

IMPORTANT QUALITIES OF A HELPER

Exchanged Life Counseling Workshop

INTRODUCTION

Most of you are not and do not expect to become professional counselors, that others would come to for counseling and reimburse you for your services. If you were a professional counselor, you would be expected to have specialized training or educational credentials in the counseling field.

On the other hand, most of you will have repeated opportunities to listen to friends, acquaintances or neighbors, and share some things you have learned that have changed your life.

Our desire is to equip you with the skills and tools to share the truth of what God has provided as answers to life's problems.

If a person is hurting and is willing to share those hurts, you may be on your way to being a helper. There are many principles applicable to being a people helper but there are some important distinctions to be made between traditional approaches and the Exchanged Life approach. These distinctions center in the principle of helping people come to the end of their own resources rather than helping them strengthen their own resources. What you will be doing is leading others to a decision to give up trying to do things they cannot do, in order to experience the indwelling Christ in all his fullness doing through them what they could never do for Him.

LISTENING

The first and most important step in helping another, is listening. This means to allow the person to express his or her need or hurt from their prospective. You may perceive that they are telling you about symptoms rather than the real problem, which may be spiritual in nature, but in the beginning, listening is the most important thing you can do.

The umbrella over all the activities of a helper is the act of listening. Many would-be helpers operate with the misconception that listening is a passive endeavor and therefore talking is more important if one is to be really helpful. Although talking is important, the act of listening requires a great deal of attention and effort if one is to be an effective helper.

EMPATHY

Empathy involves deep understanding of another person's feelings, thoughts and motives. It could be described as entering another person's world to the point of seeing the world through their eyes. When empathy is present, two people can respond to each other interchangeably. A person with empathy doesn't need to keep saying, "I understand".

RESPECT

As a helper one must respect the ability and need for another person to be responsible for his or her own life. Others must be allowed and encouraged to make their own decisions and respond appropriately to God. Respect for another demands a basic regard for the differences of the individual, having been created in the image of God. This does not require a blanket acceptance of their behavior, but rather this person.

GENUINENESS

In the role of a helper, "to be genuine" means to be free to be yourself. There is an absence of fakeness or a façade. However, in the role of a helper, self-disclosure should come as a gradual part of the process as the relationship develops. It is not appropriate to overwhelm someone with your own experiences. Genuineness means getting to know one another and becoming transparent with appropriate timing and context.

WARMTH

Warmth is giving the impression of friendliness and deep interest by the helper. The counselee will receive warmth as a genuine caring on the part of the helper. The counselee will sense the warmth given as an expression of affection by the helper.

GIVE FULL ATTENTION

Giving full attention to another person requires the filtering out of all extraneous input that would otherwise interfere with you hearing and understanding them. It involves observing and listening to what another person is communicating with their whole being. It means NOT being distracted or distracting.

REFUSE TO BE JUDGEMENTAL

To be nonjudgemental, first of all, does not require the compromise of values, nor winking at unacceptable behavior. It is important to understand that feelings, in and of themselves, are neither positive or negative.

Thinking and action is what grants value to feelings. Prerequisite to being an effective helper is to suspend judgement about another person and leave that task to God.

UNDERSTANDING FEELINGS AS WELL AS CONTENT

Paying attention to what a person tells you is important if you are going to accurately understand their experience, but understanding their feelings may be the key to setting them free from their experience. Feelings may not drive the train, but they have a way of derailing it. The person who is unable to express their emotions is just as much in bondage to them as the person who can't stop expressing them.