

*friends*  
INDEED

A Course  
In Helping

Cooperative Extension Service  
Kansas State University  
Manhattan

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***"A friend is someone to whom we may pour out all the contents of our hearts, chaff and grain together, knowing that the gentlest of hands will take and sift it, keep what is worth keeping and with a breath of kindness blow the rest away."***

Arab Proverb

## Introduction

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Life is a mixture of apparent contradictions: a storm thunders across a peaceful prairie, carefully tended crops are parched by a blistering sun, a seedling grows in the shadow of a decaying oak tree. What is true in nature applies in our own lives: a beloved child filled with life dies, a farmer in economic trouble is forced to leave his land and home after generations of careful stewardship, a family that began with love and hope is torn apart by divorce. We are no strangers to sorrow.

In the midst of heartache we may feel particularly isolated, as though we are forced to wander alone, our pleas for help unheeded, our pain ignored. But we have company in this barren land, strangers with masks that conceal distress with a half-smile and an “I feel fine!” We are often afraid to reach out to each other—for what will others say when the mask is dropped? Underlying this pretense is diminished self-worth, a belief that tenderness is treason and compassion, weakness.

We do have inner resources to help us through difficult times. We might meditate and pray as we reflect on our priorities and goals in life; we might seek more information to make better decisions; or we might focus on our physical well-being by showing more concern with nutrition and exercise. Personal effort and determination are necessary to free us from the destructive effects of stress.

But the twin specters of grief and shame can gradually take hold in our minds, spreading confusion, self-doubt, and hopelessness. During these

times we need the stability and encouragement of someone who cares. Such friends can help us by reaffirming our own sense of worth and helping us think through a problem. We need others who can set aside their own concerns, who really care about how we feel and what we have to say, who can accept our deepest emotions and fears. And we, in turn, can be those people who care.

*Friends InDeed: A Course in Helping* is an informal, personal study program that will strengthen your ability to be an effective helper, to provide emotional support to others. There is nothing you have to mail, no class to register for, no tests. You learn at home, at your own pace. The emphasis is on contact, listening and encouragement.

During this period of study and reflection you will be asked to focus on and strengthen your compassionate side, the part of you that wants to reach out to others. You will study background information related to helping skills and will reflect on how that information relates to you personally. Since emotional support is a relationship skill that must be learned and practiced, activities will also be suggested to help you apply the concepts. References and suggested readings are provided for additional study. You will also have the opportunity to complete a weekly self-evaluation checklist that will assist you in monitoring your progress.

Set aside a reasonable period of time for each section. A week is suggested, though you may prefer a longer or slightly shorter period of study. In any case do not rush yourself. Take

the time you need to reflect on the ideas and to complete the activities. Make a contract with yourself to finish, but feel free to pick up where you left off if you find yourself setting the material aside longer than you intended.

Showing concern for another person is not something we do just to benefit another. Every act of kindness we offer makes us stronger, deepens our feelings and sense of community. As caring becomes a part of our lives we are likely to discover that such kindness is reciprocated. Compassion enriches our relationships.

Throughout this publication we use the term “friend” to refer to the person who needs support. This individual could be a spouse, a child, a neighbor, a close friend, an acquaintance, or even a stranger. A “friend” is someone whose subtle appeal for support kindles our compassion, a combination of wisdom and feeling that enables us to respond effectively. We become a friend by providing emotional support.

Sift through this course at your leisure. Take your time and think about the material and your responses. Share this publication with a friend or, better yet, find a partner who is willing to discuss the material and activities with you on a weekly basis. You might also keep a journal of your thoughts and reactions as a way of stimulating your thinking, especially if you are taking the course alone.

*A Course in Helping* can be a beginning, a renewal in your commitment to social concern. Go ahead, reach out. Let us help one another, with respect and sincerity.

# Week One

# Distress and Helping

## Points to Consider

1. We do not passively respond to outside forces; we give meaning to adversity through our appraisal of its potential for taxing or exceeding our resources and endangering our well-being.
2. Distress erodes mind and body wellness and contributes to social conflict.
3. We help others manage distress when we encourage them to reflect on their appraisal of an adversity and to reconsider their personal and social resources for meeting the challenge in creative, constructive ways.
4. Those who offer their friends comfort, acceptance, respect, and hope provide them with an opportunity to express what is on their minds, work through emotion, put problems into perspective, gain confidence, and take confident action.
5. Effective helping is characterized by genuine contact consisting of preparation, observation, rapport, effective listening and encouragement.

## Looking Ahead

In this first week of the course we will examine how we can use informal social support to strengthen another's ability to cope with distress. Before beginning complete your self-assessment for this week (provided in the back of this publication). Obtain a notebook or spiral binder to use as a journal. Record your reactions to the background information and activities as you proceed.

## The Foundations of Distress

Distress is the final link in a chain of events that begins with the occurrence of either a precipitating event or the "pileup" of relatively minor frustrations that are appraised by a person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and possibly endangering his or her well being (see Figure 1.1).<sup>1</sup>

Precipitating events include such incidents as bad weather for a farmer, poor grades for a teenager, or the illness of a child for a parent. It might consist of a major challenge that stretches our resources and forces us to reach out beyond ourselves, e.g., a new job with lots of responsibility.

Pile-up might involve such frustrations as minor conflicts at work, the persistent nagging of a young child, overcrowding, or mechanical problems. Individually these problems may be easily dismissed. But if they occur persistently over time, even minor frustrations can accumulate and become distressing.

Adversity only has the potential for triggering a distress reaction. This potential must be activated by our appraisal of the extent of the harm or loss, the na-

ture of the threat or challenge presented by the adversity, and the extent of our resources.

This appraisal is affected by our commitments and beliefs.<sup>2</sup> These factors determine what is important for our well-being in a given encounter, shape our understanding of adversities, emotions and resources, and provide the basis for evaluating the outcome of the situation.

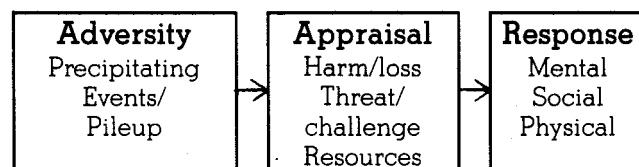


Figure 1.1 The Distress Chain

Commitments reflect what is important to us and underlie the choices we make. They also guide us into or away from situations that threaten, harm, or benefit us. Our commitments affect our vulnerability for the deeper our commitment the greater the potential for threat or challenge. But commitment also contains the seeds for success as it propels us to take action.

Beliefs determine how we evaluate what is, or what is likely to happen. Sometimes our beliefs can be accurate and reasonable ("This means a loss of income," or "I will miss my husband") while sometimes they are not ("This means I AM A FAILURE," "I will never recover," or "I have to be perfect"). Distress results with either appraisal. But unreasonable beliefs make matters worse by deepening an individual's grief, making a difficult challenge appear hopeless, heightening physical tension and disrupting relationships.

Commitments and beliefs affect the degree that we will experience harm or loss, threat or challenge in a situation.<sup>3</sup> Situational influences include prior experience and association with harm and danger, the uncertainty of an adversity, and such time factors as how soon, how long, and when it is likely to occur.

### ***Showing Appreciation***

Contact at least three individuals who were once kind to you. Describe what they did to help you and express your appreciation for their willingness to become involved. If any of these people cannot be reached, write the letter anyway and mail it if you have their address. Or you might keep the letter as a reminder of your appreciation for the person.

Our appraisal of an adversity affects our mental, physical, and social response to distress. Under conditions of prolonged stress we are likely to suffer from “fuzzy” thinking. When this happens, thoughts of failure, rejection, and victimization may begin to crowd out a more realistic appraisal of our situation. We may have a difficult time putting the problem into perspective and making decisions. Our health also may begin to suffer. We might experience migraine headaches, ulcers, or sleep problems. And because we are not thinking or feeling well our relationships may become strained as we misdirect our frustration toward those around us.

In our efforts to help we must remember that people do not passively respond to outside forces—they actively shape their social environment through their appraisals of both adversity and their own resources. If our friends have the opportunity to tell us their stories, to describe the impact of hardship on their lives, they will begin to better understand their commitments and beliefs, to rethink their appraisals and rediscover their resources for overcoming adversity.

In a telephone survey of 603 households in the state of Washington, 68 percent of the respondents said they face great or moderate stress in their lives. Family relationships, financial problems, work or school pressures, parenting, and individual problems were the most prominent causes of stress. Keeping feelings to themselves so others would not know they were stressed was employed by 70 percent of the sample to deal with stress at least some of the time. But almost half reported that talking about the problem was a “frequent” response used to cope with stress.<sup>4</sup> Social support can be an important resource in adversity.

### ***The Importance of Social Support***

When we experience distress we tend to look to informal sources of help such as family members, friends, employers, or such community helpers as clergy, lawyers, teachers, and doctors.<sup>5</sup> Social support can take three forms: **information** (information or advice and feedback regarding progress), **tangible aid** (direct assistance in the form of service or providing loans or

gifts), and **emotional support** (reassurance, the feeling of being able to rely on and confide in someone).<sup>6</sup>

Information is typically needed when someone is trying to understand or prevent a problem. Tangible aid can be helpful at any point when a material resource is needed. Emotional support provides a foundation of caring and connection, promotes self-confidence and strengthens decision-making abilities as an individual begins to work through the problem.

Emotional support can offset the negative physical consequences associated with stress. In one study researchers contacted 100 men who had lost their jobs when a factory closed to determine the extent to which these men received emotional support from their wives, friends, and relatives. Those feeling unsupported had higher levels of serum cholesterol and illness symptoms than those who felt supported. Lack of support was also associated with depression regardless of employment status.<sup>7</sup>

A substantial body of research links the presence of social support with successful resolution of stressful experiences and with overall psychological well-being.<sup>8</sup> Women who experienced severe life stress and did not have a confidant were approximately ten times more likely to be depressed than women who experienced stress but had a confidant. Close, intimate relationships were found to be a more important form of support for women than a large number of superficial friendships.<sup>9</sup> Psychological impairment in a crisis has also been associated with low expectations of help from friends, relatives, and neighbors.<sup>10</sup> Emotionally supportive relationships are important for physical health, psychological well-being, and the prevention of psychiatric disorder.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Special Friends***

Imagine surrounding yourself with special people who could be the best possible friends for you. These individuals might be real people from your past, historical figures you have heard about and admired, or they might be characters from fiction. If you could surround yourself with five or six special people, who would they be?

Think about each of these individuals. What qualities do they have that are important to you? How are these qualities expressed in your friends' lives? To what extent do you embody these qualities in your own life?

Sometime this week describe this activity to a friend and ask him or her to identify five or six special people and identify their attractive qualities. Compare and contrast your two lists. Talk about some of the important traits you look for in potential friends.

Unfortunately, men appear to experience less support than women. Women are more likely than men to report that they confide in more people, are reassured by people, feel respected by people, feel as though they would be cared for by people if they were ill, could talk with people when they were upset, and could talk with people about their health.<sup>12</sup> Men are more reluctant to seek help than are women but will do so a bit more will-

A. Informal Helping Skills	B. Implied Helper Message	C. Offers	D. Leading To . . .	E. Reduces or Prevents
1. Establishing Rapport	"I care; I am interested in you."	Comfort/Security	Expression	Distress
2. Warm Listening	"I value what you think and feel."	Respect	Exploration	Confusion
3. Hot Listening	"Your deepest emotions are ok."	Acceptance/Emotional Balance	Understanding	Rage, Panic, Grief
4. Encouragement/Problem Solving	"You have options; you can make it."	Hope	Self-Belief/Confident Action	Despair

Table 1.1 Stages of informal helping skills and their consequences

ingly if they believe the situation is important or involves a task to be completed.<sup>13</sup>

Effective helpers are able to offer emotional support and insight through four key skills in their relationships (see Table 1.1). These skills form a sequence of helping, each one building on the one that precedes it. The first, *establishing rapport* is achieved through openness and concern that conveys caring and promotes comfort and security. Rapport promotes expression and diminishes initial distress.

### **Your Reactions to Stress**

**How do you typically respond to a stressful event? Examine the following list and check off those reactions that apply to you:**

<input type="checkbox"/> heart pounding	<input type="checkbox"/> butterflies
<input type="checkbox"/> tears	<input type="checkbox"/> increased pulse
<input type="checkbox"/> fists clenched	<input type="checkbox"/> headaches
<input type="checkbox"/> shallow breathing	<input type="checkbox"/> dizziness
<input type="checkbox"/> eyes narrowed	<input type="checkbox"/> appetite loss/increase
<input type="checkbox"/> trembling	<input type="checkbox"/> neck/shoulders tight
<input type="checkbox"/> weak knees	<input type="checkbox"/> stomach ache/upset
<input type="checkbox"/> shaky hands	<input type="checkbox"/> backache
<input type="checkbox"/> perspiration	<input type="checkbox"/> diarrhea
<input type="checkbox"/> dry mouth	<input type="checkbox"/> nail biting
<input type="checkbox"/> blushing	<input type="checkbox"/> skin rashes
<input type="checkbox"/> lump in throat	<input type="checkbox"/> tapping feet/fingers
<input type="checkbox"/> fatigue	<input type="checkbox"/> cracking knuckles
<input type="checkbox"/> throat tightens	

**How do you manage these physical reactions? What kind of negative images and thoughts typically run through your mind during these moments? How do others typically respond to you? How would you like others to react to you? (Keep in mind that the reactions listed above could be associated with an underlying physical problem or disease that requires medical intervention.)**

*Warm listening* conveys to our friends that we are indeed listening and that we value what they think and feel. Because they feel respected, our friends are more likely to engage in self-exploration, to begin thinking about the implications of the problem. Warm listening reduces confusion.

*Hot listening* is an acceptance of such deep feelings as anger, fear, and grief. Hot listening conveys acceptance and helps our friends regain emotional balance. Recognition of deep feelings promotes self-awareness and self-acceptance while reducing the intensity of the emotions.

*Encouragement and problem-solving* helps our friends begin identifying the underlying alternatives to resolving or managing the challenge. This stage of helping reduces or prevents despair, the most damaging stress-related emotion.

Our helping should encourage expression, exploration, understanding, and action by our friends." Each of these stages of helping will be examined in more detail in the last four weeks of this course.

### **Lemon in My Mind**

**What we think about can affect our physiological reactions. For example, imagine right now that you are taking a bite out of a lemon. . . The bitterness of the skin is overwhelmed by the sudden rush of sour juice. Stay with that thought for a few moments. Are you beginning to salivate?**

**In a similar way what we imagine can cause us to react physically with fear, grief, and anger. There is a mind-body connection between what we think and how we feel.**

Emotional support is not therapy. We should not attempt to interpret the deeper significance of what our friends tell us. Nor should we imply that we can help with problems that require professional assistance. Emotional support is not taking control, since the emphasis is always on their taking charge of their own

lives. Emotional support is not giving advice or “fixing up” a problem. Emotional support is standing beside our friends during times of adversity.

The goal of helping is to provide the support that enables the individual under stress to work through emotions, gain insight into the problem, acquire self-confidence, and make better decisions. Those who feel emotionally supported will begin to search their minds as they articulate their concerns. As our friends talk and experience our listening they will begin to discover aspects of the problem and its solution that they may not have seen before. “Effective helpers act as human mirrors through which individuals can see themselves more clearly and discover their own potential to effect change.”<sup>15</sup> Because distress arises from the way our friends appraise their situation, we can contribute by helping them interpret the behavior of others and assess their own resources more accurately.

### **Arm Lifting**

**We may avoid asking for help because we dislike being dependent. Ask a friend to help you with a simple experiment. Stand behind your friend and ask him or her to stretch out both arms parallel to the ground. Gently support the upraised arms underneath the elbows and ask your partner to relax his or her arms completely, to remove all muscle tension and allow you to do the supporting.**

**Gently move the arms up and down, checking for signs of tension and resistance. How “heavy” do your partner’s arms feel? Can he or she give control to you? Reverse roles and ask your partner to do the same for you. Can you give up control? Explain that the purpose of the activity is to experience what it is like to give and receive support, to be dependent on another person. Spend some time discussing this experience with your friend. How does it relate to real life situations?**

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## Week Two

# Preparing Ourselves

### **Points to Consider**

1. Nurture your personal strength for helping.
2. Allow your feelings of warmth and caring to surface as you respond to another's distress.
3. Maintain enough separateness to avoid being downcast by your friends' depression, frightened by their fear, or disturbed by their anger.
4. Strengthen your own support network of special friends.
5. Incorporate trustworthiness, patience and hope into your relationships.
6. Affirm your talents for reaching out to others with empathy, genuineness, respect and concreteness.

### **Looking Back. . . and Ahead**

Last week we examined the nature of stress and helping. This week our attention will turn to the qualities needed for effective helping. Helping is more than just good will and intentions. Responding to another's distress challenges the best within us. Compassion and helping are skills that must be nurtured. Before beginning complete your post-week assessment for last week and the current assessment for this week.

### **Helping as a Personal Strength**

Helping is a manifestation of our inner strength. We must have the energy to care, to set aside our own preoccupations to concentrate on friends who need our help. The Japanese use the term "ki" (pronounced "key") to refer to this inner vitality. Think of *ki* as a term that embodies such concepts as spirit, life force, and inner strength. *Ki* is energy, a frame of mind or attitude, a vitality that affects others.<sup>1</sup>

With this energy flow we are able to maintain our full presence with another person rather than becoming preoccupied with our own mental distractions. We are able to focus on the person before us rather than being distracted by other sights and sounds. *Ki* is also associated with calmness or emotional balance and acceptance of another's experience. When we feel tired, mentally preoccupied, distracted, upset, or rejecting it is our personal strength that pulls us back to be fully with another.

This personal energy and frame of mind is communicated to others. Warmheartedness, self-confidence and courage generate an atmosphere around us that people respond to in a positive manner. Aloofness, irritability, and inner weakness create an atmosphere of tension and indifference. We do not like to be around those who radiate this lifelessness. But we are drawn to those who radiate a quiet, self-confident inner strength.

Words of deep truth also have great power. To focus on what is really happening, to listen intently and reflect back in our own words what our friend is feeling is power used compassionately. When someone establishes such rapport with us we can feel the energy, their full presence in the moment.

*Ki* is associated with *satori*, a concept from the Japanese Zen tradition which describes the natural har-

### **Nurturing Positive Ki**

During this week concentrate on nurturing your positive energy in two ways:

**Focus on positive energy thoughts.** When you feel yourself dwelling on negative, strength-sapping thoughts, stop, reverse your thinking and consciously refocus on something positive that contributes to your inner strength. Emphasize the following thoughts:

Choose happiness.	Be courageous.
I can handle it.	Enjoy life.
<b>Try.</b>	Have hope—there are
I will not be defeated.	positive forces at work in
I am aware of my feelings.	the world.
I am worthy.	I cannot control others.

You might write these messages on cards and place them where you can see them during the day. When you feel discouraged refocus your awareness on your feelings of determination and compassion. Do not let your mind and heart defeat each other.

**Be aware of your breathing.** Take every opportunity to breathe deeply, from your diaphragm rather than upper chest. Let your stomach move when you breathe. Sense the energy you inhale, filling you with positive *ki*. Deep, easy breathing is especially important in moments of tension when inhalation may become shallow, choking off the flow of oxygen.

mony of body, mind, and emotions.<sup>2</sup> When the mind is free of distractions and focused on the present moment; when the emotions, free of obstructions, vibrate with positive energy; when the body, relaxed and vitalized, is sensitive and open to our friends and something “clicks”—that’s satori. Satori is readiness, a foundation for compassion.

### **The Ki Handshake**

**During this week pay particular attention to how people convey their personal power in a positive way. Shake hands with as many people as you can. Can you feel an individual’s power and vitality conveyed in a handshake? How does it feel? How else do others convey their *ki*? How do you feel about your handshake—how would you rate the impression you give?**

**Try an experiment with a friend. Take turns shaking hands with one of you draining all energy, warmth, and life out of your hand so that it feels lifeless and cold. Here is definitely the absence of positive *ki*. End with a friendly *ki* shake.**

Friends who begin to open up and reveal what is in their hearts invite us on a journey through the dim recesses of their minds. Here is a place where deepest fear and self-doubt can reside. Our friends must feel our strength and acceptance to be able to face and overcome these inner obstacles to their personal growth, the real source of their distress.

The opening of our hearts, though, may trigger our own fear. Maybe our friends’ emotions will become too difficult to handle; maybe they will become embarrassed; what will other people think? But we must not let our apprehension keep others at a distance. Our inner strength must be transformed into courage that allows our feelings of warmth and caring to surface as the dramas of our friends’ lives unfold. We must never be a passive witness to another’s pain.

We must remain separate enough, though, from others’ distress to avoid being downcast by their depres-

### **The Trouble Tree**

**Find an object that you pass by daily or can carry in your pocket. The next time you feel distressed, touch this object and “give” it your troubles. Maybe it is a tree outside your front door that you hang your troubles on before entering your home, or a smooth rock you keep in your pocket. Once you have established the connection you can go to this object in your imagination and send it your worries and distractions no matter where you are.**

**An alternative is to associate some action with releasing tension. As you mentally sweep your troubles aside perform an action like rubbing your hands together, taking and releasing a deep breath, or pushing both hands together in a downward motion. The action should be simple and not distracting for others. When you find yourself in a tense situation use the action to relax and regain focus.**

sion, frightened by their fear, or disturbed by their anger. There must be space in our closeness. Because our heart knows no bounds our minds must integrate wisdom into our caring.<sup>3</sup> Our deep feelings should not diminish our own (or our friend’s) integrity as a separate person. If we allow another’s distress to tear us apart we will lose our effectiveness as a helper.

There are times when we need emotional support ourselves. If we are concerned about our ability to help, we might strengthen our own support network of special friends. We should put time and effort into finding and maintaining friends who make us laugh, who enjoy doing what we like to do, who take time to listen to our concerns and show faith in us.

### **Trust, Patience, and Hope: Critical Helping Attitudes**

When our friends begin to speak their minds and hearts they trust us to keep what they say confidential. This trust places a great responsibility on us to respect our friends’ feelings and experiences. We must never reveal to others what was told to us in confidence. Gossip and betrayal destroy relationships.

Confidentiality is not something that has to be explicitly requested; we know when someone is telling us something important about themselves that is confidential. We must honor their trust in us by respecting their privacy.

Patience is also an important ingredient in caring. We must let our friends set their own pace. With patience we can tolerate confusion and floundering in others as well as ourselves. (“I must give myself a chance to learn, to see and discover both the other and myself; I must give myself a chance to care.”<sup>4</sup>)

Hope is a third critical attitude to bring to a helping relationship. We must believe and convey that the present is filled with possibilities.<sup>5</sup> Such hope is not a wishful “pie-in-the-sky,” “Now, honey, everything will be all right” attitude. Hope conveys confidence and emphasizes potential for change. Even our darkest moments contain the seeds for courage and growth. The farmer who loses his land must believe that his inner resources will help him find satisfying work; the widow must feel the love of others in her life; the child who fails must gather strength to face her future self-confidently. It is hope that can set such beliefs in motion.

### **Characteristics of Helping**

Honesty with ourselves about our personal strengths and weaknesses is an important aspect of effective helping. Accurate empathy, genuineness, respect, and concreteness are qualities needed in our relationships.<sup>6</sup>

Accurate empathy. We are accurately empathetic if we can (1) discriminate: look at the world from another’s perspective and get a feeling for what that world is like for him or her; and (2) communicate this understanding to show we have picked up on his or her feelings and experiences. We do not try to pry into what a friend is only half-saying, or implying, or stating im-

plicitly. Let's take a look at a few examples of this "primary" level of accurate empathy.

*Farmer:* This awful weather; how am I ever going to get these crops in? I can hear the banker moaning now.

*Friend:* This constant rain is a real pain. Mud instead of money! I can understand why you're worried--time seems to be running out.

*Wife:* James [her husband] has a heart problem that's getting worse, Joyce. The doctor says he'll need an operation. What am I going to do?

*Friend:* James has heart disease? Oh, no! A lot of worries must be running through your mind right now.

Both of these friends are trying to communicate their understanding of what the other is trying to say. Accurate empathy will be examined in more detail in weeks four and five.

*Genuineness.* Effective helpers are spontaneous--they do not hide behind facades of artificial sympathy. There are times when we must withhold something in our minds to be tactful, but, if we are genuine, what we choose to reveal is sincere.

*Respect.* Respect means valuing another person simply because he or she is a human being. Respect is expressed in the way we relate to others--paying attention to what they say, suspending critical judgement, and encouraging them to discover and use their personal resources. We show respect by demonstrating a high regard for the uniqueness and self-determination of others.

*Concreteness.* People want to talk about their problems with someone who is genuinely interested in listening. We may hold back because we are concerned that the other person is not really interested in us or will criticize what we think or feel. So instead of saying what is on our minds we are more likely to take refuge in generalities. Instead of saying, "I feel angry," we might say, "You make me upset!" or "I don't feel right." We just nibble around the edges of what is in our minds and hearts. Revealing what we really want to talk about is too risky. As we begin to feel more safe and accepted we may begin to risk sharing with another what we think and feel.

Being concrete means being specific and clear about what is happening. As helpers, our task is to be concrete in how we respond to what our friends say. For example:

*Mother:* Tommy didn't bring home a good report card. I've tried to help him, but it doesn't seem to be doing any good!

*Friend:* You're feeling discouraged right now. Even though you've done your best, he's still having problems with his grades.

In this instance the helper tries to be specific about what is bothering her friend.

A second way to achieve concreteness is to not allow our friends to ramble. They may begin their conversations with a concern then talk themselves away from the issue to something "safe" and neutral. When we have the opportunity, we might gently interrupt with a response that shows we are listening and are interested in what they *really* want to say.

## ***Tension Interference***

**Tension can limit sensitivity. Find two objects that you can easily pick up. One should be noticeably heavier than the other. Pick up both objects, one in each hand and get a feel for their weight and tactile qualities. Put them down simultaneously and, while continuing to hold on to them, tense both hands as much as possible. While tensing and gripping with as much strength as you can, lift both objects simultaneously. How noticeable are the differences now? The tension interfered with your sensitivity. Does the same thing happen in our relationships? If we are tense can we notice what others are feeling?**

A third possibility is to ask our friends for more information, especially information that clarifies vague statements. Questions that begin with "what," "how," and "when" are much better than "why" because they are open-ended and are less likely to elicit defensiveness. Asking our friends to identify the causes of a problem forces them to analyze a difficult issue, usually unsuccessfully, rather than describe their own experiences. Avoid asking "why" questions.

Being concrete should never be a cover for prying. Instead, the emphasis is on fostering an atmosphere that allows our friends to speak their minds and hearts. Through sensitive inquiry we can help our friends say more completely what they need to say. Being concrete means that we have the courage to focus as partners on the risks and realities of the issues confronting our friends.

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## Week Three

# Observing and Establishing Rapport

### **Points to Consider**

1. Be receptive to signs of stress and subtle appeals for help by those around you.
2. Decide whether or not you want to commit yourself to listening.
3. Offer your friend a symbolic sanctuary.
4. Adopt a posture of involvement when responding to an appeal.
5. Establish an empathic link with the other person.
6. Pace behavior to strengthen rapport.

### **Looking Back. . . and Ahead**

Last week we focused on inner skills and challenges related to providing emotional support. For the remainder of this course we will examine specific helping skills keyed to the chart presented on page 24. Since the first few minutes of an encounter provide a critical moment, an opportunity for us to establish a climate of trust and support, we will begin with observation and rapport. First, complete your post-week assessment for last week and the current assessment for this week.

### **Our Ritual Greeting**

One of the oddest rituals in our society is the “How are you?” greeting people make when they meet someone they know. For example:

Person 1: “How are you?”

Person 2: “I’m fine . . . how are you?”

Person 1: “I’m fine” or “Great!” or equivalent.

This is a bizarre ritual because the asker is not really interested in getting an answer, the person being asked the question rarely, if ever, answers it truthfully, and neither party is willing to stop and take the time for a real exchange. In fact, this “How are you?” is not really a question--it is typically a statement equivalent to “Hi!”

When someone asks you to participate in the ritual this week, respond to “How are you?” with “Hi!” or “Hello, there!” as you pass on the street or see someone in the store. Respond to the statement of greeting rather than the nonquestion. Notice how the other person reacts. In many cases, he or she will respond to your “Hi!” with “I’m fine!” The ritual is so ingrained that people will complete it despite your nonparticipation. If we use this greeting genuinely, as an inquiry about another’s welfare, we should be willing to stop and talk if the person responds with an expression of distress.

### **Being Receptive**

The first step is to be receptive to signs of stress and subtle appeals for help. People tell us indirectly when they need someone to listen by sending “distress” and “appeal” signals. Facial expression, eye contact, tone of voice, and posture can convey distress. Probably the most important signals are revealed in a person’s face. A downcast glance, tears, a trembling mouth can shout, “I need someone! Someone, please reach out to me!”

Our friends also communicate to us that they want us to provide that support. An unexpected telephone call, a personal visit that seems to linger after superficial matters have been resolved, a glance conveying deep emotion are “appeal” signals. We typically send out hidden messages instead of directly asking for support. That way we can save face if another is not interested in helping us.

Several common attitudes prevent us from reaching out to each other. We may not express what is on our minds because we do not want to “burden” our friends with our problems. We may tell ourselves that they are not interested. We may be unwilling to take the risk of being vulnerable. Or we might be afraid that an indifferent or critical reaction may only increase our distress. But we must not allow this fear to cripple all of our relationships. If we are to give and receive support from others we must set aside our fear and consider the merits of a specific relationship with an open mind.

### **Severity of the Problem**

In some cases a friend may have severe emotional problems that require professional help. The severity of the problem depends on the following formula<sup>1</sup>:

Distress X Uncontrollability X Frequency = Severity

Distress is the intensity of the experience and how much it interferes with daily activity; uncontrollability

is the lack of perceived self-control in managing the problem; *frequency* indicates how often the problem is experienced. Each multiplies the other to bring about the final impact on the individual. When the experience is distressing, occurs frequently and seems to be uncontrollable, then maximum severity is present.

Some of the specific behaviors that are signs of potentially severe problems are:

- Persistent, intense depression
- Frequent loss of self-control
- Incapacitating guilt and self-doubt
- Persistent family discord
- Excessive drinking/drug use
- Chronic sleeping or eating problems
- Withdrawal and suspicion
- Inability to concentrate
- Outbursts of violence
- Threats of suicide or other violent acts

### ***Observing for Signs of Stress***

During this week focus outward and be aware of how others communicate distress. Pay attention to:

**Speech:** changes in pitch or speed, quivering voice, "flat" tone, intensity of voice.

**Facial Expression:** blushing, eye contact, frowning, trembling jaw, tears, rolling eyes, clenching teeth, biting lips.

**Body Movement:** bowed head, sagging shoulders, clenched fist, shrugging shoulders, trembling hands, tapping feet or fingers.

**Behavior:** irritability, crying, throwing something, withdrawing, sullenness, criticizing.

Watch how these signs blend together to form an overall picture of distress. Observe how people relate to each other physically. How do people make contact with each other when one of them is upset? How does their reaction to stress tend to distance them from others?

Greater concern is justified if more than one of these reactions are present. Two other simple criteria you can use are: (1) Do others notice something "strange" happening to the individual? and (2) Does the problem interfere with daily activities?

If a problem is severe, uncontrollable and frequent then professional help is needed. If this is the case, the most important service you can provide is a referral, a helping skill described in week six of this course. You should not assume responsibility for the care of someone who really needs professional help. Taking this role could deny your friend the care he or she really needs. You can still be supportive in the more reasonable role of a friend.

### ***Making a Decision***

Once we become aware of a friend's need for our informal support we then have to make a decision about our own involvement. Are we emotionally ready to re-

spond? Does the other person elicit our feelings of compassion? Can we take the time necessary to work through the other's feelings? If we are too upset or distracted to help, if we really do not care, or if time is too pressing, we should not convey an artificial interest in the other person. Insincere offers to help only deepen another's distress. But if we are willing to become involved, we can make a decision to be a friend of the moment, someone who cares and is ready to help.

### ***Fresh Perspective***

**Find a common object in your home: a tool, cup, egg, pencil, pen, etc. As you hold it before you, say to yourself, "This is a \_\_\_\_\_." Set the object down for a moment.**

**Labels diminish real contact. Once we "know" something we stop discovering its unique qualities. Pretend for a minute that you are a baby--you have no idea what this object is before you. Close your eyes and pick the object up--feel its texture, temperature, weight. Just experience the object as though you were picking it up for the first time. . . . Now open your eyes and take a good look at the object, as though you have never seen it before. Look, really look.**

**Repeat this activity a few times this week with other objects you find. Do we also do this with people? Once we "get to know" someone do we stop being sensitive to their uniqueness? Do we close off our awareness? People are constantly changing in subtle ways. Take a good look at people around you. Appreciate them for who they are now, apart from your prior perceptions of who they are.**

### ***Offering a Sanctuary***

Once we commit ourselves to the exchange we might first consider offering our friend a *symbolic sanctuary*.<sup>2</sup> We might suggest going for a walk or out to coffee at a nearby cafe; as we talk we might demonstrate our concern for privacy by taking our phone off the hook or closing our office door. Food is an excellent form of symbolic nurturance. A cup of tea, a glass of milk, a slice of apple pie are offerings of nourishment that foster a sense of being cared for that is relaxing. These actions symbolize our care in a very concrete way. They are messages of interest that begin to build rapport.

### ***Adopting a Posture of Involvement***

The second important message we can send is to adopt a "posture of involvement."<sup>3</sup> Gerard Egan suggests the acronym S-O-L-E-R.

- S**-Face the person Squarely
- O**-Adopt an Open posture
- L**-Lean toward the other
- E**-Maintain good Eye contact
- R**-Be relatively Relaxed

An open posture means to hold yourself in such a way that shows interest in what the person is saying. A

closed posture would involve such actions as crossed arms and legs. An open posture is a nondefensive position. Satisfying eye contact is not staring or intrusive. It is a sign of involvement and attention.

## ***Establishing an Empathic Link***

In the early stages of this helping encounter we should also strive to establish an empathic (em-path'ic) link with our friends, a sympathetic response to their emotions. We sense their pain, anger, sadness, and fear, not as an aloof observer, but as one who actually experiences their feelings.

Touching may play an important role in establishing rapport. We might reach out and shake hands or simply touch our friend on the arm. This contact conveys our warmth and establishes a bond between us. It also allows us to sense with greater immediacy what our friend is feeling. Everyone responds differently to contact, depending on the situation and the individuals involved. For some a light touch on the arm is enough; for others, a sincere hug would be most satisfying. Both the giver and the receiver have to feel comfortable with the contact.

### ***S-O-L-E-R Involvement***

**Become aware of how you respond to others as they approach you. Try pacing the other's behavior if rapport needs to be established. Reach out and touch the other if you think such contact would be helpful. As you begin to provide emotional support move to a SOLER response to deepen rapport.**

**You may feel a little uncomfortable as you try this activity, as you would when you try any new skill. This discomfort does not mean that you are being insincere. Quite the opposite—you are expanding your compassionate skills because you care. Don't be mechanical about pacing and SOLER. Incorporate them gradually and naturally into your response. Watch how pacing occurs naturally in your relationships and in the interaction of others.**

The energy, the *ki*, that we bring to this empathic link enables us to sense, but not be overcome by, our friends' experiences. For the time we are together we are in synch, sharing a moment of closeness and compassion. We are "in touch."

Identifying common experiences is another way of establishing a common bond. Statements like "Yes, my husband died last year. That was a difficult time for me too," or "I grew up on a farm too. We knew the meaning of hard work and hard times," express a commonality that strengthens rapport.

## ***Pacing Behavior***

*Pacing* our friends' behavior also helps strengthen rapport.<sup>4</sup> Pacing means matching what our friends express—their mood, body language, speech patterns, breathing, or beliefs. We naturally and spontaneously mirror these behaviors. For example, when rapport is established, we cross our arms when our friend crosses

her arms: we smile when our friend smiles or grimace as she does. When two people are involved in a discussion their movements are synchronized.<sup>5</sup> Pacing is another way to symbolically convey our concern and involvement.

Pacing can be misused. Others are likely to detect and resent our insincerity if pacing becomes a self-conscious imitation of their behavior. We should never repeat something that would make another feel uncomfortable, such as stuttering or asthmatic breathing. Common sense should prevail here. Pacing is a powerful way to communicate to others that we are in alignment with them. It should become a part of the way we respond compassionately to others rather than a maneuver to manipulate their emotions.

When we establish rapport we tell our friends that they are free to say what is on their minds. And for the moment, the masks can be dropped, the heart revealed.

### ***Sound Off***

**Turn off the sound while you watch a television sitcom or drama. Watch how the actors demonstrate or fail to demonstrate rapport in the form of SOLER and pacing. Can you guess the relationships between characters on the basis of how they act when they are together?**

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# Week Four

## Warm Listening

### *Points to Consider*

1. Pay careful attention to the messages conveyed by others in distress, listening especially for their basic or “core” experiences and emotions.
2. Affirm your friends’ experiences by paraphrasing what is openly spoken or implied, checking the accuracy of your perception when appropriate.
3. Illustrate your friends’ perspectives with examples, additional information, or a description of your own feelings and experiences if such expression of solidarity is likely to draw you closer together.
4. Use silence to show respect and encouragement.

### *Looking Back. . . and Ahead*

Last week we began our emphasis on specific relationship skills. The first step is to establish rapport. Once contact is made our friends are likely to begin expressing their concerns. As they talk we can help them explore their feelings by respecting what they disclose and making a sincere effort to show them we understand. Before beginning, complete your post-week assessment for last week and the current assessment for this week.

### *Warm Listening*

Instead of questioning, criticizing or making suggestions, our initial response might be characterized by “warm” listening, demonstrating our understanding of what the other is trying to communicate:

**Farmer:** Rain, rain, rain. When is this blasted rain going to stop!

**Wife:** I can understand why you feel frustrated. You’re ready to go but the weather won’t cooperate.

There is no one right way to respond to what another says. But all warm listening responses are characterized by a communication of acceptance and understanding.

### *Understanding Verbal Messages*

The first step in warm listening is to pay careful attention to what people tell us. In addition to body language our focus should be on two components of our conversations: feelings and content.<sup>1</sup> Let’s say you are having coffee with a friend who makes the following comment:

“Well, I went to the doctor yesterday to get some test results. He tells me I have cancer. Isn’t that just great! Now what am I going to do?”

Feelings are emotional experiences. They are different from beliefs and opinions. For example, the statements, “I feel that you should relax more,” and “I think

my children gave me a great present!” are opinions, not feelings. The individual in the previous example is likely to be feeling frightened, angry, and confused. Tone of voice, facial expression, and body movement will help us recognize the feelings underlying words.

### *How Others Respond*

**Think of something that leaves you feeling a little uncomfortable. Maybe it’s a trip you are going to take, a test of some kind, or a person you are going to see. Decide on a brief statement you could make to others about your discomfort. For example, you might say, “I’m feeling a little uncomfortable about the plane trip I have to make next month.” Choose something that is important but not too personal.**

**Approach at least five individuals this week and during your conversation with them begin talking about your concern. After making your introductory comment allow the discussion to proceed naturally.**

**How do you feel about their responses? Did you feel confirmed and understood? Did you find yourself opening up or closing down? Who understands you the best? How would you describe this individual’s style of listening and responding?**

Emotions are difficult to understand because we can have several feelings at one time. For example, a father waiting for his daughter to return at 2:30 a.m. is likely to feel both frightened and angry. One moment he is furiously pacing the hall, the next, frantically looking out the living room window. Feelings can be confusing when they contradict each other. In addition to anger and fear, the father is likely to feel deep love and concern for his daughter. But which emotion will he express when his daughter arrives?

Content is the precipitating event that contributes to emotions. For example, content might include going

to the doctor, receiving test results, and obtaining treatment. Feelings are inner experiences while content is the situation that evokes the feelings. For example:

<b>Feeling</b>	<b>Content</b>
I feel sad	about the death of a friend.
I feel angry	when something is stolen from us.
I feel scared	when a loved one is ill.

An effective listening response depends on recognizing the importance of both feelings and content which together comprise an individual's experience.

### **Describing Feelings**

**Practice in describing feelings might be especially helpful since we may not have had much of opportunity to learn how to talk about emotions. For each of the emotions listed below, identify four different ways of putting the feeling into words: by naming it, using a metaphor, naming an action, or describing a physical reaction. For example:**

*Shame*

Naming:	You feel embarrassed
Metaphor:	You feel like a child caught with his hand in the cookie bowl.
Action:	You feel like hiding.
Physical:	You can feel the heat in your face.

**Take a sheet of paper and write out four potential responses to each of these emotions:**

Joy	Helpless	Pressure
Loneliness	Shame	Depression
Love	Fear	Anger

### **Reflecting Feelings and Content**

Warm listening involves reacting to the experience our friends share with us by paraphrasing what they have told us. We listen for feelings and content and then put into words what we think that experience is for our friends. In the previous example involving the visit to the doctor's office a friend might respond with:

"Oh, no! The tests are back and they were positive. What a shock! [reaches out to touch her hand] You must be awfully scared about what is going to happen."

If these words do not seem right, there are many other sensitive and compassionate responses we could make in this situation. We can identify feelings by *name* (You feel angry), by *metaphor* (You feel like a bear), by the *action* prompted by the feeling (You feel like smacking somebody), or by the *physical experience* of the emotion (Your stomach must be tied up in knots). There are many different ways of conveying our attempt to understand the experiences of our friends.

Our response should be made in a way that shows acceptance of those feelings. Our reaction should be a clear signal that we are truly interested in our friends' experiences. It should not make them feel foolish and ashamed, or wish that they had kept their feelings to themselves.

Listening and responding can be difficult because

of differences in meaning we bring to the words we use in conversation. Words like "discipline," "failure," and "hate" can have different meanings for different people. If we have any uncertainty about what our friends are trying to convey we should check the accuracy of our interpretation by using such phrases as

Seems to me. . . .  
 Sounds like you. . . .  
 You seem to be saying. . . .  
 I have the feeling . . . but maybe I'm wrong?<sup>2</sup>

These comments allow our friends to clear up any misunderstandings.

We can help to illustrate our friends' experiences with brief examples, additional information, or a description of our own feelings as long as the focus remains on our friends, and our comments are made as an act of solidarity. Consider the following exchange:

**Teenage Son:** Nobody likes me at school. I don't have any friends—they all make fun of me!

**Father:** You want to be accepted, to be someone special. I know that hurts—I had some lonely times in high school too.

The father makes a quick illustration from his past to show understanding of his son's experience. But he doesn't attempt to take the focus away from his son.

### **Silence: The Quiet Encouragement**

The effective use of silence can be one of the most powerful ways to convey acceptance and encouragement. We typically fear silence because of the pressure we feel to "do something." But silence gives our friends the opportunity to gather their thoughts and the courage to say what they want to say. It gives our friends the freedom to choose whether they want to discuss their situation in greater depth.

We use words when our friends need to know we hear them and understand; we use silence when our friends need time to express their thoughts and feelings. The balance between these two important responses is an art we can only learn through practice.

### **Failures in Support**

Friends can fail to support each other in a variety of ways.<sup>3</sup>

**Ritualistic nonsupport:** Using such phony cliches as "I know just how you feel" or "Is there anything I can do?"

**Cheap empathy:** Offering insincere support to meet one's own needs. "Support should not be 'mush,' even though it may be tender; it should not be sentimental, even though it involves feelings and emotions. It should arise from the strength of one who gives support and not from his weakness."<sup>4</sup>

**Interrogating:** Bombarding another with questions. Instead of allowing the person to tell of his or her experience, the listener pushes and distracts. Open-ended questions can be an effective form of support when encouragement is needed (see week six) but not at the point when someone needs to feel understood.



**Bandaiding:** Rushing to the aid of someone with the idea of “fixing” the problem. The response is condescending, made more to reduce one’s own distress than to show support for another’s ability to work through emotions and problems.

**Competitive listening:** Disagreeing and attempting to influence another. This difference in opinion can be signaled by shaking one’s head or by contradicting what another says:

**Mother:** I’ve had it! I can’t stand Jamie’s crying any more! I’ve got to. .

**Father:** [interrupting] Now, honey, Jamie’s not so bad. Get a hold of yourself.

**Irrelevant listening:** Showing total indifference to what another says and responding with comments unrelated to what the other just made.

**Farmer:** Rain, rain, rain. When is this damn rain going to stop!

**Wife:** Honey, could we go into town Saturday? The children need some school clothes.

**Redirective listening:** Manipulating the conversation. This response has the look of sincerity since the comments of a previous speaker are acknowledged. But the listener uses these comments to quickly move the conversation in a direction he or she chooses.

**Mother#1:** Sandy is having a difficult time in school. She just cannot get along with her homeroom teacher. And her grades are suffering. . .

**Mother#2:** Yeah, some teachers are pretty tough. Bill had a terrible year when he was a Junior. We liked his teacher, but Bill didn’t. You know what happened just before Christmas? Well, Bill. . .”

The second mother used part of what the first one said to introduce a topic of interest to her. Such comments may be innocuous in light social conversation. But they can be very discouraging when they are a response to something serious another wants to discuss.

Showing acceptance of feelings is *sincere*, avoiding cliches like “I know how you feel.” It is *accurate* because of our careful attention to the meaning of our friends’ words. *Respect* also is conveyed by our avoidance of probing, analysis, giving advice, or offering such phony reassurance as “It’ll be all right.” The language of our response also matches the other’s language since we use familiar words and expressions, and the depth of our friends’ emotions. Showing understanding conveys confidence and appreciation for our friends’ experiences.

## Letting Go

To be receptive to others we need the clarity of a quiet mind. This week, become aware of the chatter that seems to erupt in your mind when someone is talking to you. Relax and gently tell yourself, “Let go . . . !” Release the internal chatter and refocus on what the person is saying. Don’t become angry with yourself—just mentally push these distractions aside. Pretend they are just a slight breeze that passes through your mind.

## The Goal: Exploration

You know you are on the right track if your friends continue to open up. Or they might sit quietly, satisfied from being understood. They might show a physical release by a sigh, or tears in their eyes. The tension that underlies the effort to be understood is released as our friends relax for a moment. The silence is a satisfying respite for a mind struggling to make itself understood.

### Listening for Feelings

**How would you ordinarily respond to each of the following statements? Write your responses out on scratch paper.**

Your 5-year-old son has just broken one of his favorite toys. He approaches you with the broken airplane in hand, sobbing. “I want it back! Fix it please!” How would you respond?

Your spouse is trying to make a deadline for completing an important project. He or she has been working all day with papers spread out in the family room. At about 10:30 p.m. he (she) shouts, “That’s it! I’ve had it! I’ll never get it done so stuff it!”

You see your neighbor in the supermarket. She approaches you and, with her voice quivering, tells you, “We lost our farm. The bank is calling in our loan and we can’t pay. [with tears in eyes] That’s it for us!”

You get a phone call from a friend who tells you, “Guess what! I made it into grad school at K-State!”

You come home from work to find your spouse upset with your 4-year-old. “I can’t stand it! Chester is driving me up a wall. Whine, whine, whine, cry, cry, cry . . . that’s all I’ve heard today! Give me the car keys. I need to get out of the house for a while.”

**When you are finished examine your answers again, considering whether they show understanding of feelings and content. Go over each of the situations, this time conveying understanding and emotional support more effectively, if possible.**

**Keep in mind that effective emotional support involves a blend of verbal and body language. Select the best mix of responding to content and feelings to show understanding. Visualize these situations and how you might respond.**

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# Week Five

## *Hot Listening*

### **Points to Consider**

1. Step back from your friend's strong feelings for a moment.
2. Reflect and diffuse your friend's strong feelings.
3. Get into alignment with the direction of your friend's experience.
4. Monitor your own emotional reactions and describe your feelings if necessary.
5. Redirect the energy of your friend's experience to productive goals.

### **Looking Back. . . and Ahead**

Last week we examined the importance of showing understanding as we listen. This acceptance may encourage our friends to share even deeper feelings of anger, fear or grief with us. When these intense feelings emerge we will be challenged even more to provide support without becoming too threatened. This is hot listening, the topic for this week. Before beginning, complete your post-week assessment for last week and the current assessment for this week.

### **Hot Listening**

As we show understanding of the feelings and experiences of our friends, we are likely to create an atmosphere of acceptance that makes it possible for them to express more fully what is on their minds. This may mean an increase in intensity. Sadness may give way to grief, anger to rage, fear to desperation. In other words, things begin to heat up.

Most of us may be comfortable with warm listening. But as soon as more intense emotions begin to appear we are likely to back off and suppress the expression of emotion. As our friend begins to talk about his frustration he may slam his hand on the table in disgust. If this reaction frightens us we might insist, "Now Jake, everything will be all right. CALM DOWN." Or if our friend begins to cry we might become embarrassed and say, "Now, now, Jake. It's not so bad—you'll make it!"

The net effect of this avoidance is to discourage our friends and leave them feeling abandoned. We implied acceptance with warm listening, but now that the going gets hot we withdraw. The acceptance we conveyed was only conditional, the support weak. Just at the moment when our friends need us the most we bolt.

The alternative is to hang in there, to be a partner to our friends through their journey. But we have to be capable of meeting this challenge. We have to continue with our support despite the rise in temperature. This is *hot listening*.

### **Stepping Back and Unhooking**

Our first response to strong emotion should be to step back momentarily to get a better picture of what is happening. During this pause we might take a deep breath and relax. If our own emotions begin to percolate, we can use this moment to consider our own feelings and how we might proceed. Stepping back is like counting to ten—it stops us from acting prematurely and gives us time to consider the situation, the other person's feelings, and our response.

The key at this point is to *unhook* our reactions from the emotions of our friends. Instead of blindly reacting without thinking, we can step back, allow the energy of the strong feeling to pass us by without buffeting us, direct our awareness to our friend, and respond intelligently to the situation.

### **Reflecting and Diffusing**

After unhooking we can begin reflecting our friend's strong feelings and content with the same style as we used for warm listening.

#### *Example 1:*

A teenage child with cystic fibrosis who becomes discouraged with treatment and tired of suffering begins to cry.

**Father:** Sandy, you are so filled with sadness and fear; it hurts so much, so deeply. . . .

#### *Example 2:*

A wife is upset with her husband for how selfish she thinks he is.

**Wife:** I've had it with you! You only think about yourself and never anyone else. You never talk to me anymore. So that's it!

**Husband:** You are really upset. You feel left out and ignored. . . .

Accurate reflecting may diffuse the emotion and help our friends cool down because their feelings are ac-

cepted and acknowledged. Express uncertainty if you are not sure since inaccurate reflecting can create additional frustration, anger, or withdrawal.

## **Centering in Conflict**

**During this week be aware of how your feelings can be suddenly hooked by the strong emotions of others. Practice reestablishing an emotional balance when you begin to feel distracted by your feelings.**

**Imagine that the strong feelings of the other person are like a strong breeze and that you are a tree. The breeze passes through the branches and bends the trunk, but the tree remains resilient and quickly regains its balance. It allows itself to move with the energy instead of giving resistance. Feel the energy of the other, allow it to lightly touch you as it passes by.**

## **Aligning Yourself: Going With the Flow**

As you reflect back the other's experience, you can gain alignment by offering a personal reaction that demonstrates sincere sympathy. For example, the father of the child with cystic fibrosis could continue with:

*Father:* . . . I will never leave you. No matter how tough it becomes I will be by your side. You will not be alone. . . .

And the husband could continue with:

*Husband:* . . . You don't want to be left out "in the cold"; you want me to open up more. I have been distant lately.

The father responds to his child's frustration and fear with a personal disclosure about his sincere commitment. The husband who listens continues to elaborate on his wife's initial comments. At this point there is no attack, no resistance to the strong emotion.

## **Owning Feelings**

If your own emotions begin to interfere with listening or if a disclosure would strengthen your relationship you might choose to express your feelings. We can describe them in the same way we try to show understanding of another's feelings: by expressing them directly, identifying a metaphor, referring to an action, or identifying a physical reaction. For example the father and spouse could continue with the following:

*Father:* . . . I love you deeply, Sandy. I would walk a thousand miles just to ease one moment of your pain . . . [holds his child and begins to cry softly with her]

*Husband:* . . . But right now I'm feeling defensive, caught off guard. I have so much pressure on me; sometimes I feel as though I have to work it out myself. I don't want to burden you.

Both the father and the spouse say what is on their minds as a way of drawing closer to the people they care

about. The focus now is on the feelings and ideas of the listener. But this drawing inward is only momentary for the sharing is offered to clarify the situation and/or strengthen the bond of the relationship. The focus is quickly shifted to the other person.

Owning feelings implies that you know that your feelings belong to you and, because they are the result of your own appraisal and belief system, they are different from the events that may have provoked them.<sup>1</sup> Instead of attacking, becoming defensive or withdrawing, owning feelings involves sharing your feelings. It is not done to manipulate others, to make them feel guilty or to control their behavior. Owning feelings is a genuine expression of emotion, a starting point for continuing the dialogue.

During moments of intense emotion we will find ourselves challenged to remain focused and centered. Our own intense emotions will close off our awareness if we focus our energy and attention on self-protection. Owning feelings allows us to communicate our experience in a way that others are likely to hear. It may also help us see how we are responding to our friends' behavior. Once we communicate this, we can refocus our attention on the feelings and perspective of the other person.

## **The Hidden "I"**

**Be aware of how many times you begin statements with the word, "You." Are these comments really about the other person or are they more about your own values and beliefs? If you can catch yourself, change these "you" comments to "I" statements. For example:**

"You are being too noisy!" to

"I dislike all that screaming in the house—it hurts my ears!"

"You are a crybaby." to

"I am uncomfortable with your crying."

**"I" statements are crucial to good communication. Change the following "you" or impersonal statements to "I" statements that own the feelings of the speaker:**

"You make me so mad!"

"Why don't you turn the TV down; it's too loud!"

"This is a kind of situation to make people nervous."

"This is a nice sunny day."

"That child drives me up a wall!"

**During this week be aware of how often you hide behind the statements you make rather than owning your feelings. Try to catch yourself to restate how you feel more directly. How do others respond to your description of feelings?**

Owning feelings should follow a decision that disclosure would be helpful. In some cases it may be too risky to express feelings. It may provoke a deeply disturbed person to become more angry or could be used against us later by an insensitive person. There is always a risk in revealing ourselves. If we are unwilling to take the risk, though, we should not expect others to re-

veal themselves either. The decision to open up should be based on an awareness of the situation, the other person, and our common sense. It is not automatically the best course of action.

### ***Turning to the Positive***

**Think of someone you dislike. Take a few moments to picture this person, what he or she looks like and how he or she acts. Now try to get past the exterior facade this individual shows you. How does the person really feel? What kinds of experiences have shaped his or her personality? . . . Now do your best to focus on the positive in this person. What qualities does he or she have that you appreciate or admire? Next time you see the person, try to focus on these qualities.**

### ***Redirecting Energy***

As they hear us interpret their deeper feelings into our own words, our friends will gain a clearer picture of the values and ideas that motivate their behavior. Instead of fighting our friends' intense emotions and beliefs, our alignment with their experience can begin to help them rethink what is happening, clarify their options, and make better choices for managing the problem. Effective action follows insight and understanding. Consider this continuation of the preceding examples:

**Father:** . . . Sandy, fight this illness. You can find the strength to beat it. And when you are weak and tired I will be here—borrow mine. Together we can face this disease.

**Husband:** . . . Tell me more about how you feel; I want to understand you better. . . . I care about our relationship. Can we set aside some time to talk, maybe in the evening?

Both listeners invite the ones they care for to direct the energy of grief and anger into a direction that will strengthen the individual and the relationship. But this is done only after they make every effort to convey full understanding.

### ***Look for Agreement***

**When you find yourself disagreeing with someone this week, pause and search for something to agree with in the other person's position. Describe this point of agreement before you give your opinion. During the exchange breathe in to take in energy, breathe out to release whatever tension you feel.**

## ***The Goal: Understanding***

We listen at this more intense level because the real issues are likely to come to the forefront along with the deep emotions. We know active listening works when our friends show distinct relief at getting the issues "off their chest." The anger has been expressed, the crying is over; the person feels understood, accepted. Despite the heat we are still there.

Now there is anticipation, a readiness by our friends to face the problem and deal with the real issues confronting them. Our working through of emotions has set the stage for problem solving, the topic for the last week of the course.

## ***Reference***

1. *Basic Interpersonal Relationships: A Course for Small Groups.* Atlanta: Human Development Institute, 1969.

## Week Six

# Encouragement and Decision-Making

### **Points to Consider**

1. Encourage your friends to engage in a goalsearch—to identify their touchstones, talents, and targets.
2. Encourage your friends to engage in lifecrafting—to brainstorm alternative responses to the challenges facing them and to involve others in helping them reach their goals.
3. Ask your friends open-ended questions.
4. Encourage your friends to take positive steps to overcome adversity.
5. Urge your friends to seek appropriate formal help if necessary; act as an advocate for those friends who decide to seek counseling.

### **Looking Back. . . and Ahead**

Providing emotional support is a necessary but insufficient response to friends experiencing distress. Self-confidence and action must be our ultimate purpose for providing support. Effective help empowers or gives strength to a friend who becomes more capable of facing distress, making appropriate decisions and taking action.

But our friends have to be ready to begin identifying and analyzing responses to their problems. Self-belief and action must be built on the foundations of expression, exploration and understanding. Hope is nourished by comfort, acceptance and respect.

### **Your Touchstones**

What are your heart's desires? What do you really need to make your life worthwhile? What talents do you have that can help you fill this need? If you had five different lives to live, what would you accomplish? What kinds of experiences would you seek during each life? What would you do with each one? How are each of these lives vital parts of you? How can we incorporate the touchstones for each of these lives into the one we have?

One way to prepare for responding to a problem is to employ what Barbara Sher calls "goalsearch" and "crafting."<sup>1</sup> Goalsearch is a preparation for action; lifecrafting, a strategy for accomplishment. Before beginning, complete your post-week assessment for last week and the current assessment for this week.

### **Goalsearch**

The first step is to encourage our friends to consider their goals. Goals are specific actions or events that an individual can accomplish. There are three parts to a goalsearch: the touchstone, talent and target. The **touchstone** is the emotional core of the goal, what the individual wants or needs from reaching the goal. Talents are the skills an individual can apply to reaching the target. The **target** is the specific goal.

A neighbor whose farm is being foreclosed and another whose husband has died, for example, might begin to consider a plan of action based on the following goalsearch:

#### **Farmer**

Touchstone: To be self-sufficient, his own boss, to engage in worthwhile work.

Talent: Repair of farm machinery, knowledge of mechanics.

Target: To become a machine maintenance specialist in the food industry.

#### **Widow**

Touchstone: To feel loved and accepted by others who care.

Talent : Personal warmth, willing to give time.

Target: To make new friends and renew old friendships.

We can encourage others to engage in goalsearch only if the previous stages in helping have been satisfactorily accomplished. If our friends are too upset to consider how they might proceed, then rapport and listening would take precedence. Timing is critically important.

The mind has to be ready to begin problem-solving.

Goalsearch is initiated by those who encourage their friends to consider their values, needs, and dreams, to consider the touchstones and talents in their lives, and to identify goals that will guide their work.

## **Lifecrafting**

Lifecrafting involves a plan of activities to reach the target. Two resources can be tapped for lifecrafting: human ingenuity and human community. Ingenuity is liberated by brainstorming, and community is mobilized by barnraising.<sup>2</sup>

### **Appreciations**

**At least twice during this week approach someone you know fairly well and describe one or two qualities they have or something they did that you appreciated. Be specific about the trait or behavior. For example, a father might tell his teenage daughter, "I really appreciated your willingness to help me clean up the garage. That gave me some extra time I really needed. Thanks." Make sure your comments are sincere.**

**Brainstorming.** As we talk with our friends, we can encourage them to identify as many ideas as they can for reaching their target. Brainstorming is creative thinking about alternate routes to a goal. "Woolgathering" is the first stage of brainstorming in which we help our friends generate as many ideas as possible for reaching the goal, accepting every idea with uncritical delight. The only rule is that there are no rules. Sit down with your friend and begin exploring options. Invite others, even children, to participate. Write the ideas down as you proceed.

Partial lists for the farmer and widow might look something like:

#### **Farmer**

Go back to school for additional education;  
Apprentice out to someone who has a reputation for being an excellent mechanic;  
Attend a training program at the American Institute for Baking.

#### **Widow**

Volunteer for hospital or church work;  
Identify and contact her most important friends;  
Join a community or civic club;  
Start a support group for widows.

Once these lists have been formed we can begin to identify the useful elements as well as the problems and their possible resolution for each option.

Once our friends determine the "best" idea we can shift to **bridge building**, identifying the steps for reaching the specific goal. If the farmer decides to attend the training program and the widow decides to start a support group through her church, how do they proceed? What steps do they have to take to reach their goals? We

might sketch out a diagram to help our friends visualize the steps they could take.

**Barnraising.** When their crops had to be harvested or barns built, pioneer farmers would pool their talents to get the job done. They belonged to a community of purpose, a group of people willing to work together toward a common goal. We can begin to harness this co-operative spirit by "barnraising" with our friends, helping them to discover and use a resource network.

Once the plan is formed our friends could reach out to others to inform them of what they hope to accomplish and invite them to assist in any way they can. At this point we can encourage our friends to expand their social network to include as many people as they can in their plan. They might even invite these friends for an evening of socializing and brainstorming. Success depends on getting others involved.

This entire process of goalsearching and lifecrafting can take as little time as 15 minutes or as long as several months. It can be done with the person sitting next to you on the plane or with a spouse you have known for 30 years.

Rapport and listening as forms of emotional support tend to focus on the past and present. Goal-searching and lifecrafting have a present and future emphasis. All of our listening and sharing should be aimed at strengthening the ability of our friends to become problem solvers and planners.

## **The Art of Questioning and Reinforcement**

Asking open-ended questions is one of the best ways to stimulate discussion with our friends for considering and implementing a plan. Open-ended questions typically begin with who, what, where, when, and how. They require another to describe something rather than simply answering "yes" or "no." These types of questions are not likely to provoke defensiveness.

### **Options**

**Find a comfortable place where you will not be disturbed. Identify a problem that has been the source of some distress for you. Let yourself relax, your mind open up. What are your options for dealing with the problem? Imagine if someone who really knows and loves you were to list some options for you, what would he or she suggest? After generating as many options as you can, decide which of the alternatives would be best. Begin working on a plan of action to implement your idea.**

"Why" questions, though, force others to defend their perspective, to explain an action or position they have taken. For example, which of the following questions would you be more comfortable answering:

Why did you take that job? or

What do you enjoy about the work you do?

Despite common misconceptions we do not have to know "why" before deciding on a plan of action. Why

questions cannot be answered completely. Which of us knows the reasons for all of our actions?

We can also express support for our friends' responses to our comments and questions. Support is reflected in our enthusiasm and in such comments as "That's a great idea!" We must convey to our friends that *they* are capable people who can take positive steps to overcome distress. If we do the hard thinking for them and make them dependent on us, then we have not really helped them at all. Our support at this stage conveys two critical messages: positive steps can be taken to manage the distress, and our friends have the capability for moving forward to manage their future.

### ***The Limitations of Our Support: The Need for Professional Help***

Sometimes our friends will have problems too severe for informal support to be effective. We may notice a gradual deterioration in their behavior and physical well-being (see week two) and a lack of responsiveness to our attempts to be helpful. If they fail to get the professional help they need because of the apparent support of our friendship, we will be responsible for accelerating that deterioration. The most important and possibly the most difficult thing we can do for our friends under these conditions is to encourage them to seek the help they need.

#### ***Anticipations***

**To help stimulate discussion related to goalsearch ask several friends where they hope to be and what they hope to be doing 10 years from now. Use their responses as a starting point for discussing their touchstones, talents and targets. How about you? How would you answer this question?**

Consider the following steps when you think more formal help is needed.

1. Think carefully about what you see going on in your friend. Don't exaggerate the problem. But don't minimize it either. Consider also the strength of your relationship. Does your friend trust you? Is there a reservoir of good will that he or she can draw on when considering the implications of what you suggest?
2. Become familiar with resources in your own or nearby communities. Contact a more formal helper such as a minister who has training in counseling, a mental health clinician, a clinical psychologist, or family therapist. Describe your friend's behavior (keep it confidential) and ask whether he or she thinks outside assistance is needed. Discuss the possibility of referral.
3. If appropriate, contact immediate relatives to express your concern. Conferring with parents or guardians would be necessary if your friend is a minor. This contact is important for double-checking your concern and should not involve

"ganging up" on your friend, the ultimate insult and betrayal.

4. Schedule a time and place to talk with your friend in private. Make sure you are not disturbed.
5. Describe what you see happening with your friend. Be honest about your observations. Express your personal concern. Tell him or her firmly that you think additional help is needed and suggest who that might be.
6. Emphasize during your discussion that everyone needs such help at some time in their lives, that there is no shame in seeking more formal assistance. If you want, express a willingness to go with him or her.
7. Let your friend or, in the case of a minor, the parents make the appointment.

Threats of suicide, no matter how they are made, should be taken seriously. If a friend should make such a threat, be firm and encourage the person in the strongest terms to seek professional counseling. Contact a professional in a social service agency such as a community mental health center to describe the situation and determine a plan of action. If you believe suicide is imminent contact the police immediately. Suicide threats are pleas for help that must be answered.

No list of suggestions can adequately cover the wide variety of circumstances we are likely to encounter. Discussing professional referral is one of the most difficult tasks you may have to face in a friendship. Make sure in your own mind that your friend is in real need of such help. Use your common sense and keep your discussion private. Helping your friends find the real help they need may be the most important form of support you could ever provide. Keep in mind that your continued support is needed even though a friend may be getting his or her "main" help from a professional.

### ***References***

1. Barbara Sher, *Wishcraft: How to Get What You Really Want* (New York: Viking Press, 1979).
2. Sher, 1979, pp. 111-173.

## Conclusion

We are at the end of our journey. Maybe you felt at times as though you were walking on thin ice. The power of compassion to deepen intimacy can be frightening. On the other hand, perhaps you have felt yourself growing stronger as you strengthened your inner capacity for soothing the hurt of others. We could, if we want, insulate ourselves from feeling such pain by keeping others at an emotional distance. But this false sense of security is purchased at the cost of loneliness.

We know in our hearts that we need each other. We are like wandering storytellers, searching for someone who is willing to share our journey, to listen to our story, to take us seriously. For it is in the telling of our narrative that we discover ourselves and the touchstones of our lives.

If we are to be heard, however, we must also be ready to listen. The capacity to feel another's pain, to transform it and give it meaning by sharing what we understand to be true is a powerful force for personal growth.

As we make space for others in the dramas of our lives we may discover that others are interested in listening to our story as well. Now the scripts can be set aside, the masks discarded, and for at least a short time we can be ourselves.

Because listening and sharing at a deep level requires energy, we cannot be so involved at all times in all of our relationships. But when we pick up those scripts and don the masks once again we can do so with the confidence that someone cares, that we have the power to set aside the rituals that are part of our social fabric. We can share what is really in our hearts.

## Suggested Readings

- The Anatomy of an Illness*, by Norman Cousins (New York: Bantam Books, 1981).
- Between Health and Illness: New Notions on Stress and the Nature of Well-Being*, by Barbara Brown (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1984).
- Contact: The First Four Minutes*, by Leonard and Natalie Zunin (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972).
- A Gift of Hope: How We Survive Our Tragedies*, by Robert Veninga (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1983).
- Help Thy Neighbor: How Counseling Works and When It Doesn't*, by Linda W. Scheffler (New York: Grove Press, 1984).
- How Can I Help?* by Ram Dass and Paul Gorman (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985).
- Mental Judo*, by Lance Lager and Amy L. Kraft (New York: Crown Publishers, 1981).
- The Road Less Traveled*, by M. Scott Peck (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985).
- Wishcraft: How to Get What You Really Want*, by Barbara Sher (New York: Viking Press, 1979).

I have been fortunate to have the help of many friends who were willing to share my journey of writing *Friends InDeed: A Course in Helping*. I would like to thank the following reviewers for their observations, suggestions and encouragement: Howard Barnes, Jan Copeland, Nonie Englund, Pauline Ferrell, Sharon Frost, Haley Matson, Diane Helmuth, Bev Kindler, Dan Lord, Marcia Ransom, Paula Seele, Kent Springer, Dave Stewart, Marge Stith, Jud Swihart, Jim Warner, Stacy Warner, Steve Westfahl, and David Wright. I would also like to express my thanks to Myrna Daly and Warren Pray for their editorial and design contributions.

We would like to hear about your use of *Friends InDeed: A Course in Helping*. Send your comments and suggestions to:

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## Self-Appraisal

*Instructions:* Before you begin each week of the course consider each skill statement below for that week and rate how thoroughly you understand or how well you can perform the skill. When you complete the course for that week rate yourself again, this time by assessing how much

you have improved. At the conclusion of the six weeks, reexamine the entire list of skills. Mark an “X” through the “After” ratings to indicate your final appraisal. Compare the three ratings—do you see a gradual growth in your ability to understand and offer emotional support?

RATINGS  
 0 = Not At all  
 1  
 2 = Moderately  
 3  
 4 = Very Well

Week 1 DISTRESS AND HELPING	RATING	
	Before	After
1. I can describe how appraisal affects stress.	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4
2. I can describe how social support reduces distress.	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4
Week 2 PREPARING OURSELVES	RATING	
	Before	After
1. I can describe the significance of personal strength for offering emotional support.	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4
2. I can identify the key ingredients for emotional support.	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4
Week 3 OBSERVING AND ESTABLISHING RAPPORT	RATING	
	Before	After
1. I can attend to “distress” and “appeal” signals conveyed by others.	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4
2. I can identify the three factors involved in determining severity of a problem.	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4
3. I can define and offer a “symbolic sanctuary.”	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4
4. I can define and offer a “posture of involvement.”	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4
5. I can define and establish an “empathic link.”	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4
6. I can define and demonstrate “pacing.”	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4

Week 4 WARM LISTENING	RATING	
	Before	After
1. I can attend to “core” messages conveyed by others.	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4
2. I can differentiate between feelings and content.	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4
3. I can name four ways to paraphrase another’s feelings.	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4
4. I can paraphrase feelings and content.	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4
5. I am comfortable using silence as an encouragement for another to talk.	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4
Week 5 HOT LISTENING	RATING	
	Before	After
1. I can define “unhooking” from another’s intense feelings.	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4
2. I can define the concept of “alignment” as a response to another’s intense feelings.	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4
3. I know how to express my feelings directly.	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4
4. I can define “redirecting energy” as a response to another’s intense feelings.	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4
Week 6 ENCOURAGEMENT AND DECISION MAKING	RATING	
	Before	After
1. I can describe how to encourage others in a goalsearch.	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4
2. I can describe how to engage others in lifecrafting.	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4
3. I can describe the differences between open-ended and closed questions.	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4
4. I can identify the steps for helping another receive formal support.	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4



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MF-806

February 1986

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, as amended. Kansas State University, County Extension Councils, Extension Districts, and United States Department of Agriculture Cooperating, Richard D. Wootton, Associate Director. All educational programs and materials available without discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability.

File Code: Human Development—4

2-86—10M; 11-87—5M; 10-92—5M; JR 11-95—3M