

TIPS ON LEARNING TO HELP\*

The fundamental skill in helping is to be able to see the world through the eyes of the other person and then be able to communicate to him accurately and effectively what it is that we see. The effective helper relates to the helpee so that the helpee is able to solve his problems, achieve his goals and at the same time become less and less dependent on the helper for help. An effective helper is one who is constantly working himself out of a job. In order to set a structure for grasping the nature of effective helping, we can examine a set of guiding principles.

1. Helping can either improve or worsen an individual's living situation. There is no guarantee that by trying to help someone you will in fact help him. You may only make matters worse by interfering, making him more dependent, increasing his feelings of inadequacy, clouding the issues of his life, or trying to advise him on the basis of your own perceptions and experiences. Intention to help is certainly not enough--the world is already over-populated with do-gooders. Helping another begins with your own willingness to change, to be open to help yourself, and is fostered by practice on your own part of effective helping skills.

2. Effective helping, that is--helpful action--grows out of understanding. A helpful person is one who understands and then is able to take action based on understanding. "Authority" is no substitute for understanding, nor is "belief" an adequate basis for understanding. The effective helper understands the helpee's problem from the helpee's perspective, he understands the helpee's need to do something about his problem, he communicates his understanding to the helpee; and he helps the helpee take action to solve his problem. The key ingredients of helping are 1) understanding, and 2) action.

3. Non-professional lay people can learn to help just as adequately as can professionals. Professionals do not have a monopoly on helping. There is research to show that professional training and education often reduces helping effectiveness. A strongly motivated lay person may learn to be an effective helper more rapidly and to a greater degree than a professional--partly because he has not been prejudiced by extensive training in procedures and concepts which are of no value in helping.

Not everyone can help. Some people are not willing to help. Others are not able to help. In order to help, we have to get our selves in order before we can assist someone else get himself together. When we understand ourselves and are clear about our own needs and behaviors, then we still have to learn certain skills in order to be helpful. Skills must be practiced to be effective. What are some of the core skills in helping?

A. The first goal of helping is to get the helpee to explore his problem. Both the helper and the helpee must grasp what the difficulty is before

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either can work toward a solution. Often a person presents a problem which is not real. He may not know just what is wrong beyond the awareness that "something" is wrong. Unless the helper can begin to grasp some aspect of the helpee's puzzle, the helpee is not likely to disclose it--partly because he himself is confused, partly because he will not trust an ignorant, insensitive helper. Exploring and differentiating the problem lead both the helper and the helpee toward an understanding of what is the difficulty.

B. The second goal of helping is to get the helpee to understand himself. Certainly the first goal is to facilitate exploration. However this in itself does not necessarily lead to adequate understanding. Exploration may produce only bits and pieces. It is the helper's job to listen and respond to the helpee in such a way that the bits and pieces get put together to produce full understanding.

C. The third goal of helping is to get the helpee to act on the basis of his understanding. The more a problem or difficulty is understood, the more courses of action become apparent. By differentiating alternative courses of action, by considering both short-term and long-term consequences, a choice can be made on what to do. Then the doing can occur.

Exploring, understanding and acting are inter-dependent and often occur simultaneously. Exploration leads to understanding. As understanding develops, more avenues to explore crop up. Taking action brings results which may either lead to more understanding or call for more exploration. In effective helping the cycle of exploring, understanding and taking action goes on and on.

Understanding another person means giving your full attention to him. When one person (helper) pays attention to another (helpee), actively listens to him, prompts him to explore, understand and act, we say that the helper is responding to the helpee. In a helping relationship, the action (usually talk) centers around the feelings, thoughts and experiences of the helpee. A skilled helper knows how to encourage the helpee to talk about his personal feelings, thoughts, and experiences. When the helper does this, he is initiating action (responding) in relation to the helpee. During the early phases of a helping relationship, the helper is most effective when he responds to the helpee. There are a number of things a helper can do to build the helping relationship and do to facilitate the helpee's efforts to explore and understand himself.

A. The helper can respond with empathy. He can try to see the helpee's world through the helpee's eyes. He can attempt to "crawl" inside the helpee's skin and get as close to the helpee's experiencing of the world as he can. Most significantly, he will communicate to the helpee what he understands from inside the helpee's frame of reference.

B. The helper can respond with respect, or caring. Caring is communicating to the person that you care what happens to him, that you believe in his ability to do something about his difficulties, and that you will help him understand and take effective action. Caring, if it is to be appreciated and real, must be specific and direct. A general attitude of caring (I love all my children) is of little help and may even be a mask for disrespect.

C. A helper is specific with the helpee. Being specific (concrete) is the ability to encourage the helpee to deal specifically with his own feelings and experiences. The effective helper is able to help the helpee to focus on his own current life-issues and not just talk about other people or talk in vague generalities.

Initially, the effective helper responds with empathy, respect and concreteness to enable the helpee to explore and understand. As the helping relationship develops he continues to respond in these ways and adds further ingredients in order to bring about action on the part of the helpee. Three action-conditions are genuineness, confrontation and immediacy.

A. Genuineness is the ability to be real (rather than a role-player) in a relationship with another person. Negatively, realness consists in not being a phony. Positively, realness means actually being yourself and communicating yourself through your relationship with the other person. The effective helper is free to be himself--he is not restricted by role-playing or lack of self-knowledge. He is able to remember that helping is for the helpee. The genuine helper presents his own person--does not send in substitutes such as "official authority", "my role", "politeness", "I'm God", etc.

B. Immediacy. This is the ability to differentiate and be aware of the different feelings and experiences which are going on "here and now" between you and another person. Often a helper is not able or willing to express immediate feelings and experiences. The effective helper has an awareness--verbal and non-verbal--of immediate experiencing and can tell the helpee what is going on so that the helpee's understanding can expand. Immediacy and empathy are simultaneous processes.

C. The effective helper is able to confront, or tell it like it is. He is able to tell the helpee what he hears when the helpee talks, this is often different from what the helpee thought he was communicating. He is also able to confront the helpee with the reality of a situation, or the reality of their relationship. To be healthy, confrontation has to be followed by a working through of the differences between the helper and the helpee which the confrontation exposes. The effective helper knows that constructive confrontation is for increasing understanding and not for putting another person down.

To restate, the effective helper responds with:

- empathy
- caring
- concreteness
- realness
- immediacy
- confrontation

Responses communicating these conditions build the effective helping relationship and promote movement toward the goals of exploring, understanding and action. All six conditions are related to each other. Taken together they form effective helping.

A helper is most helpful when he assists the helpee to choose a course of action which gives him the best chance of being successful. A course of action is simply a way of doing things which is better than what has been done before. Better in relation to the helpee's immediate life-situation, his short term goals and, sometimes, his life-time goals.

Guide to Understanding Levels\* of Helper Conditions

Levels of Effectiveness	Empathy (Understanding)	Respect (Caring)	Concreteness (Being Specific)	Genuineness (Being real)	Immediacy (What is Happening)	Confrontation (Like it is)
5++	Deep understanding (adding a lot)	Unconditional respect, really caring.	Really being specific	Unusual presence, absence of phoniness, game-playing.	Unusual, direct awareness and communicating of whats going on between us	Really tell it like it is
4+	Understanding (Adding)	Caring, positive regard	Being specific	Being real	Saying what's going on between us	Telling it like it is
3 (openness to +)	Interchangeable expressions	Open to caring (not actively caring)	Open to being specific (not constant create communication	Open to being real; not being phoney	Open to saying what is going on between us	Open to telling it like it is

Absence of						
2-	Not understanding (subtracting)	(negative regard)	Being abstract, general, vague	Not being real, Being phoney	Not saying what is going on between us	Not telling it like it is; being polite, apologetic, defensive
1--	Subtracting a lot	Don't give a damn, couldn't care, less	Really being completely abstract, total intellectualizing and generalizing.	Unqualified phoney, game-player, non-person	Completely covering up what is going on between us, outright deception	Extreme evasiveness, attempting to please and avoiding

\* 5++ = Extremely effective helping  
 4+ = Effective helping  
 3 = Openness to being a helping person

2- = Not effective  
 1-- = Defective, clearly hinders