LISTENING SKILLS

By Andrew Gottlieb, Peggy Smith,
Peter Salovey, and Vincent D'Andrea

Listening skills have broad applications. Many of you may find that you use them quite naturally. Good listening is about 50 percent of counseling, and it is also a useful tool with family, with friends, and at work.

This book does not teach you how to become a therapist. Listening is only part of helping, hut it is a crucial part. A means of support, good listening helps people explore what they are thinking and feeling. Developing your skills may therefore help another person solve or clarify a problem.

A word of caution about what good listening is not. It is not doing all the talking. It is not giving advice. It is not manipulating. It is not taking the responsibility for the other person's problem and its solution.

The material in this chapter is based on the work of Alan Ivey (1978). We hope it will demystify the skills of active listening. These skills can be defined, taught, and learned. You do not have to be superhuman to grasp them. In fact, you may find you have acquired one or more of the skills quite naturally, while you need to learn a few others. What is most important is a sincere desire to understand other people accurately and to he more aware of these skills—skills that do facilitate interpersonal interactions.

MINIMAL ATTENDING SKILLS

Minimal attending skills are the foundation that supports all the other skills. Sometimes called "the art of listening with your mouth closed," this set of skills helps you be a more effective and empathetic listener.

Although we are not consciously aware of it much of the time, our body language is a critical part of how we relate and what we communicate. Of particular interest in this regard are eye contact and body posture.

Good *eye contact* is important but complex. Different cultures and subcultures, even different individuals, have different standards for good eye contact. Be sensitive to another person's comfort; good eye contact says, "I am with you" but is not invasive. With practice, you will come to know when you are engaging in appropriate eye contact.

Just as eye contact varies from person to person or culture to culture, so does *personal space.* Being the right distance from another person is part of appropriate posture. In addition, leaning forward with an open, relaxed stance and without extraneous, distracting movement is part of an ideal posture. Once again, it is important to remember to be yourself and to use a posture that is comfortable for you.

Another element of basic attending is *verbal following.* Verbal following differs from ordinary conversation, in which each person may be pursuing his or her own line of thought. With verbal following, you let the other person determine the course of conversation while you simply nod, respond, or ask questions. Keep interruptions to a minimum and avoid "topic jumping" or changing the subject. Although it may be difficult at first, also avoid giving advice or judging the other person's motives,

thoughts, and behavior. Avoid sharing your personal experiences or "comparing notes."

Summary—Minimal Attending

1. Eye Contact
    a. Look at the person most of the time.
    b. Communicate caring: "I am with you, I'm listening."
2. Body Posture
    a. Be comfortable, he relaxed, lean forward slightly.
    b. Be aware of personal distance.
    c. Avoid distracting gestures or fidgeting.
3. Facial Expressions
    a. Don't be a brick wall!
    b. Display appropriate empathy.
4. Following the Person's Lead
    a. Don't interrupt, don't change the subject.
    b. Listen, don't talk.
    c. Don't share experiences ('Oh, I've been there..."

OPEN QUESTIONS

This section concentrates on what we call "the open invitation to talk." In it**,** we speak of "open" and "closed" questions. Open questions are questions that encourage a person to talk without feeling defensive. Closed questions are the kind asked by a census taker, a doctor, a lawyer, or a parent: in most cases, both parties in the conversation understand that very specific information is requested in very short answers. Examples of closed questions are:

"Did you do that last Monday?"
"Is it true that there are three people living here?"
"How long have you been here?"

Nothing is wrong with using a closed question if you need to—and if the client is amenable. However, such questions do tend to cut down communication; and if used unadvisedly, they can lead to frustration for the client. Especially frustrating are questions that begin with "Have you tried" or "Do you think" or "What do you think," because such questions are really sneaky ways of giving advice or airing your opinion.

Open questions, on the other hand, are phrased for the purpose of exploration. An open question allows the other person to direct the flow of conversation, to bring up more data, and to deal with it in more depth. Open questions serve several functions: they can begin the interview, they may encourage the person to elaborate on a point or explore a point further; they may elicit specific examples to clarify what is being said; and they may allow the person to focus on his or her feelings.

Open questions often do something further. They lead the conversation into a more personal, here-and-now, internal mode in which the client assumes responsibility for feelings and behavior. This contrasts with the anecdotal, external style of conversation, in which the client blames others for what is happening.

As you encourage people to speak more personally, there is a greater chance they will find solutions to problems.

EXAMPLE: INTERNAL MODE

Counselor: How are you today?

Client: I'm feeling kind of down, like everything is going wrong. I'm not much fun to be with.

EXAMPLE: EXTERNAL MODE

Counselor: How are you today?

Client: I'd be okay if it weren't for the people at my house. They get on my nerves and make me feel like climbing the walls.

For open questions, "How," "What," and "Could you say more about" are appropriate beginnings, Examples of open questions are: "What would you have done then?" and "How did it happen that you were there at that time?" One especially good kind of question is, "What would you like to have happen?" or "If you could have things just the way you wanted, what would they be like?" This type of question gives people permission to fantasize, and answering the question often triggers a new insight, a new alternative.

Be careful of using "why." As mentioned in the previous chapter, beginning a question with "why" often puts the other person on the defensive. It seems to call for an explanation or justification. Using "*why"* is good if one is asking how something works ("Why does the computer do this?") but it is not very effective in other cases. Many times, a 'why" question can be rephrased so that it asks essentially the same thing hut does not elicit the defensive response. For instance, try saying to yourself, "Why did you do that?" and then ask, "How did it happen that you did that?" and see which sounds better to you. Or compare, "Why are you here now?" with "What brings you here now?"

As a peer counselor, you need to be sensitive to the "temperature" of your interview. If the person seems anxious or conversation is dying, open questions can stimulate the interchange. If you are feeling flooded with information from your client, use closed questions to cool down and slow the flow. But be careful: some seemingly closed questions can unleash a flood, for example, "Are you thinking about a divorce now?" On the other hand, some questions that sound like open questions are really "coolers," as in "Exactly what kinds of sexual behaviors **do** you engage in with your spouse?"

Minimal encouragements also move the conversation along. They may be either verbal (such as "Go on," "Uh huh," "I see," "Yes," or a repetition of the last few words the client has said—for instance, "So little time ... ?") or nonverbal (such as nodding, smiling). The important part is that they be brief and natural to you. Again, by experimenting, you should be able to find your own best style. Many times an encouragement or the simple restatement of something already said has a powerful effect, so do not be afraid to limit yourself to the use of minimal encouragements if you want to keep the conversation going.

Although we do not often think of it in this way, *silence* is a useful minimal encouragement. Practice using silence instead of asking a question and see what occurs! Being patient and not asking questions to fill silence allows the client to think, talk, and explore.

Summary—Open Questions

An **OPEN QUESTION IS** one that:

- Can't be answered by one or two words
- Usually starts with "how" or "what"
- Encourages the other person to talk

A **CLOSED QUESTION IS** one that:

- Can be answered by "yes" or "no" or by one word
- Starts with "is," "do," "have you," etc.
- Discourages the person from talking and slows the flow of conversation

You can use open questions for:

1. Beginning a conversation
   "What would you like to talk about?"
   "What's going on with you?"

2. Clarifying and elaborating "How is this a problem for you?"
   "What do you mean by _____?"
   "What is it about the situation that bothers you?"

3. Working with feelings
   "How do you feel about that?" (Make sure you get an answer about feelings, not thoughts.)
   "What is [that feeling] like for you?"
   "How do you feel right now?" (This helps people bring feelings into the here and now.)
   "What would you like to say to him/her?" (This helps people get in touch with their feelings about other people.)

4. Solving problems
   "What options do you have?"
   "What have you thought of doing?"
   "How do you feel about each of these options?"
   "What's the best thing that could happen?"
   "What's the worst thing that could happen?"
   "What do you think will actually happen?"

DON'T:

- Ask questions to satisfy your own curiosity
- Ask "Why . . ?"
- Ask long, complicated questions with lots of dependent clauses and other grammatical junk.
- Give advice in a question (e.g., "Have you tried talking to him?").

DO:

- Keep questions clear and simple.

- Keep questions in the here and now and with the person. (Don't counsel someone who's not in the room.)

PARAPHRASING

A *paraphrase* reflects the essence of the verbal content; it expresses briefly the facts of the situation but pares away details. For instance, newscasters often repeat in their own words what people said during interviews. Each of you has observed the use of the paraphrase and has probably used paraphrasing, perhaps without noticing it**.** When you take notes in a class, you probably paraphrase the instructor's lecture. When you send a telegram, you condense the message into as few words as possible—again, a form of paraphrase.

This skill is a bit sophisticated, taking more concentration and more practice than the open questions described earlier. The paraphrase has three main functions:

1. Verification of perception
2. Clarification
3. Demonstration of accurate empathy

First, a paraphrase acts as a perception check, to verify that you have understood what the other person has said. This is especially helpful if you are confused, or if you feel you may he identifying too closely with the person's situation. If you have heard correctly, the client may respond to your paraphrase by saying "Yes", "That's it", or "Right."

Second, a paraphrase may clarify what the person has said, especially if you pick up trends, set up dichotomies, or list priorities. As an active listener with some objectivity, you may see these trends and priorities more clearly than the speaker.

Third, a good paraphrase can demonstrate that you have what Carl Rogers called accurate empathy. *Accurate empathy* is a nonjudgmental reflection of another person's world view; it is "walking a mile in another's shoes."

It is important that a paraphrase be brief. It should almost always be shorter than what was originally said. Standard openings for a paraphrase are: "In other words," or "So I hear you saying_____"

You will discover other openings with which you feel comfortable.

Make the paraphrase tentative, so that if it is not right, the person feels free to correct you. It is crucial that you know when you have not heard correctly. You might end with: "Is that right?" or something similar. Watch out for endings such as "isn't it?" or "aren't you?" since these have the effects of a closed question.

What is especially tricky about paraphrasing is that if you parrot back exactly what you heard, you are not being terribly helpful and may even he irritating. (Sometimes, though, the client's wording is so apt that you may want to use some of the same words.) On the other hand, if you add too many of your own perceptions, you may be putting words into the other person's mouth. The former is called a *restatement;* the latter is an interpretation. Although both restatements and interpretations have their appropriate places, they are both quite advanced tools, and neither should take the place of the paraphrase. With a

little practice, you will be able to tell the difference between restating, paraphrasing, and interpreting.

Summary—Paraphrasing

A **PARAPHRASE IS** a brief, tentative statement that reflects the essence of what the person has just said. A good paraphrase:

- Captures the essence of what the person said; leaves out the details
- Conveys the same meaning but usually uses different words
- Is briefer than what the person said
- Is clear and concise
- Is tentative

Reasons for using paraphrase include:

1. To check *perceptions*
   When you paraphrase what you think people have said, they can react to your paraphrase and tell you whether it is accurate or inaccurate.

2. To *clarify*
   Hearing an accurate paraphrase helps clients clarify what they are thinking and feeling. Often a paraphrase will bring up new thoughts and feelings.

3. To *give accurate empathy*
   An accurate paraphrase demonstrates that you ate listening and that you understand. In effect, a good paraphrase says, "I am with you."

DO:

- Keep it brief and keep it tentative!
- Use openings such as:
  - "Let me see if I've got it right ..."
  - "Sounds like . . ."
  - "I think I hear you saying . . ."
  - "So, in other words. . ."
- End by asking, "Is that right?"

The Continuum

Restatement	Paraphrase	Interpretation
(OK)	(Best)	(Avoid, for now)

WORKING WITH FEELINGS

Working with feelings is difficult for two reasons. First, people are taught not to discuss feelings openly; feelings are too private, or too embarrassing, or too powerful to deal with directly. Second, partly as a result of such training, what people say may not match—or may not be *congruent* with—what they are communicating nonverbally. Nonverbal communication is more directly a reflection of feelings. Nevertheless, a timely reflection of feelings can be quite useful, since it gives people "permission" to own their feelings—it validates the emotional as well as the Cognitive expression.

Talking about feelings is a limited experience, so our vocabulary may he equally limited. When working with someone's feelings, avoid pejorative or evaluative terms, such as: "That's ridiculous," or "Why would you feel that?" Stick to more specific, simple, expressive words. This is a sensitive area, and you will want to refrain from interpreting what you sense or putting the client on the defensive.

There is a vast difference between saying, "You feel" and "You feel that." The former is a genuine reflection of feeling, while the latter moves into more cognitive areas. Say to yourself, "I feel happy" and then, "I feel that today is going to be a happy day." Notice the difference?

It is of paramount importance to notice both verbal and nonverbal expressions when working with feelings. (Sometimes you may even get two dissimilar verbal or two incongruous nonverbal messages.) Although you may not always want to comment on discrepancies you notice, it is helpful to use this information as a cue for your own behavior. Be sensitive, again as to when it would be appropriate to point out congruence or lack of it—and when it would be judgmental or threatening.

The four basic steps in working with feelings involve helping the person to:

1. Identify feelings
2. Define and clarify feelings
3. Acknowledge feelings and take responsibility for them
4. Deal with feelings

Identify Feelings

There are three ways to discover what someone is feeling. You want to be able to use all three and to learn when each is most appropriate.

Ask Feelings Questions

The main feelings question is "How do you feel?" Sometimes it is more effective to substitute "What emotions do you feel in relation to that?" Help your clients stick to the here and now. Talking about feelings in the past tends to turn into storytelling. Even when people's current problems involve past events, they have here-and-now feelings about what happened.

It is essential that you get feelings for answers rather than thoughts. Statements that begin with "I feel that" *or* "I feel like" usually express a thought. Statements that begin with "I feel" usually express feelings. If someone gives you a non-feeling answer, paraphrase it and then ask the feeling question again.

Counselor: How do you feel about that?

Client; Well, I feel like I should be angry at her.

Counselor: So you think you *should* be mad at her, but how do you actually *feel*? What emotion or

emotions are you experiencing?

Client: I'm pissed off at her and frustrated that I haven't told her.

Paraphrase Spoken Feelings
It's not always necessary to pry feeling out of people. Some people express their feelings quite openly. When someone does express feelings, it's a good idea to paraphrase them. This tends to clarify for people what they are expressing.

Client: I get so angry when my sister comes to visit for the holidays and all she does is complain.

Counselor: So you're feeling angry, is that right?

Reflect Feelings

Reflecting feelings is one of the most effective methods for bringing up feelings, but it is also one of the trickiest and most easily abused. The term *reflecting feelings* is slightly misleading, because what you actually reflect are a person's nonverbal expressions of feelings.

For example, a woman comes in for counseling and you notice that her face and body seem very tense. You could react in two ways:

1. "You seem to be angry."
2. "You seem to be very tense."

The first response reflects a feeling but is an interpretation. The woman might be nervous or scared and not angry at all. The second response is much better. It reflects the actual nonverbal message the woman is expressing, and it does not make a judgment or interpretation; it is not a conclusion in any sense. One of the most effective techniques is to reflect the person's nonverbal messages and then ask, "What are you feeling?" This opens the conversation rather than closing it.

Remember that reflection of feelings deals with emotions, while paraphrase deals with content and data. Sometimes
the two may seem very similar, particularly if you are talking about an emotional situation. Discuss the differences with your trainers until you are sure you understand them. When you are role playing as the client, use a situation about which you have lots of feelings.

Define and Clarify Feelings
Once you've elicited a feeling, such as "I'm upset," it is important to find out what that means to the person. This process of definition is particularly important when the feeling expressed is a *global* one, such as "I'm depressed" or "I'm lost" or "I feel good." In other words, don't assume that you know what it's like for other people. Define and clarify what their feelings, words, or expressions actually mean in *their* world. Good questions for defining and clarifying feelings include:

"What does [being mad] mean to you?"
"What is being [nervous] like for you?
"How does that feel physically?"
"What other ways would you use to describe what you're feeling?"

What often happens as you help people define and clarify feelings is that other feelings come up. These also can then be defined and explored.

Client: I feel depressed.

Counselor: How do you experience that depression?

Client: It's like a numbness, a not wanting to do anything.

Counselor: So you feel numb?

Client: Yes, I feel like there are all these feelings inside me and yet I can't really feel them. [Counselor stays silent.] You know, it just feels so numb.

Counselor: Could you describe the numbness?

Client: It feels like there's a void within me. It's empty. . . no, it's not, it's full of feelings. . . But they're dangerous. They need to be kept under control.

Counselor: What are those dangerous feelings?

Acknowledge the Feelings

To deal effectively with their feelings, people must first acknowledge and take responsibility for those feelings. Many people tend to place their feelings outside themselves, saying things such as "It makes me feel ____," or "He made me feel _____." Although feelings may be associated with external events, they are not "out there"; they are within the person. Compare these statements:

"You made me angry when you slept with Cleopatra." *vs.*
"I felt angry when you slept with Cleopatra."

The first statement suggests causation; the second, correlation. Statements that begin "It makes me feel," "She makes me feel," or "One would feel" signal that the person is not owning or taking responsibility for his or her feelings.

All of this is well and good, but what can you do if the person is *not* taking responsibility?

Client: You know, when you're working at a job you don't like, you just can't find any energy for other things. You feel bummed out and you feel disgusted, you know?

Counselor: So you feel bummed out and disgusted, is that right?

Client: Yeah, you just can't seem to break out of it you know?

Counselor: When you say, "You can't seem to break out of it," do you mean "I can't seem to break out of it"?

Client: Yes, I just can't get rid of these feelings.

Counselor: What make you want to get rid of those feelings?

What this counselor does is first to paraphrase the statement in a way that puts the responsibility on the client. Like many people, this client doesn't recognize the distinction and continues to say "you" instead

of "I." The counselor then asks a closed question that encourages the person to acknowledge the feelings personally.

This step is a tricky part of working with feelings. It is important not to challenge clients too directly, but sometimes people simply refuse to acknowledge their own feelings. When this happens, it may be necessary to take a different approach (such as a problem-solving or a "What if . . . ?" fantasy approach). It is not useful to force your point of view on people. It is often more constructive to move past or around an issue.

Deal with the Feelings

Once you have elicited the feelings, defined and clarified them, and have gotten the person to acknowledge them, then what? The first part of dealing with feelings is to place the feelings in context ("What thoughts and events are these feeling correlated with?"). Good questions are:

"What brings up this feeling of _____ for you?"
"What's the situation when you experience these feelings?"

People usually don't experience just one feeling at a time. The question "What other feelings are associated with _____ for you?" often brings up many related feelings.

It can also be useful to relate thoughts to feelings. A question such as, "What do you say to yourself when you are feeling _____?" is helpful.

An important part of dealing with feelings is to get people to express feelings that they had previously found difficult to articulate. Examples of effective questions are:

"How would you like to express this feeling?"
"What would you like to say to that person?"

It may help to have clients pretend to be speaking directly to the person to whom they are expressing the feeling. So rather than "I'd say that I'm angry and that I never want him to do it again," have clients stay in the present and say, "I'm angry and I don't want you to do that again."

If people have difficulty or are uncomfortable with this, questions such as these may help:

"What's the best (worst) thing that could happen?"
"What would you like to see happen?"
"How have you dealt with this before?"
"What could you do to feel better?"

If clients depict a situation that seems hopeless and they see no possibility for improvement, then they may he really stuck. In such cases, acknowledging this reality and their feelings about it may be more helpful than encouraging a possibly premature course of action.

Finally, the best preparation for working with feelings is to deal honestly with your own. This can he approached by role-play practice or co-counseling sessions specifically devoted to exploring your personal style of dealing with feelings.

Summary—Working with Feelings

Working with feeling is an *essential* part of counseling. It is difficult to explore alternative solutions to problems until the feelings surrounding the problem are clarified, vented, and dealt with.

1. Identify the feelings
    a. Ask feelings questions "How do you feel about that?" "How do you feel?" "What feelings does that bring up in you?"
    b. Paraphrase spoken feelings "So you are feeling ____, is that right?" "Sounds like you are really_____." "You must feel pretty _____."
2. Define and clarify feelings
    a. Elicit feelings that accompany the one that is primarily expressed
    h. Discover the individual's personal experience of a given feeling (what does the person mean when he or she says, "I feel X"?)
3. Acknowledge the feelings
    a. Assist clients in taking responsibility for their feelings
    b. Reinforce them for stating feelings in a direct, personal way (e.g., "I feel X" rather than "I feel that one should feel X in this situation, don't you?")
4. Deal with feelings
    a. Relate thoughts to feelings
    b. Further express feelings
    c. Help people express hidden feelings through best/worst fantasizing and other open questions

SUMMARIZING

A counselor's summary is like a combination of one or more paraphrases and often includes a reflection of feeling. In addition, it tends to cover a relatively long period of time—several statements of the client, perhaps from even more than one session. A summary attempts to capture the essence of what the person has said, to tie together content and feeling, to put things in perspective, and to identify important trends, conflicts, or possible decisions. Even so, it is a good idea to keep the summary brief. Being concise reduces confusion.

With summarization, more than with any other skill, there is the possibility of distortion or interpretation, so he especially sensitive. Constantly check with the person to verify that you are not adding to or subtracting from what he or she has said. Be tentative in your remarks.

As you sum up what you have observed as the two of you have talked, emphasize the positive aspects of the situation: what has been accomplished, what could he done, what the possibilities for the future are. Dwelling on the negative aspects rarely leads to constructive action, so while you may not he able to ignore them, do not limit yourself to enumerating them.

A good summary has several functions:

1. It acts as a perception check (and is especially helpful if you find you *strongly* identify with—or cannot *at all* identify with—the problem).
2. It directs the course of future interaction, decisions, and planning. Again, you should therefore be positive.
3. It clarifies the situation, reflects trends, points out conflicts, and lists priorities.

When should you use a summary? A summary is useful when shifting modes (for instance, after you have

explored feelings and are about to go into solving problems). Likewise, a summary is useful after main events in a counseling session— for example, after you've found out what the person considers to be the problem, it is useful to summarize and then go on, using an open question. A summary is also good at the end of a counseling session. It ties things together for the person, giving a clear image of the session.

After a good summary, there may be a pause or a sense of "what now?" This indicates that you are ready to move into new territory, and an open question is appropriate at that point. Learn to be sensitive to this forward movement; such sensitivity is one of your goals as an active listener.

Summary—Summarizing

A summary is a cumulative paraphrase. It captures the essence of what the person said. Like a paraphrase, it is brief and tentative. Summarizing serves many of the same purposes as paraphrasing:

- It serves as a perception check.
- It demonstrates accurate empathy.
- It clarifies for you and the client.

A summary is not a sequential recounting of what the person said. A good summary organizes what has been said into a logical, usable form. It mentions both thoughts and feelings and ties them together. A summary helps people see where they've gone and where they are going.

INTEGRATING SKILLS

Integration is putting all your skills together and using each when appropriate. This is where the art and the finesse of counseling has its fullest expression.

OPEN QUESTIONS turn on the flow of conversation. They encourage people to talk. They can also direct the conversation.

PARAPHRASING tends to interrupt the *flow.* Because a paraphrase reflects what a person has just said, it focuses the conversation. Paraphrases fit together well with open questions; first, you paraphrase; then you ask an open question.

EXPLORING FEELINGS IS useful after the initial problem has been presented. Sometimes, exploring feelings will be a very effective method of counseling Some people and some types of problems respond less to feelings-oriented counseling, and in these situations you will want to take a different approach. Remember, use what works for the client.

REVIEW OF LISTENING SKILLS

A. Minimal Attending
1. Making eye contact
2. Relaxing your body posture
3. Using a concerned facial expression and tone
4. Using verbal following (don't jump topics)

5. Responding with minimal verbal encouragers
6. Using nonverbal encouragers such as head nodding

B. Asking Open Questions
1. Beginning with "how" or "what"
2. Encouraging expression rather than yes/no answers
3. Clarifying, elaborating, working with feelings, and solving problems
4. Staying clear and simple
5. Avoiding "why" questions or leading questions

C. Paraphrasing
1. Capturing the essence of what the person said
2. Staying brief and tentative
3. Checking perceptions
4. Clarifying for the client
5. Giving accurate empathy

D. Working with Feelings
1. Identifying feelings
    a. Asking feelings questions and getting feelings answers
    b. Paraphrasing spoken feelings and reflecting unspoken feelings
2. Defining and clarifying feelings
3. Having the client acknowledge and take responsibility for feelings
4. Dealing with feelings

E. Summarizing
1. Capturing the essence of what has been said, cumulatively, and putting it into a logical and usable order
2. Being brief and tentative; "Is that right?"
3. Creating closure or shifting modes

F. Integrating Skills
1. Using open questions to encourage talking or to direct the conversation
2. Using paraphrase to slow down the conversational flow and focus the conversation
3. Explore feelings before solving problems
4. Summarizing to help wrap things up

A FINAL WORD ON THE COUNSELING SITUATION

The guiding philosophy for peer counseling is that the client is in charge. You are there to help people deal with their emotions and find their own solutions. There are times, however, when something goes wrong in the counseling process itself, and it becomes necessary to talk about it—namely, when you find yourself becoming frustrated, anxious, or angry. Dealing with such a situation requires assertiveness on your part but it is essential to deal with it in order to preserve the counseling situation. You can't be an effective counselor if you are wishing you were somewhere else.

Here are some typical situations that make some counselors uneasy;

1. You feel like you are going around in circles and not getting anywhere. The usual way of dealing with this situation is to pick one area to concentrate on and not let the client get away from it. But if it gets to be too much of a problem, it's a good idea to talk about it with the

person. Expressing your feelings ("I'm getting really frustrated because I . . .") will get you farther than if you sound as though you are accusing the other person ("We're not getting anywhere because you...").

2. The client starts crying. This can be an essential part of releasing pent-up emotions. Some people find that it helps to reassure the person that it's okay to cry. Sometimes touching the person, or even giving him or her a shoulder to cry on, can be appropriate, depending on your style and the situation.

3. The client becomes hysterical. Talking with people calmly can sometimes help them settle down. At times, however, clients may be too distraught to talk to you at all. In this situation, you can stay until the person settles down and is able to talk. Or you may want to ask whether your client prefers to be alone for a while or wants to continue the session at a later time. In any case, try to ascertain whether the person wants you to stay. Be prepared for a rather lengthy session.

   If you are counseling on the telephone and the person cannot calm down, ask whether it would not be better to talk again in a short while. Try to get the person's phone number so you can return the call in fifteen or twenty minutes. Gently say that you cannot talk while the person is so overcome and that you would be willing either to stay on the line while he or she calms down or to call back at a later time.

4. You are attracted to the client, or the client is attracted you, or both; or the person is lonely and would like to have you as a friend. You may not have to deal with this situation immediately unless it is getting in the way of your counseling; hut at some point, you will probably have to clarify the nature of your relationship. If the person is coming back to see you (or will call you again), and you have the feeling that it is not for counseling, you have to decide if you are willing to continue working with him or her. If so, it is a good idea to clarify the relationship and not get stuck between being the person's counselor (which is something of a position of power, even in peer counseling) and being his or her friend. It is never appropriate to maintain a dual relationship (e.g., being someone's counselor and seeing them socially at the same time).

5. A person wants to have someone to talk to, rather than to work on problems. If you want to accept this, fine. But if you don't, you can be firm about being willing to talk about problems, but not being willing just to talk. If the person starts attacking you ("I called this place because I thought you cared about people, and here you won't talk to *me!"),* a good rule of thumb is: ***DON'T*** DEFEND YOURSELF. It will only prolong the situation. Instead, keep repeating yourself until the person gets the message.