

# Can the \*Untrained Really Help Others?

(\* those without degrees in psychology or counseling, etc.)

There is some very interesting research about the effectiveness of the many different types of psychotherapies that are available. Some researchers have concluded that the therapeutic method matters little if several elements exist in the relationship between the helper and the person being helped. Perhaps this is why bishops, teachers, leaders, and others can really make a positive difference in someone's life without therapy when they would otherwise need to be in therapy. (However, there is empirical research supporting the relative effectiveness of certain techniques such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy.)

This presents an interesting question: Is there a one page list of principles that a well educated "people-person" could learn and apply that would significantly improve his or her ability to really help someone in distress? (Not those who are psychotic or that would be better served with medications, etc.)

## My One-Page List of Counseling Principles:

- The helper would have unconditional positive regard for the person (accept them where they are now).
- The helper would have a good working relationship with the person (an alliance). The person needs to respect the helper.
- The helper would be truly empathetic. Empathy: The act of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without actually experiencing any of those things.
- The helper would listen well, pay attention, be alert, show they care, and take the time necessary.
- The helper would not negatively react to peculiar or unrighteous behaviors. Such as a youth leader would not freak out if a young man or young woman told them they were viewing pornography or masturbating. The youth would be telling the helper this to obtain help not to be shamed. The helper would seek to understand the underlying emotions and circumstances surrounding the behavior. *"Jesus saw sin as wrong but also was able to see sin as springing from deep and unmet needs on the part of the sinner."* Spencer W. Kimball, Ensign Aug 1979, 5. A better way to deal with this might be, *"What you have told me is serious indeed, but it is clear that you are ready to make changes and work through the repentance process, otherwise you would not be here. Aren't we glad that this entire life is the time to prepare to meet Heavenly Father, not just the first [insert age here] years? This is not unforgivable and here are some things ..."* Or from a non-religious perspective, "What you have told me is serious indeed, but it is clear that you are ready to make

changes. If you work hard and carefully to make healthy changes you will gain emotional strength from that and it will be easier to make more healthy choices in the future. Let's talk about some things you can do."

- The helper would be able to summarize thoughts and feelings and reflect them back. Accurate reflection is like a revelation to the person because it crystallizes their thoughts and feelings in such a way that it aids in self-understanding. The person might respond with *"Yes, that is what I mean,"* or *"Yes, you do understand me."* When a person seems to be going on and on, interrupt them by saying, *"Let me see if I understand what you are saying ..."*
- The helper would honor the person's agency. We should not be telling others what to do, especially women. They want to process their problems with other people - to hear them self think. People are fully capable of figuring out their own solutions, especially if helped. When asked, make suggestions or brainstorm ideas with them. If the helper has not been invited to suggest ideas then they should rarely and softly offer them. Please watch the wording. *"You should/must/will/need to/have to ..."* does not encourage self-assessment and or self-correction. Appropriate responses include; *"Have you thought of ...,"* or *"What have others said to you about this?"*
- The helper would keep confidences, be very patient, and be a calming influence. The helper would be humble and teachable about the person's needs and wants.
- The helper would help identify distorted thinking like, *"Nobody could ever love me,"* or *"If I can't do this, I am worthless,"* and several other types of distorted thinking. Try to move the person towards more healthy / logical thinking.
- The helper would help them take responsibility for their own actions. Heavenly Father, their mother, a controlling spouse, other people, "life", fate, etc. are often blamed when, in truth, people need to take personal responsibility for their own actions.
- The helper would remind the person that they are an "agent unto themselves" and that other people do not "make them" be (feel or do) anything. They allow themselves to become angry/ vile/ violent, etc. Things or people to not "make them" depressed. They may feel depressed because of how they thought about or interpreted a thing. Some people simply need to learn to think differently. For example, instead of thinking *"She left me, my life is over!"* a person could think, *"It is unfortunate that she has chosen to break off our relationship but I will find another, life will go on and I will be happy again."*
- Lastly, the helper would instill hope and end all meetings on a hopeful note. Realistic but extremely hopeful.