

**HELPING SKILLS
FOR HUMAN SERVICE WORKERS**

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Fourth Edition

**HELPING SKILLS
FOR HUMAN SERVICE WORKERS**

**Building Relationships and Encouraging
Productive Change**

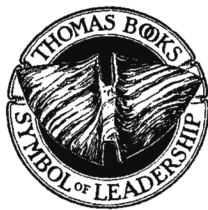
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*To
The staff of
Aging and Community Services
Cumberland County, Pennsylvania*

PREFACE

If building relationships and encouraging productive change are enterprises you wish to learn, this book is for you. Perhaps you aspire to work in crisis intervention, mental health, case management, or social services. You may be a staff member at a group home, rehab center, youth facility, or partial hospitalization program. You may have a job that involves pastoral duties, triage, death notifications, patient care, or working with consumers. Performance in any of those arenas, and a host of others, can be enhanced by the communication skills addressed in this book.

In order to introduce you to relevant concepts, we arranged the chapters in the following manner. Chapter 1 discusses several basic issues regarding the development and use of helping skills. Chapter 2 explores common modes of response. In Chapter 3, you will encounter several ingredients that foster positive relationships. Chapter 4 presents a step-by-step approach to problem solving. Chapter 5 examines responses that can detract from your efforts. In Chapter 6, you will find a straightforward approach to establishing goals, objectives, and plans. Chapter 7 describes channels of nonverbal information and commonly encountered nonverbal messages. Chapter 8 highlights endeavors that take center stage before, during, and after scheduled appointments. And Chapter 9 considers the needs of several groups: children, older persons, clients having low socioeconomic status, individuals experiencing psychosis, persons experiencing long-standing issues, and individuals like you.

In the fourth edition there is new supporting research for the following topics: the helping alliance, empathy, collecting and providing client feedback, communicating positive regard and affirmation, agreeing on goals, client autonomy, self-efficacy and stress in helping skills students; responding to negative feelings clients have about you, genuineness, collaborative working relationships, client feelings of well-being associated with a focus on problem solving and with following through on plans that are consistent with their own values and beliefs, client methods for implementing plans, learning how to set adaptive goals, improvement goals versus avoidance goals, working with clients experiencing psychosis, and stages of change. In the section on aging in Chapter 9, there is new information on support for per-

son-centered decision making that is required by law (under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act) for certain older and disabled individuals. Also in Chapter 9, there is a new section on student and worker well-being.

Chapters 2 through 9 provide you with opportunities to try out the content being presented. There are multiple-choice questions, as well as short-answer and fill-in-the-response items.

You will discover a progression as you read the practice items in the text. Early chapters include topics such as being away from home and making a career transition—circumstances commonly encountered by undergraduate and graduate students, and by new staff members of human service organizations. Since you probably are in one or more of those categories yourself, you may find that you and people you know have experienced challenges similar to the ones being portrayed. In later chapters, the examples become more diverse in their content, as we demonstrate how helping skills can be used with a wide variety of issues.

There are two complete interviews in the book. One is in Chapter 4 and the other is in Chapter 6. In both interactions the client is going to school and is a newly employed staff member of a human service organization. As with the early practice items, our hope is that you will readily identify with the person being interviewed. From the client's perspective, we want you to appreciate the value of the skills being demonstrated.

Throughout the book, we write as though you are interacting with one person. But all of the material also applies to interactions with two or more individuals.

Some authors of counseling, interviewing, and helping texts praise naturalness, spontaneity, flexibility, and individual creativity, then go on to present complex sets of tactics or overwhelming amounts of information that are impossible to keep in mind. In this book, the basic system we present is simple and straightforward. Consequently, it will become possible for you to keep in mind the fundamental concepts, thereby giving you the freedom to be flexible, spontaneous, creative, and natural.

As an introductory treatment of helping skills, simplicity and the building of foundation abilities are guiding principles for what follows. There are many topics that are beyond the scope of this book. Examples of such areas include more specialized endeavors (such as humor and paradoxical intention), various theoretical perspectives (such as psychodynamic and cognitive-behavioral), a multitude of diverse populations and problem areas (such as substance abuse and homelessness), and psychological assessment (such as the use and interpretation of specific screening devices).

Other topics on which you will find limited information are habits associated with gender, affectional orientation, cultural heritage, and ethnicity.

We believe that each client brings to the interaction a host of individual characteristics and preferences, some of which are based on the factors just named. In our opinion, it is beyond the scope of this book, or any single book, to address the thousands of possible backgrounds possessed by clients. Whatever a client's background, we believe workers should be respectful of the person's values and beliefs. (At the same time, we agree that it may be appropriate for staff members to help clients explore the consequences of problematic values and beliefs that become topics of discussion.) When many of your clients share a common background, you may wish to do additional research on central influences affecting your client base. This can help you more effectively mesh your own efforts with the expectations of those you serve.

Because of the traditions of some client groups, it is possible for discussion of feelings and encouragement of independent problem solving to be inappropriate activities. When that is the case, you will need to learn relationship-building and change-promoting practices that are in tune with the backgrounds of those persons.

Although the approaches we advocate in this book are in agreement with many of the ideas discussed by other authors, it appears that our style of helping does have some unique aspects. We emphasize being natural, demonstrating understanding of the client's thoughts and feelings, avoiding repetitive phrasing, and choosing responses with an eye toward the interaction's ultimate purpose. We hope the book aids in your development of helping skills appropriate for use by human service workers.

K.F. and K.W.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Clients in helping relationships make progress when they feel understood and actively work toward goals they care about, as documented by extensive research (Norcross & Lambert, 2018). This book applies those findings by presenting ways for promoting rapport and facilitating desired change. We describe ways to create positive relationships and engage clients in joint efforts that focus on developing adaptive targets to work toward and achieving productive outcomes.

There are many approaches one can take when working with clients. Research indicates, however, that regardless of the approach taken, clients improve more when they experience a strong helping bond with the human service worker (Flückiger, Del Re, Wampold, & Horvath, 2018). To better understand that bond, the American Psychological Association's Society for the Advancement of Psychotherapy and Society for Counseling Psychology developed a task force to investigate specific relationship factors associated with productive client change. After rigorous review of extensive research, the task force concluded that strong and consistent research findings document the effectiveness of several factors in person-to-person human service relationships: developing a helping alliance, demonstrating empathy, collecting and providing client feedback, communicating positive regard and affirmation, and agreeing on goals (Norcross & Lambert, 2018). Those factors are important components of the helping skills discussed in this book. We address ways of developing a helping alliance in Chapter 3, with emphasis on conveying empathy and positive regard. We suggest enhancing the helping alliance through collaborative problem solving in Chapter 4 and cooperative

goal setting in Chapter 6. Collecting and providing client feedback regarding progress toward those goals is also a central focus of the material in Chapter 6. The remaining chapters discuss ways to enhance those fundamental skills.

Now that we have looked at the worker's perspective, let's consider the client's point of view. Clients requesting assistance from human service workers often are feeling anxious, low, or combinations of both emotions. There are essential commonalities among anxiety and depressive disorders according to empirical evidence reviewed by Barlow, Allen, and Choate (2004; reprinted in 2016 by the same journal). They assert that at the core of those disorders is a sense of being unable to control events, which results in negative emotions. Emotional disorders can arise out of biological predispositions and early learning experiences, and then intensify during challenging situations in which individuals perceive a lack of control.

According to Barlow and his colleagues, successful therapeutic interventions focus on building a basic sense of being able to influence events. The development of such confidence can be supported in a number of ways. Possibilities include the following three strategies: (1) logically thinking through things prior to taking on challenging situations (such as realistically estimating both the likelihood of negative events happening and the true nature of negative consequences that actually might occur), (2) actively exploring ways of confronting and dealing with challenging situations, and (3) accepting emotions rather than expending effort trying to avoid them.

Consistent with the ideas of Barlow and his associates, the problem-solving approach described in Chapter 4 can be used to help clients control what they are able to influence. We support the following: (1) logically thinking through challenging situations in advance, (2) exploring ways of confronting those situations and dealing with them adaptively, and (3) accepting negative emotions and then addressing their causes via realistic problem solving to bring about environmental change and/or by adaptively modifying the way one views the circumstances.

ENCOURAGING CLIENT AUTONOMY AND SELF-EFFICACY

Throughout the book we emphasize providing a supportive relationship in which clients can explore their thoughts and feelings, con-

sider options, and make their own decisions regarding changes they might like to implement. In other words, we support client autonomy. Research has demonstrated that individuals try harder and perform better when changes are more internally motivated and are developed in a nonauthoritarian context, than when change is motivated by the expectations of others (Jang, Kim, & Reeve, 2012; Levitt, Pomerville, & Surace, 2016; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon, & Deci, 2004). Consequently, we discourage advice giving and encourage active client involvement in problem solving and in the establishment of targets for change.

Clients who actively participate in setting targets for behavior change may experience greater self-confidence or, more specifically, greater self-efficacy regarding their abilities. Albert Bandura (1997) defined *self-efficacy* as belief in one's ability to successfully execute a particular behavior. He noted that self-efficacy predicts how much effort and persistence one puts into changing a behavior. Clients with higher self-efficacy regarding coping and behavior change (in other words, clients who believe they actually will be able to cope with difficulties and accomplish desired change) are more likely to persist when faced with obstacles and are, consequently, more likely to successfully bring about desired change. Research confirms that stronger belief in one's ability to accomplish change is associated with greater success. This effect has been demonstrated in a variety of areas, including the following: overcoming phobias, achieving and maintaining weight loss, improving athletic performance, increasing activity level, coping with anxiety, and abstaining from drug and alcohol use (Bandura, 1997; Bandura & Locke, 2003; Evon & Burns, 2004; Kuusisto, Knuuttila, & Saarnio, 2011; Rejeski et al., 2003).

Research has also suggested that self-efficacy is associated with internal motivation and helping alliance. For example, one study (Heins, Knoop, & Bleijenberg, 2013) looked at factors influencing fatigue in persons who had participated in treatment for chronic fatigue syndrome. Lower levels of post-treatment fatigue were associated with higher self-efficacy for controlling one's fatigue and with the person's degree of agreement with the therapist on what the necessary steps were to achieve one's treatment goals. Researchers are now suggesting that increases in self-efficacy may be one of the reasons that helping bond is associated with productive change. Links between helping alliance and improved client self-efficacy have been found to be associat-

ed with outcomes such as improving diet and exercise following cardiac events (Burns & Evon, 2007) and abstaining from misuse of alcohol (Hartzler, Witkiewitz, Villarroel, & Donovan, 2011).

Given the links among autonomy, self-efficacy, and successful coping, efforts to foster autonomy and self-efficacy seem important. Bandura (1997) identified a number of ways to enhance self-efficacy, including receiving credible verbal encouragement and successfully accomplishing what you set out to do. He suggested that performance success, or what he called mastery experience, is a primary way of increasing self-efficacy. From our perspective, both self-efficacy and autonomy are enhanced when the worker encourages productive change by helping clients engage in adaptive coping efforts that foster success in areas which are important to them. Consequently, in this book we emphasize developing rapport and alliance, while also encouraging autonomy and self-confidence through collaborative problem solving and goal setting.

REWARDS AND COSTS OF USING HELPING SKILLS

Let's consider some of what you do as an effective human services worker. Since the ultimate goal is for *clients* to develop insights and to cope more adaptively, you encourage their input and foster their initiative. Using the least amount of authority necessary, you seek to understand feelings, and you encourage the expression of ideas. By sharing responsibility for determining the subject matter and the pacing of interactions, you put clients in position to take credit for progress they make, thereby enhancing their self-efficacy and autonomy.

The preceding considerations imply both rewards and costs for you.

Costs include:

- as a student, trainee, or new employee, you must make the effort to learn the art of helping;
- as a skilled worker, you will need to allot sufficient time for problem-solving interactions with clients (with about 20 minutes being the minimum for an initial problem-solving discussion).