explore) them a little and see if you can figure out why you keep them secret. Do some of your reasons surprise you? Do you have a hunch about the main reason you have for not letting other people know important things about you?

In counselling, by being honest and clear, by leveling and trying to understand, we help other people open up area I and shrink areas II, III, and IV.