

LEOPARD CHANGE YOUR SPOTS

Companion to a
CO-COUNSELLING
Course

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Co-Counselling is:-

FOR ME

- To Sort out PROBLEMS.
- To Sort out My LIFE.
- To UNBURDEN.
- To FEEL LISTENED TO.
- To DEVELOP My POTENTIAL
- To DISCARD My BLOCKS.
- To FIND A DIRECTION.
- To FEEL USEFUL.
- To FIND out About MYSELF.

To: FOSTER REV-
ELATION
OLUTION
SIZZLE!

To
!" BE REAL "!



To: Be able to get in touch with FEELINGS
To: Be able to Express Them to OTHERS.

BRACKNELL College Group 1988.

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FOREWORD

(November, 1985)

This booklet has evolved from a collection of handouts prepared for students on Inner London Education Authority co-counseling courses from '82 – '85. For those students for whom, like me, it is hard to keep track of bits of paper, I thought it would be helpful to bind them all together with a 'Contents' section to explain what is where. Also, I thought it might prove useful for individuals considering whether or not you want to learn co-counselling.

For 'one-way' practitioners considering using the methods described here – a word of caution. They are effective in the co-counselling context because the client is in charge and knows what to expect. Without this mutual training, the methods can take you and your client by surprise. The best way to understand the impact of co-counselling interventions is to experience them for yourself in the facilitative climate which a co-counselling course provides.

My appreciation for helping to make this booklet goes first to the students at Chelsea Westminster, Hammersmith, Camden and Fulham Adult Education Institutes. Their questions, confusions and insights told me what to write. This would not have been possible without the support of Laura Ashley, Head of Liberal Studies at Chelsea Westminster, who first submitted my course proposals to the Institute and to the Inspectorate of County Hall. The layout of the manual, and the fact of its ever getting made at all, is down to Val Manzione at Fulham & S. Kensington AEI. Liz Rivers drew me the cover design and so a special thank you to her.

The sensitive and skillful counselling I received from Anna and members of the Garfield Co-Counselling peer group sustained me, imparted confidence and provided a solid background for my teaching. Also, I am especially fortunate for the support of Dave, Lucy and Zoe, who tolerated my sitting endlessly at the typewriter, and a house full of coloured papers (strictly not for drawing on!). I am delighted that they too are proud of my work.

The principles, attitudes and methods described were taught to me by John Heron who founded the Independent Co-counselling Community, and who remains a source of inspiration and support. This booklet does not, however, represent the views of Harvey Jackins 'Re-Evaluation Counselling' from which Independent Co-counselling was derived and to which it owes most of its philosophy and practice.

The errors and confusions in these pages are my own responsibility. I hope you will draw them to my attention in time for the next edition. There is a wealth of spelling mistakes, some Freudian, some banal, which I trust you will enjoy or ignore. After Christmas, I hope to provide the section 'About Me' and Chapters 10 & 11 on 'Styles of Co-counselling' and on 'Students' reactions to the Course'. I don't envisage re-writing the rest unless I have access to a word-processor. Meantime, read on, and I wish you a New Year full of challenging self-discoveries.

Barbara W Williams,

FOREWORD 2 (1989 Interim Edition)

Well, Folks – it's four years on and it seems that several people are still wanting copies of this 'Leopard'. Thank you for the positive feedback you have given, which has encouraged me to bring out this slightly expanded version.

I now have a word-processor, but learning to use it well is another matter. That means this edition too will retain all the quaint errors which I hope you enjoy. A favourite of mine is 'resposibility'. This no doubt conveys the feeling of relief when I don't avoid taking it, to choose a positive interpretation!

In this edition, I have supplied the missing section (About The Author and Chapters 10 & 11); have expanded the Peer Group section and provided illustrations and diagrams. Thank you to Kay Brown who did a couple of them – especially the one inside the back cover, which has lots of clever symbolism.

As before, I have referred to clients and counsellors as 's/he' or 'they' choosing to be ungrammatical and clumsy rather than excluding either gender.

I hope you find these additions help to clarify some issues and stimulate ideas in your teaching or co-co practice.

Happy Co-Counselling.

Barbara W. Williams
October '89

Foreword 3 (September 2015)

I've been meaning to revise the Leopard for 26 years, but now realize that I'm unlikely ever to do this. However, now that we are in a computerized age, I am happy to have it uploaded to the CCI website.

Since writing the "Leopard", I have trained as a cognitive-analytic therapy (CAT) psychotherapist, but I still think co-co has much to offer that one-way therapies can never replicate.

CAT, invented by Anthony Ryle, has some similar principles to co-co. Firstly, it seeks "active participation" from the client. Also, it sees recognizing and changing entrenched patterns as key to self-development. It describes patterns as "traps" (self-fulfilling prophecies that re-inforce beliefs), "snags" (ways of sabotaging ourselves) and "dilemmas" (seeing things as if there are only two ways to be ("I am either a jelly or a battering ram")). CAT also talks about role relationships, usually derived from childhood, as drivers of patterned behaviour. For example, a relentlessly critical parent might produce a child who feels unacceptable, and whose pattern is to please too far in order to gain approval. This is likely to lead to exploitation and self-criticism for not being able to do enough. If you are interested, you can find out about CAT on www.acat.me.uk or Elizabeth Wilde McCormick's book "Change for the Better".

These days, much is talked about "evidence-based practice", but methods of collecting and interpreting evidence leave much to be desired. I once looked at outcomes from a co-co course, and found positive results, but the sample was too small to draw any conclusions. I understand from Rose Evison that recent studies on emotion bears out much of the co-co view about the importance of "discharge". Cognitive-behavioural (CBT) therapists who emphasize the importance of thoughts in fuelling psychological distress are also noting that "hot" thoughts are very important in the process of therapy and personal change.

Co-counselling seems to me to embody ideas that have been developed by many psychotherapies (there are several hundred on the market!) including cognitive, behavioural, psycho-analytic and compassion-based "Mindfulness" approaches. Whenever, I come across a "new" therapeutic approach, I find myself thinking – "we did this in co-co years ago".

Thank you for looking at the Leopard and I hope you can take some ideas from it that will nurture you as you grow.

All best wishes,

Barbara

INTRODUCTION

What is Co-Counselling?

Co-Counselling is a method for people to meet together as equals to deal with our distress and develop more satisfying and constructive approaches to life. We hold the view that people can behave in much more intelligent and loving ways than normally happens but because of being hurt over and over again we become unable to respond fully to new situations. An example could be the child who is repeatedly reprimanded by the formidable headmaster and then gets reduced to jelly in the presence of authoritative people ever-after. Being 'reduced to jelly'; throwing tantrums; taking it out on someone else; 'hurting first' or simply withdrawing from contact are all forms of what co-counsellors call 'patterns'. We are said to be 'in pattern' when we cannot stop reacting in the same old fruitless way – however hard we try.

To break these patterns, people need to review the original situation and fully communicate their feelings related to this incident. When the pent-up feelings are let go, or 'discharged', a new perspective emerges and a more flexible approach can be adopted to similar instances.

Co-counselling provides people with the opportunity to break unwanted patterns; implement new ways to be and, in recognizing their existing strengths, to take pride in their being and becoming. We Leopards can change our spots and co-counselling is a good way to accomplish this.

HOW CO-COUNSELLING IS DONE – CLIENT AND COUNSELLOR ROLES

Co-Counselling is done in pairs, with each person taking half the time in the client role and half the time as counsellor. This way, no one feels inferior, no one is dependent, and everybody learns not to interfere in each other's lives.

Clients identify problems, distressing events, relationship difficulties, or areas where they do less well than expected and use a set of specific techniques to work on these issues. Clients are in complete charge of the sessions, determining the content, rate and depth of their work. Their tasks are to consolidate strengths, shed past distress and develop and attain realistic life goals.

The counsellor's role is to give full attention and support, and, based on an agreed contract with the client, to make suggestions as to how the client might work. The counsellor is there to facilitate clients in their self-expression, not to be the expert with information, advice, interpretation or anything which supplements the client's thinking. Counsellors are there to listen, care and provide a safe situation in which the client can work. They always keep the content of the session completely confidential.

TRAINING TO BE A CO-COUNSELLOR

You learn to co-counsel in a 'fundamentals' course, which provides training in the roles of client and counsellor. Participants try out co-counselling exercises under supervision, starting with very brief sessions and increasing the time spent as their skills and confidence grow. After each short 'mini' session clients can give feedback on their experience and counsellors are invited to raise problems, but never discussing the content of the client's problem. Demonstrations are given to the group by the tutor and group exercises are introduced so that everyone can benefit from the supportive atmosphere. Initially, we concentrate on strength-building – learning to value ourselves more and looking at good and joyful moments in our lives. We laugh a lot and play together, finding that informality gives us more freedom to be creative. As we build trust in one another we are able to approach more painful areas and learn how to tackle our difficulties. The final phase is planning and thinking constructively, and in learning to work without the support of the tutor.

NETWORK

The course aims to give you the knowledge and skill to co-counsel for yourself but the counselling you need will mostly come from your own practice sessions in between classes and after the course is completed. When you have successfully completed your fundamentals course, you may wish to join a local Independent Co-Counselling Support Network. This will put you in contact with other co-counsellors and inform you in a newsletter about workshops, support ("peer") groups and advanced or refresher courses that are being offered. You will also have the opportunity to co-ordinate a group of co-counsellors who share a particular concern or wish to explore a common theme by announcing it in the Co-Counselling International Newsletter or via your local network. Local networks are in London and various UK locations and are part of an international venture. There are national UK workshops and international conferences you can attend. Some people prefer always to co-counsel on a one-to-one basis whilst others find day workshops or ongoing groups more helpful. There is no demand made on members to participate in community activities and each person can choose what is most helpful for themselves.

WHO IS CO-COUNSELLING FOR?

Co-counselling is for people who are coping adequately but feel that in some way their lives could be more colourful, productive or fulfilling. It is useful for anyone who is willing to share personal experiences and listen to other people at length. It is generally not for people who are heavily distressed or under psychiatric treatment. Co-counselling is particularly recommended for members of the helping professions and voluntary workers.

CO-COUNSELLING IN YOUR PROFESSIONAL WORK

Although it is primarily a tool for personal growth, Co-Counselling has particular relevance to persons working in the 'helping' professions; persons meeting the public in an advisory capacity, and persons with a management role such as personnel officers.

Advisory and Management Roles

The insights and strategies learned through co-counselling develop your interpersonal skills, especially in:

- Establishing a firm but caring structure
- Imparting confidence
- Creating a high morale in the work team
- Listening: hearing the message behind the words; identifying needs
- Dealing with irate staff-members; clients or students
- Dealing with distress, frustration and emotional outbursts
- Establishing good customer relations
- Counselling staff who are under-functioning or present problems within a team.

Helping Professions and Voluntary Workers

Co-counselling is particularly useful in this area of work because it develops your listening and counselling skills and teaches you methods for managing distress.

On the conceptual level, you learn about the development of maladaptive behaviour and about the psychodynamics of client-counsellor relationships. You learn from a personal viewpoint how it feels to be a client and to work on problems. In working through some of your own difficulties, you feel clearer and less threatened when a client's material evokes aspects of your own life. This enables you to listen better, counsel more appropriately and be confident in dealing with transference issues (see ID check).

In working with deprived persons, you are likely to encounter much distrust and dismissiveness in response to your caring. Co-Counselling helps replenish some of what you give, offers you support in your work and helps to consolidate your strengths.

NOTE – There is no formal qualification in co-counselling and completion of the course would not enable you to become a professional counsellor.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

“Listen! Do you hear – there’s a duck in the other room. Come and see. Look at this – you have a baby sister!”

With these words I was introduced to my nine-year-old brother. It was 2nd April, 1945 and I had just missed being born on ‘All Fools Day’. Actually, I arrived sooner than the doctor had predicted, but the joke implying that April 1st would have been more suitable somehow seems to sum up my early years when I was always in trouble for foolish things; saying it wrong; doing it wrong; dropping it; losing it or forgetting it.

My Dad, ever the humourist, thought that when you **speak** you should **say something**. But unfortunately he lamented, “whenever Barbara opens her mouth she puts her foot in it”. Dad was an idealist and a perfectionist who had to have things exactly right or it was a disaster. Mum was warm and fiery: she worried terribly about what other people would think. She was forever disapproving of me and would fly into a rage when I lost a handkerchief or admitted some similar sin. At primary school, I would rush out at playtime and find a hiding place where I would stay alone until the whistle was blown, for fear of bullying ‘big’ girls. On family visits from the ages of 12 – 18, I vowed never to say anything except, ‘please’, ‘thank you’ and would you like some of these?’

After the shock of discovering me, my brother determined to become my protector and tried to educate me. However, I was only interested in larking about and always ended up disappointing him. He was an avid academic-to-be. He taught me to decline ‘mensa’ in Latin and conjugate Greek verbs in bed on Sunday mornings. Next came science and the definition of photosynthesis, which I mistook for Greek poetry. Years later, following in Terry’s footsteps, I tried to take ancient Greek at ‘A’ level. I took it 3 times obtaining grade D the first time, C the second time and back to D the third time. I always promised myself that if ever I became successful, I would put these relics on the wall. This year I became a Chartered Psychologist, which in a way could count, but true to form, I don’t now know where those ‘A’ level certificates have got to!

In between school and university, I worked in lots of offices as a ‘temp’. I had decided to study psychology, in the hope of sorting out myself and my family and learning to understand people. I was very lucky to be accepted at Manchester University in that it was about the last person-centered course in what subsequently became a black box and ratomorphic¹ era. I came out of University in ‘68, with more understanding, of what was going wrong, but no idea how to change any of it.

After leaving University, I discovered Carl Rogers’ books, and for the first time had that wonderful feeling that somebody somewhere could understand me.

¹ See Arthur Koestler ‘The Ghost in the Machine

Emboldened by this, and the notion that I might be an okay person after all, I kept applying for clinical psychology posts throughout the next year and eventually was accepted as a trainee. Through being seconded on courses, I discovered the 'Growth Movement' and participated in numerous therapy groups and workshops. They included Encounter, Gestalt, Psychodrama, T.A. and Family Therapy. Although these were all encouraging and helpful, I continued to under-achieve and could not seem to find my way. My boss complained I did nothing innovative only undertaking what was asked of me.

In February 1976, I did a Fundamentals course in co-counselling with John Heron. He invited me to go around the group merrily proclaiming, "I can put my foot in it delightfully!" Suddenly everything seemed different. I set up psychodrama groups on the wards and started staff-support and training groups. I felt much more confident and less apprehensive of causing trouble. People responded to my initiatives and asked for more. In 1977, Dave and I got married and Lucy and Zoe were born a few years later. Now they are ten and nine years old and everyone they meet seems to say fantastically nice things about them. I'm very proud that their experience is of being a pleasure, and they are not having to repeat my past.

Perhaps it was a summary of all the other individual and group work I had done, perhaps I exaggerate and in the words of my one secondary school friend, "you haven't changed at all". However, I am convinced that the co-counselling course was a turning point in my life. It's unique combination of reciprocity, validation, catharsis and cognition worked the 'magic' which enabled me to feel better and appear more personally effective to many people. I feel I could have been saved years of anguish if I'd found it sooner. Similarly, people who see me in my professional capacity often say, "You're the first person I've been able to talk to like this". I think it wrong that I struggled so long before I found the help that suited me. I think it wrong that people should have to feel so awful they need psychiatrists and psychologists before they can talk about their feelings and needs. By teaching co-counselling, and writing this booklet, I hope to create earlier opportunities for others to find that help. Then together we can create a climate of more acceptance and less hurt in which future generations can flourish.

CHAPTER 1 : WHY CO-CO WORKS: BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

Human Potential

Allowed to develop naturally and given the fulfillment of basic human needs, every person has enormous capacity for intelligence, creativity, joy, warmth, affection and love.

Intelligence for co-counsellors is seen as the ability to create new, unique, appropriate responses to each unique experience that confronts them. Whereas most animals rely on instinctual, pre-set behaviours for survival – humans survive through flexibility and inventiveness. So, to be unintelligent implies impairment of the ability to develop new behaviours but instead to keep on irrationally repeating old behaviours which have previously been shown not to work.

Human Vulnerability

Human beings have little in the way of genetic endowment to ensure their needs are fulfilled. As well as obvious physical needs such as the avoidance of pain, hunger and thirst, psychological needs are paramount: the need to love and be loved; to understand and be understood and the freedom to choose – to be self-directing. Techniques for the satisfaction of these needs are flexible and derived through the process of socialization. This involves growing up as a member of a family within society and learning to express oneself within the society's culture. Because of this it is inevitable that needs are often frustrated and their expression blocked. When the person is distressed in this way, negative 'hurt' feelings are evoked such as grief, fear, anger and embarrassment.

Co-counselling theory maintains that when a person is hurt, and this hurt is not healed in the appropriate way, human potential is blocked and rigid, so irrational behaviours emerge. Healing involves expressing and sharing the hurt, and receiving comfort. Stored distress prevents people behaving rationally and compassionately.

Natural Discharge

Natural mechanisms for dealing with hurt are visible in the young child who cries freely if upset; rages when frustrated and screams or shakes when frightened. If the feelings are expressed and the child receives comfort, the situation is resolved and s/he happily resumes play having got the whole episode in perspective.

Human Patterns

However, if they are prevented from the natural expression of feelings, the hurtful situation remains unresolved and unevaluated. Persons cannot think rationally when being hurt so their reaction in terms of the attitudes they adopt or the behaviours they produce are likely to be maladaptive. The usual intelligent process of recording information appropriately and with discrimination is shut down so that the hurtful event is received and recorded piecemeal. No selection or adequate assessment of the situation can be made.

When this happens the impression of the event together with the accompanying thoughts and reactions become stored like a recording. In the recording are all the sights, smells and sensations of the original event and the way the individual reacted to them. This distress recording lies dormant until something in any subsequent situation triggers a memory of the original hurt. Even if the situation is not in itself hurtful, the recording can be activated so that the person will feel, adopt attitudes and behave in just the same way as they did before. This rigid, inflexible and inappropriate reaction is known to co-counsellors as patterned behaviour or 'acting in pattern'.

The triggering of a rigid response pattern is known as "re-stimulation". Most patterns are re-stimulated intermittently by what are themselves innocuous features of the environment. For example if, in your childhood, a formidable headmaster who used to wear dark suits frequently reprimanded you, you might always become numbed and inarticulate in the presence of dark-suited strangers. Typical triggers are clothing, wallpaper patterns, facial features, hair-colour, gestures, people's names or their professional roles. Patterns triggered in this way are known as 'intermittent patterns' because they only operate when there is a trigger.

Chronic Patterns

Sometimes a pattern is triggered so often that it runs continuously without requiring any further reminders. This is called a 'chronic pattern'. Whereas intermittent patterns are relatively easy to detect and work through, chronic patterns are ingrained and the individual finds it hard to recognize their irrationality. Instead they would view the pattern as 'a fact of life' or part of their personality – "It's just the way I am". Such patterns would include chronic feelings of worthlessness and un-lovability or inability to trust or care for others.

Suppression of Feelings (The Non-Cathartic Society)

Unfortunately, many attitudes in our culture favour the suppression instead of the acceptance of feelings. Being 'emotional' is regarded as not quite BRITISH and people are taught to 'keep a stiff upper lip', not to cry and not to lose their tempers. Showing fearfulness is also regarded as a sign of

weakness. Traditionally, men and boys are expected to be strong and logical, not showing their vulnerability while it is regarded as unfeminine for women to be angry and forceful. Because of these values, more and more hurts are stored, unexpressed and undischarged. Consequently, people's activity becomes increasingly taken up by rigid irrational patterns of behaviour. The more this happens, the more people feel unreal – unacceptable to others and alienated from themselves. This in turn distorts the relationships they make so that more hurts are received and similarly undischarged with a snowballing of patterns throughout the generations.

Aims of Co-Counselling

The object of co-counselling is for people to meet in an atmosphere of acceptance and respect so that they feel free to express themselves without fear of rejection and knowing that they will instead receive supportive and caring attention. In these circumstances people are able to review themselves and their lives. They can see their good qualities and celebrate them and can also begin to look at the things they dislike or find contradictory. Eventually, they can look at their deepest hurts and express the feelings of grief, anger, fear and embarrassment associated with them. Through doing this they let go or 'discharge' the hurt feelings thereby making the incidents open to rational thinking and re-evaluation. The whole pattern then starts to break up allowing flexible and appropriate behaviour to be adopted where before it was rigid and maladaptive. After a while people find they can understand themselves much better and behave as they would wish rather than in a trapped, compulsive way. They feel more accepted and can accept themselves better. They find emerging in themselves a greater capacity for celebration and joy.

Roles of Client and Counsellor

In co-counselling, people meet together as equals taking it in turns to be client and counsellor. This way, the client learns that the counsellor has no magic answers and they must find the way forward autonomously. The counsellor only intervenes on the basis of an agreed contract with the client, and since they know how it feels to be a client, make sure they do 'not take over' but allow clients to find their own path. The reciprocal relationship co-counsellors enjoy avoids the dependency problems typically found in one-way therapy.

Example of the Development of Patterned Behaviour

It is Sunday afternoon, a 7-year old girl complains of severe pain in her jaw. Mother is busy preparing the lunch for a family of eight people. She tells the child to go and lie down on the couch.

The child's pain grows increasingly intense but she sees mother is unable to help. More important than her pain, seems to be the Sunday lunch and the needs of her older siblings. She presses her head into the couch to try and numb the painful sensations.

The situation continues for hours and all through the night. The next morning a neighbor arrives and looks in the child's mouth. The result is she is rushed off to hospital for an emergency operation.

At 45 years, the woman is seen by a psychologist. She is diagnosed as "hypochondriacal" and is one of those people that doctors can find an imposition. She has several times had symptoms that doctors have ascribed to her 'nerves' but have subsequently been found to be physical in origin. The more often this happens, the more she worries over each little sensation she feels and the more dismissive the doctors become.

So the patient's pattern is:

- To try and contain the pain whilst tentatively and unconvincingly informing people that she is hurting
- To believe that she is not important enough for people to bother about – no one will notice unless she is virtually at death's door
- To suppress any anger at the lack of attention, whilst always being available to other people in need.

Chapter 2:

COMMITMENT TO THE COURSE: HOW TO MAKE IT WORK FOR YOU

The Course as A community

In joining the course you should wish to be supportive to the other participants and enable them to be supportive to you. Each person is responsible for themselves and should expect to treat others with respect and tolerance. Some behaviour is not tolerable such as violence, racist or sexist remarks, but we must always be clear to differentiate the person from the pattern they carry. We oppose the patterned behaviour not the person. In doing this we create a warm and nurturing atmosphere where people feel safe to be themselves and take pleasure in each other's emerging strengths.

Attendance

Because co-counselling is about giving mutual support, each person on the course makes their own unique contribution which has an impact on the way the group feels and has special significance for the people with whom they have worked. Because of this, it is very noticeable if someone is absent from the group. Please telephone or leave a message at the office if something makes it impossible for you to come.

If you decide the group is not right for you, please come to one more meeting to let the group know your decision and say their farewells.

Starting On Time

The beginnings of each group are important for renewing contact and setting the scene for the evening. My experience is that persons who frequently come late miss more than I can explain and gain less from the course than they should. Also, arriving late means that you may interrupt the discussion, or be left out of an exercise that has already commenced.

Some Taboos

Violence, smoking, drugs, aspirin or any artificial mood-changer, are incompatible with co-counselling.

Friendships

You are asked not to mix friendship and co-counselling. It's very hard to counsel freely about your partner if your counsellor has invited you both to dinner! Also, the special rapport of the counselling relationship creates false expectations and risk of being hurt.

Persons having therapy or psychiatric treatment

Co-Counselling is not suitable for severely distressed or disturbed persons who need and deserve one-way help. Please check with your therapist that

co-counselling is appropriate for you. If you have any doubts, please talk to the course organizer.

How To Get The Best From The Course

- Keep attending even when it feels tough
- Voice your difficulties: they may then become more acceptable to you, or we might change things to meet your needs.
- Feelings are to be expressed but not vented on the group or the furniture: no violence!
- Counsel between meetings as often as possible. Keep it businesslike not a social meeting.
- Take responsibility for yourself and be aware of others' needs. Don't pressure people.
- Be scrupulous about confidentiality.

Equipment

Please bring a floor cushion or pillow to each meeting. As well as their use for sitting on, cushions have a range of functions that emerges as the course gets under way.

Chapter 3: SETTING THE SCENE FOR WORKING

3.0 Rationale for Co-Counselling

Assumptions about human potential; origins of rigid, irrational behaviour patterns; stress as enabling and disabling; use of catharsis in producing rationality and flexibility, need for individuals to develop their own standards and style in a society favouring personal autonomy rather than tradition in deciding how to be (see BASIC CONCEPTS for details).

3.1 Method of Co-Counselling

3.1.1 Structure

Client-directed: Client determines the content, rate and depth of the work; client specifies the contract, which determines what counselling interventions are acceptable; client can reject counselling interventions; clients can make their own interventions.

Equal Time: in any one session the time is halved and each person spends half the time taking the client role and half the counsellor role.

Confidentiality: the counsellor never refers to the content of the client's work after the session, not even to the client or the course teacher.

3.1.2. Types of Contract

The client specifies the contract at the beginning of the session:

- “Free attention”: Counsellor gives non-verbal support only.
- “Normal”: Counsellor intervenes if the client appears stuck, in pattern, or to be missing their cues.
- “Intensive”: Counsellor uses every cue to encourage the client in working on a chronic pattern (not for beginners).

3.1.3. Ways to work for the client

- Strength building: focusing on positives – celebration, appreciation, validation.
- Reviewing and discharging: expressing and sharing the feelings evoked by problems; unsatisfying interpersonal situations; areas of under-achievement, or distressing memories so as to gain new perspectives and allow more spontaneous and satisfying responses.
- Planning and Thinking: long and short-term goal setting; thinking through intellectual problems; brainstorming; taking stock; exploring new ideas.

3.1.4 Ways to work for the counsellor

The counsellor's role is to give full attention and support and, on the basis of an agreed contract with the client, to make suggestions as to how the client could work. A range of techniques is available to the counsellor but knowledge of these is secondary in importance to an attentive, non-intrusive, caring attitude.

3.2.0 THE IMPORTANCE OF ATTENTION

3.2.1. Free attention

As counsellor, you are able to give 'free attention' when you can clear your mind of other thoughts, hopes, memories, distresses etc. and attend fully to your client. Giving free attention means listening without saying anything at all, but non-verbally conveying your interest, caring and empathy for the client. You listen without judging or evaluating the client's material, trying to see the world through your client's eyes. You can show that you are 'with' the client through touch and eye contact. Eye contact should be continually offered, but in a relaxed, non-obtrusive way. Avoid too much facial expression, so as not to reinforce the client's material and bias the direction of the work.

Free attention can be a very powerful tool to help your client release feelings and explore material at a deeper level.

Beginning co-counsellors often feel at a loss in knowing how to support their clients: they feel they should 'offer' something. The best you can offer is a safe situation where clients can explore for themselves, arriving at their own insights and solutions. 'Helping', on the other hand, can actually deprive the client of the opportunity for self-discovery and the confidence derived from this. If you do not believe this, please keep it as a working hypothesis, and see for yourself what the client can do if s/he is not intruded on.

3.2.2. Balance of attention

Discharge appears more effective in providing release from patterned behaviour when done in the presence of a caring listener – maybe in a similar way that it helps a hurt child to be held whilst crying. This is probably because distress can better be kept in perspective when the client has to divide attention between the 'here and now' of the counselling relationship and the problems being explored. With the counsellor present, clients are less likely to become engulfed by the problem and can retain awareness of the self that exists behind the pattern.

3.2.3. Attention Sunk

When a person has no awareness of anything beyond or outside a problem area s/he becomes totally wrapped up and engulfed by it as if this is the only reality. For example, 'I am wicked' instead of 'I behaved badly in that instance'. A prolonged period with attention sunk would mean depression, listlessness, apathy. When this happens there is generally a mass of pent up feelings which cannot be discharged and instead the person is numbed, unreachable, in a dream. Most of us have experienced this in a mild form when we have too much to cope with and just carry on 'on automatic'. To other people we would not seem different but very close friends would probably realize. As far as our experience goes, we miss a lot of what is going on; we are insensitive to shades of meaning or colour, we register things dimly without our usual sharpness or clarity and without being able to properly evaluate what is happening. Co-counsellors call this state being 'shut-down'. We are said to be 'shut down' when we cannot operate our flexible aware intelligence.

More fleetingly, our attention is likely to become 'trapped' in thinking about our own needs and life when, as counsellors, we need to be there for our client.

3.2.4 Attention 'out'

Evidently, it is important for both client and counsellor to learn to switch attention from other involvements onto the task of 'here and now'. Counsellors need to be able to give free attention and clients need to maintain a balance of attention. Also, clients need to ensure that they can end a session on a constructive note keeping their attention away from distress. A range of techniques are available for this, but they all involve switching thoughts onto something neutral, abstract, pleasant or vivid in imagery (see present-time techniques).

3.2.5 Warm-Ups

Although not in themselves co-counselling, trust games and exercises involving touching and sharing are found to help spontaneity and openness in groups. There is a comforting, caring element in them, which seems to promote closeness. Games involving physical activity are very good for getting attention out. However, if people are very uncomfortable with these games they should never be pressurized. They have their own good reasons. Persons with physical injuries or problems often have to opt out of the 'rough and tumble' but may wish to share what they have witnessed or what it means to them. Gentler forms of nurturing can be found where this is desirable. If people have had bad experiences with touch, they will not be able to participate and instead can observe and talk about what they have seen and how it affects them.

3.3.0. What Co-counselling is Not

The counsellor's role is always to help the client work, but not by becoming involved in the client's material or contributing to it in anyway. If the client has specified a normal contract, the counsellor can intervene in various ways, which we shall demonstrate later. These methods do not include:

- Discussion
- Advice
- Criticism/feedback
- Sharing your experience or other people's
- Asking information
- Giving information; Analyzing
- Diagnosing
- Interpreting
- Confronting
- Suggesting topics to work on
- Filling in gaps or silences" to make them feel comfortable".

In terms of John Heron's 6 Category Intervention Analysis* (Prescriptive, Informative, Confrontational: Cathartic, Catalytic, Supportive), Co-counselling focuses on the two 'facilitative' categories cathartic and supportive with the whole process of attention and eye contact being in itself catalytic. The first three 'authoritarian' categories are not acceptable in co-counselling. They are available in plenty from friends and experts in everyday life, but co-counselling helps us to explore the blocks that prevent us using or accepting the advice and feedback available from other sources.

3.4.0. Listening skills

Your listening takes on a different quality when you know you may not respond in the ways specified above. Difficulty in listening this way generally has its roots in your own past, as attention can only be given freely when not trapped in distress. To understand more about the factors that inhibit your listening, take note of some of the times where you have a strong 'urge to tell' ** and reflect on them after the session. For example:-

If you feel like giving advice to your client – try giving it to yourself instead!

If you feel like asking questions, try and see why you need to know.

If you feel your client is missing something, see if you also need to explore that possibility.

If you feel your client needs more help, look at your own need for help and how it has been met from parents onwards.

3.5.0 .Holding Patterns in the Client

As client, your aim is to express and share feelings, but your capacity for emotional release is likely to be inhibited by reluctance to revisit painful memories and by cultural conditioning on a variety of levels. Language itself often provides an inbuilt device for distancing people from the personal meaning of events they describe.

Because of this, co-counsellors do not have conversations when they work but aim to use voice, sounds and words in special ways to evoke the elusive feelings.

A range of techniques is available to help clients but some general points are useful initially.

3.5.1. Owning Experience

Always describe your experiences in the 'first person' e.g. "I'm finding it much harder to make friends as I get older" is much more authentic and immediate than:-

"One finds it harder to make friends as one gets older"

"You find it harder to make friends as you get older"

"People find it harder to make friends as they get older".

3.5.2. Personalize don't Generalize

In the same vein:

"I find it hard to make friends"

Is more of a personal statement than

"It is hard to make friends"

Generalizing tends to put the feelings 'out there' in other people or in everybody so they don't seem to matter. Personalizing makes the experience much more real, alive 'in me'.

3.5.3. Be There for Yourself

The session is for the client, not the counsellor. One way of avoiding distress is to entertain your counsellor, or tell the story of your life so that the counsellor is in the picture. What actually happens is you put the problem into the counsellor instead of taking responsibility to work on it for yourself. 'Dumping' the problem this way will not help your counsellor feel good! Remember that the counsellor does not actually need to understand what you are doing or saying.

3.5.4. Spot Your Pattern

As well as using language to distance yourself from feelings, you can dismiss your material by the way you hold your body e.g. shrugging it off; the way you

react e.g. laughing it off; and the way you distrust your counsellor with it. Noticing where you use these plays will help you to work more effectively. Some common patterns in the client-counsellor relationship are;

“I shouldn’t have all this attention”

“I must put on a show / interest / entertain the counsellor”

“I must justify myself to the counsellor”

“The counsellor would not want to know me if I shared my deep concerns about myself”

“The counsellor disapproves of me”

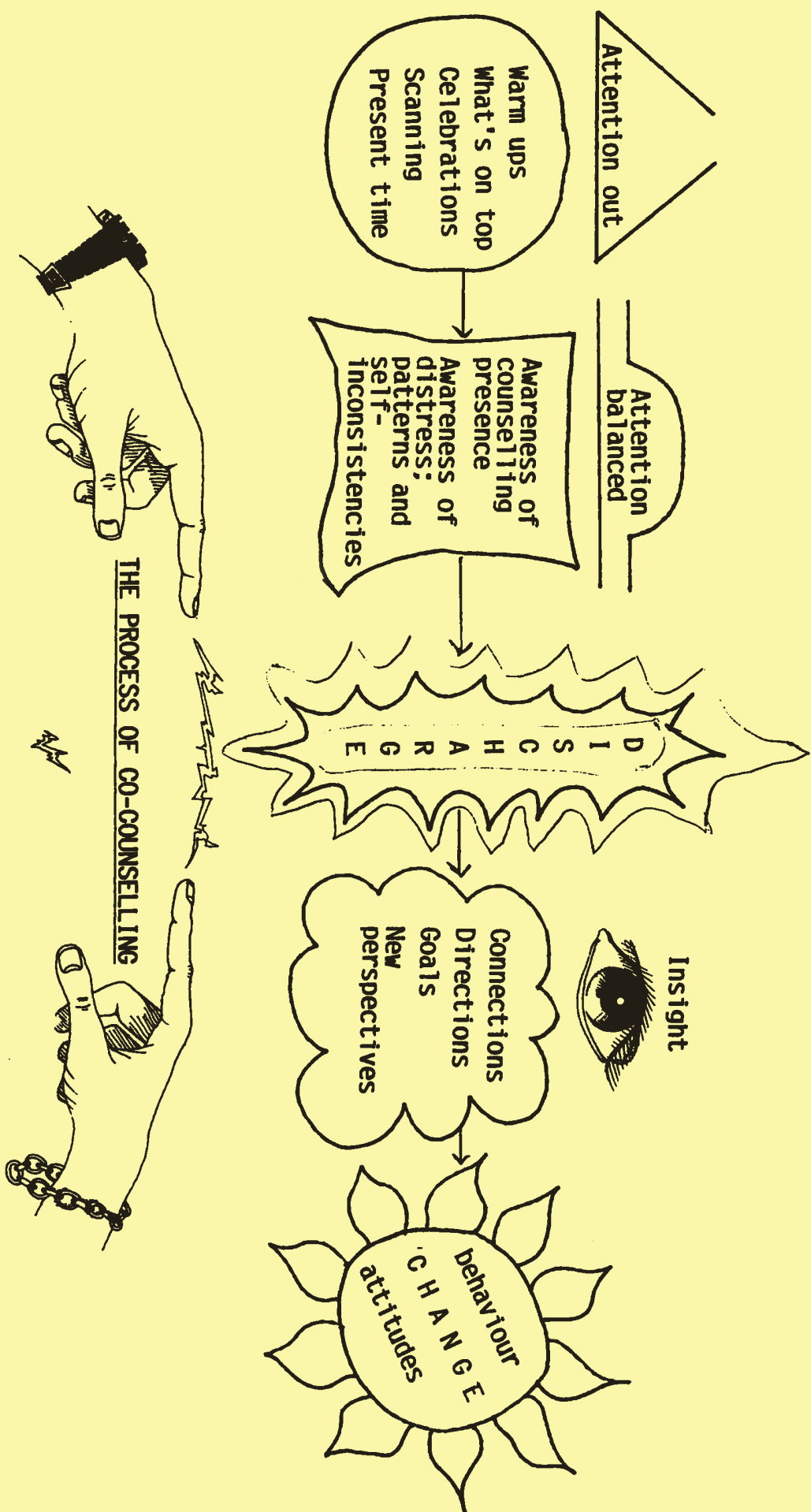
3.5.5. Present-time Techniques

A common fear in beginning co-counsellors is that once feelings are unlocked, they will be overwhelming and it will be impossible to stop expressing them. It is true that trying not to think of something distressing is likely to make it more salient for you, but attention *switching* devices are extremely effective. They can be used any time you feel you are going into your material too deeply, but are particularly useful at the end of a session when you have to stop. Examples are:

- Here and Now’ : Find 7 green things in the room; describe the counsellor’s face
- Abstract : Simple arithmetic; say the alphabet backwards; spell your name backwards
- Sensual: Be aware of how you’re sitting; describe eating your breakfast
- Creative/vivid: Think up 6 things you can do with an egg or a brick etc.
- Celebratory: Pick out one positive aspect of the things you have worked on, or the way you have worked, or say some things you are looking forward to or have done well recently.

3.6.0. Counselling Interventions

Interventions which we shall learn about next are best used by the client for the client. However, in a normal contract the counsellor may intervene when the client seems stuck; in pattern or to be missing their own cues. Interventions are usually suggestions as to how the client could work. The client is free to accept them or reject them. Counsellors should make interventions boldly, but not possessively. Do not worry if your intervention is not accepted. You may make a very good suggestion e.g. “would you like to try telling me that a little more joyfully”, but the client may be wanting to go on to something else; may feel it’s too painful to cope with; may not be ready to do it now; may wish to do it another time; may be able to help others better by remembering this method. Alternatively, the suggestion may be completely inappropriate, but it is client’s responsibility to determine this. Your responsibility is to offer help but not to insist that it is taken or to ensure that the client has a ‘good’ session. Only the client can be responsible for the effectiveness of the work.



Chapter 4.

STRENGTH BUILDING THROUGH CELEBRATION

4.0 Choosing to Focus on Positives

At the beginning of a session or workshop, it is customary to look at positive events, feelings and developments. This offsets cultural conditioning where criticisms and complaints seem legitimate currency, but giving compliments or expressing pleasure in another person may cause embarrassment or be misconstrued. Self-appreciation is often regarded as boasting and discouraged, possibly through showing envy or throwing out a 'put down' comment.

The advantages of emphasizing positives in a setting where we know they will be accepted are as follows:

- To remind us of our okay selves and help separate the worth-while person we are from the patterns we carry. This increases confidence and morale.
- In seeing ourselves positively we expect more of ourselves and this brings out the best in us when the situation demands it (self-fulfilling prophecy).
- Paradoxically, focusing selectively on positives can bring up negative feelings thereby providing material to work on in the remainder of the session.

4.1. Positive Methods – CELEBRATIONS

4.1.1. Positive Scanning

The client describes a series of events on a theme but does not dwell on any one theme. You start from earliest memories and work towards the present, e.g.

"All my happy childhood memories"

"All the times I've been creative"

"All the times I've felt confident"

"All the good friends I've known"

4.1.2 Celebration of Life, Environment and Achievements

The client tells of recent good experiences; good things that have happened; things enjoyed, good news etc. S/he keeps the tone and posture joyful:

"I was delighted to see the new green leaves in Richmond Park"

"I wallowed in a long, lazy bath"

"I won a prize in an art competition"

"I spoke out and said what I felt"

4.1.3 Celebration of Self and Qualities in Self (Self-Appreciation)

Clients describe what they like about themselves or enjoy:-

“I’m a marvelous cook”

“I’m a very punctual person:

“I can express my anger directly”

“I have the strength to move mountains”

4.1.4 Celebration of Others/ “VALIDATION”

Counsellors describe what they like about their client or about other group members:-

“I like your blue eyes”

“I value your energy and clear contributions”

“I feel safe when you are here”

“I appreciate your generosity”

Validations must always be genuinely felt by the person offering them. Validating your client is a very powerful method to help them get in touch with the hurts that prevent them from actualizing their good solves.

4.2 Celebration as a Counselling Technique

Often we talk about positive experiences without conviction - as if they were not enjoyable, or valuable, or don’t count for much anyway. As clients we can re-state these things with more appropriate posture, tone of voice and gestures. We can ensure that we do not disqualify our words either verbally or through bodily cues. Doing this affirms our humanity and flexible intelligence.

To help us in this, a counsellor might say:

“Would you like to celebrate that?”

“Try saying that as if you mean it!”

“Tell me joyfully”

“Tell me without shrugging your shoulders afterwards”

Chapter 5. CATHARTIC INTERVENTIONS

Cathartic interventions are designed to enable the physical release that assists clients to re-visit past painful memories from an adult perspective. To use cathartic techniques effectively, there must be a balance of attention between the events recalled and the counsellor's supportive presence.

5.1 Literal Description

The client describes a past experience in the present tense and tries to re-live it in as much detail as possible recalling sounds, smells and positions of objects in the room or place. If they begin to stray from the subject or drift back into the past tense, counsellors might offer the intervention:

“describe it as if it's happening now”

E.g. client: “I'm walking up the wooden steps to the headmistress's office and I can smell the disinfectant from the cloakroom on the left I'm on the top step and it's a narrow ledge outside her door. Then I knocked”

Counsellor: (gently) try “I'm knocking”

Client: “I'm knocking (trembles), I'm frightened – she's going to be very cross”

5.2 Repetition

The client takes an emotive phrase and says it again and again until the 'charge' comes off. It helps to say it slowly and loudly. Sometimes, particularly when there is anger, it is good to shout out the words loudly.

E.g. Client: “She's going to be very cross”

Counsellor: “would you like to say that again?”

Client: “She's going to be very cross (shakes) It's amazing how I could be so frightened when I hadn't even done anything I didn't need to cringe like that I was encouraging her to have a go at me”.

5.3 Catch the Thought (Association)

After using literal description, repetition or any of the following techniques, it is usual for insights to surface after some feelings have been discharged. These can be sudden flashes of understanding, new ideas, and new ways of looking at an old problem. Generally they involve connecting different aspects of experience not previously considered together. When this happens clients try to share it with the counsellor by catching it and articulating it before it disappears.

Client: "Since he was hurt in the accident, I have to help him and look after him".

Counsellor: "Say that again"

Client: "I have to help him and look after him ... (shudders a little then nods head)"

Counsellor: "What's the thought?"

Client: "Well, maybe I mother him too much"

Clients often give their counsellor non-verbal cues when experiencing thoughts worth catching – a sudden eye movement, a reflective grunt, a shift in position. Initially, it helps clients to have their attention drawn to it, but clients soon learn to catch their own thoughts.

It is also possible to catch images or feelings as with the client above who was able to articulate that she was afraid after repeating "I'm knocking".

'Catch the Thought' is not in itself a cathartic technique but is used in conjunction with these to help integrate emotional and cognitive aspects of experience. This is important as the aim of co-counselling is not just to let off steam but to recover our flexible intelligence to direct our lives better.

5. 4 Acting into Discharge

Sometimes a client will block on expressing an emotion s/he knows to be present. Acting 'into' such feelings can provide the trigger to enable the suppressed feelings to emerge. You make a deliberate display of elusive feelings as if you were an actor in a rather badly overacted play. At first it seems superficial and embarrassing but if you can stay with it, it is remarkable how often the real feeling in its intensity suddenly bursts right out and takes over. Participants are often taken by surprise when this happens: "I didn't realize I still felt so strongly about that" they say, or "I never thought I could express myself like that".

Each person has to find their own right way to act into a feeling. You try to exaggerate the reactions in your body that encourage expression whilst contradicting the things that hold it back. The most effective way might be slightly different each time, but it is surprising how often stereotyped methods prove effective.

5.4.1 Acting into Fear

Tremble and make the noise that seems to fit the feeling
Dig your fingers into the counsellor's back whilst shaking
Hold onto the counsellor's hands
Adopt a terrified expression
Pant; scream

5.4.2. Acting into Anger

Pound a cushion vigorously but not rhythmically, lifting your arms high above your head.

Clench your fists; stamp your feet; kick a cushion

Shadow box the counsellor imagining s/he is the person with whom you are angry

Get the counsellor to hold the cushion up so that you can hit it, as if in a fight.

Anger usually comes off in rapid storming, quick short bursts of indignation...

5.4.3 Acting into Grief

Adopt a stooped posture; wrinkle your face; breathe jerkily

Bawl

5.4.4. Acting into Embarrassment

Writhe, giggle, imagine yourself blushing.

If you can allow yourself to act into discharge in a session like this, you are likely to find:-

- You overact less to subsequent small annoyances
- You experience less muscle strain and bodily tension previously used to hold feelings down
- You are more adaptable and inventive in reacting to similar situations
- You are better able to control your feelings, being able to choose what to show, what to hold in, and what to explain.

The object of this discharge is always to break patterns, not to rehearse losing one's temper all over the place! Letting go in the session increases choice and control the rest of the time.

Feelings are the products of needs which are frustrated or fulfilled and as such provide signposts to what counts in our lives. For a fuller explanation of this, the chapter of Anne Dickson's book "A Woman in Your own Right" is very useful.

5.5. Role-Play

Role-play in co-counselling differs from that in other growth methods or drama in that it remains client-directed throughout.

The counsellor must never get so involved in the role that s/he misses the client's reaction.

Interspersed with playing the role, the counsellor provides the usual encouragements for the client to work and discharge. In doing this, it helps to

adopt a slightly different position physically when making role statements and counselling statements.

Role-play is an extremely helpful method when used sensitively and empathically, but is very confusing and distracting to the client when done inaccurately or uncaringly.

As client, you will discover there are a variety of ways to use your counsellor in role-play. Here are some examples.

5.5.1 Types of Role-Play

a) The Counsellor Stays Silent

The client talks to the counsellor as if s/he is a person with whom s/he has problems or unfinished business. Usually the client starts off by describing somebody and then goes on to address the counsellor as that person.

e.g. "My brother was very concerned that I do well but that made him very critical of me. (Turns to counsellor), you are too critical, stop criticizing me (shouts) stop criticizing me."

The counsellor does not respond in the role but gives free attention or, if it's a normal contract, intervenes as usual e.g. "say that again", "Say it louder" etc.

The client aims to express what has been left unsaid in the relationship that is being worked on.

b) The Counsellor Repeats Key Phrases

The client describes a situation with another person and the counsellor repeats any emotive phrases which have been said back to the client.

e.g. "Once I was worried for him, and I ventured a comment on his behaviour. He laughed and I said "Don't you think I could ever say anything useful to you?" He replied, "No, you'll always be my little sister!"

Counsellor: "You'll always be my little sister"

Client: "You patronizing idiot, why can't you see me for what I am. I wish you could see me, appreciate me, recognize me".

Counsellor: "say that again".

Client: "See me, appreciate me, recognise me".

Counsellor: "You'll always be my little sister".

c. Role-Reversal

The counsellor suggests, "Would you like to sit over here and be your brother?"

This method is designed to release the client's attention from the patterned reaction by playing the other end of the distress recording.

For the counsellor, more key phrases are provided in case role-play continues.

An incidental gain for co-counselling purposes but well-known in psychodrama and gestalt work is that in playing the role of one's oppressor, we can both understand their viewpoint better and assume some of the power we normally feel they have over us.

d) The Counsellor ad-libs

The client describes a relationship and the counsellor takes the role of the person described inventing from intuition what they might have said. This is wonderful when it works but is nearly always spoilt by introducing something impossible. For example, one counsellor accused the client of not liking her cat when the person described actually had no cat! This technique is not advised for beginners and in fact it is never necessary to go beyond the words and phrases that the client supplies. (See Bad Role-Play below).

e) Positive Accommodation

After role-playing a situation as it has been in the past the client can describe how the situation would have been in their best fantasy, requesting the counsellor to enact this. This often elicits more profuse discharge on a topic that had seemed finished.

f) Negative Accommodation

In this situation the client's worst fantasy of what could have happened is played-out. e.g. Client: "If I'd let myself go I would have murdered her". The client strangles a cushion whilst the counsellor screams and makes noises as if choking to death.

5.5.2 Bad Role-Play

a) Inaccurate Role-Play

- stops the flow of the client's work
- muddles the client: they do not understand if you are making an intervention; talking to them for real or trying to role-play. It's surprising, but it's often the last thing to occur to a client that you've just got the part wrong!

- could indicate that you are playing a role that is more important to you than to your client. It's easy to get carried away and obtain vicarious satisfaction, especially if you identify with the client or their opponent.

b) Insensitive Role-Play

This can result in a traumatic situation being repeated instead of worked on. For example, as counsellor you could portray very accurately the client's dominating mother whilst the client feels increasingly crushed. Your job is to help the client discharge feelings of rage or helplessness at being bullied. Otherwise, you just add to the original hurts.

c) Over prolonged Role-Play

This can mean the client loses charge of the session. Experienced clients become adept at telling the counsellor when to stop but it is hard for beginners. I have seen a client requesting the counsellor to stop but the counsellor continue playing the belligerent opponent who never gave up. In this case there was no way to differentiate what was being said as counsellor what as opponent.

5.5.3 Safeguards in Role-Play (Minimising Errors)

You will soon spot your mistake if you are carefully watching the client's reaction. Surprise is often registered in head and eye movements and this can tell you that you've said something wrong in your part. It's easy to rectify, just ask the client to repeat what they were saying before you dropped your clanger, or say what you were saying before.

*If you are not sure that the role-play remains productive, check with your client, "Do you want me to go on with the role-play?"

*Always be sure of your own feeling in a role and be wary if you're enjoying it or if you have a vested interest. Do you need to justify/assert/explore yourself in this role of mother, big-brother or little sister?

*Sometimes as we have shown, a client becomes confused whether you are offering something as counsellor or as part of a role. One way to prevent this is to adopt a slightly different physical position and tone of voice in each capacity. For example, you could say something loud and belligerent as the client's boss. Then, as counsellor, you could move forward and whisper in one ear "Say what you've always wanted to tell her". After, you resume your place as boss to receive the reply.

5.5.4 Role-Play in a Co-counselling Group

PSYCHODRAMA: One member of a co-counselling group asks the other members to act out a situation s/he has experienced.

SOCIODRAMA : Here a common group situation is explored e.g. Being a committee; being on a bus; being at a party; going on a demonstration; being students in class; being your own co-counselling peer group (ouch!). Afterwards, reflection is helpful either in pairs (mini sessions), or in group discussion or both.

5.6. Contradictions and Directions

Contradiction is where a client takes an emotive phrase and challenges it by saying the opposite, or negating the assumptions behind the statement. This technique:

- Releases attention from a chronic pattern so that the client can see outside of it, enabling discharge to occur.
- Highlights the discrepancy between the desired and the actual e.g... “I never lose my temper”; “I’m always on time”; “I have a wonderful figure”; “I am totally reliable”; “I never feel inhibited”.
- Encourages awareness of aspects of self which the client has been unable to accept.

Examples are:-

Client: “I’m afraid to say anything in case I hurt her feelings and I don’t want to hurt her”.

Counsellor: “Can you contradict that?”

Client: “I want to hurt her (smiles, surprised) Yes, I want to hurt you (talking to counsellor as if to the person). You’ve really let me down and I want you to feel what I’m saying to you. I want to hurt you. I WANT TO HURT YOU” (tears.... Pause..... Shakes head)

Counsellor: “What’s the thought?”

Client: “I didn’t realize how angry I am with her”

Or

Client: “Nothing I do seems to work out. I always spoil things. I mess everybody about. I am one big failure (weeps).

Counsellor: (gently, and after allowing plenty of discharge – as the sobbing subsides) “Would you like to try saying “I’m a success?”.

Client: “(flatly) I’m a success”.

Counsellor: “Try saying it lightly”.

Client: “(sarcastically) I’m a success”.

Counsellor: “Would you try to say it convincingly?”

Client: “(lifting arms) I’m a success... (Shudders)... that feels scary... I’m a success (looks petulantly at the counsellor)”.

Counsellor: “What’s the thought?”

Client: "I deserve to be a success – somehow it's as if I have no right".

In this case the session would probably continue with the client scanning actual successes and exploring reactions to success in the family and at school, until the right to be a success is affirmed.

5.6.1 Types of Contradiction

Contradictions can be full or partial and can take into account verbal content, tone of voice and body posture e.g...

Patterns

'I'm shy and inhibited'

Full contradiction

'I'm outgoing and spontaneous'

(Voice cheerful, body relaxed, arms open)

Pattern

'I'm not angry with you'

Partial contradiction

'I feel at peace with you'

(teeth gritted, fists clenched)

Another form of partial contradiction is to qualify a verbal statement with descriptive words which are contradictory.

e.g. 'I can put my foot in it delightfully', 'I'm proud of my vulnerability', 'I'm powerfully incompetent', 'I'm charmingly rude'
'For me, constipation is a lovely occupation'.

You will probably find you have a reluctance to use these methods telling yourself that the statements don't make sense or aren't true. Remembering that you are not meant to make true statements but rather to express the feelings evoked by the statements will help you to get past the initial confusion and make use of the method.

5.6.2. Contradictions as Life Directions

After discharging on a given topic, clients begin to see new possibilities for flexibility in their attitudes and behaviour. New philosophies emerge which contradict distress and can help the client deal with difficult life-situations. Often the philosophies emerge from contradictions made in a session. Initially they have no credibility but after working with them for a while they can be effective in enabling you to change unwanted habit patterns.

Examples of directions:-

"I'm okay even if I disappoint you"

"I can let you look after me"

"I enjoy being too busy"

"I can let go"

"I'm in charge of my time"

"I trust you completely"

5.6.3 Direction - Holding

One way of working with a direction is to keep repeating it over and over whilst discharging any feelings and catching any thoughts that occur in between.

e.g. if you keep saying the words 'I'm in charge' you will probably discover all kinds of areas in your life where this feels true and can be celebrated but also that there are other areas where it feels untrue. Discharging the feelings of anger and sadness unlocks the patterns, which keep you helpless in situations where you could be competent.

To use this method, think of any pattern you have and contradict it, e.g.

Pattern.....

Contradiction/Direction

"I'm useless".....

"I'm a worthwhile
person"

"I'm bottled up"

"I can honour my
anger"

"I have to stay alone".....

"I can let you in"

Where profuse discharge on this subject has repeatedly taken place with no effect on your life it could be that personal effectiveness is insufficient to combat the problem and some form of social or political action may be required. In this case you would need to find other people experiencing the same problem so you can work together on combating oppression.

5.7 Nutshelling and Re-Phrasing

A direction is a statement the client can make which releases discharge on a pattern.

One type of direction is to offer the client a word or phrase, which sums up what they have been saying. Better than this, because it is more client-directed is to suggest that the client does it for themselves. E.g.

"Would you like to pick up the most important word or statement in all that?"

"Try saying that in a nutshell".

"Have a go at summing up what you've just said in a few/one word(s)".

"Be aware of your feelings underneath all that". **

But sometimes it is not an intrusion to do it for the client, e.g.

Client: "I've got the washing and the ironing and the cleaning and the garden and the coursework and the kids and the school rota and the committee and then, well Fred rang the other day and he said, 'can you come to this meeting on Friday?' and I said "I'd try", but then Sheila said she was feeling fed up and would I come to tea on Friday?"

Counsellor: "Try saying, 'I've got too much to do'
'I feel pressured'
'I feel torn by all the demands'.

Nutshells should not be interpretations, which go beyond what the client is already conveying to you in words, gesture tone and posture. They should reflect, not add anything new. An interpretation might be:

'I fill my time to avoid being alone with myself'
But this would not be acceptable in a co-counselling session.

A similar technique is in slightly rephrasing the client's words to turn them into a statement made to somebody e.g.

Client: "I wish I could cry and get it all out like the others can, but I just can't seem to do it".

Counsellor: "Try saying, 'Let me cry'.

Or

Client: "I've tried everything I know to get through to her but it doesn't work: she just won't listen"

Counsellor: "Try saying, 'Listen to me'.....Louder.....Louder

5.8. Historical Perspective

5.8.1. Unfinished Business

Many patterns originate from important issues in relationships which have never been discussed but which simmer under the surface. A good way to deal with this is to choose a significant person in your life and designate the counsellor (or, if there is likely to be counsellor re-stimulation, a cushion placed in front of you) to be that person. You have the opportunity to tell them what you really think of them without repercussions.

This technique is used to 'resolve' past relationships emotionally but is also very useful as a consciousness raising exercise to clarify your feelings in present relationships.

Afterwards, you can choose to share nothing, something or all of what you said in the session with the actual person. Discharging in the session helps to stop you overreacting in the real life situation, partly because some of the feelings have been released and partly because present distress can now be separated from previous distress left over from a similar situation.

5.8.2. Linking past and present

If a client has been working and discharging on an episode for some time without any apparent relief or insights emerging this is an indication that there is much stored feeling from previous experiences.

Sometimes a client who you feel very warm towards will accuse you of being inattentive, uncaring, judgmental etc. Provided your own patterns are not getting in the way, this is usually an indication that the client's distress or reaction to you stems from another relationship triggered by something incidental which they have just experienced.

In a normal contract, a question from the counsellor like:

"Who else do you feel this way with?"

"Who was the very first person you knew that behaved this way with you?"

"Who was the first person in your life you could have said that to?"

"Would you like to scan all the people in your life that are like that?"

"Review all the people in your life that judged you".

Can prove a helpful gear change to a client who feels stuck.

5.8.3 The 'Identification Check'

Invaluable when co-counsellors first meet, and useful also when an otherwise good co-counselling relationship gets sticky, the I.D. check deals with unfinished business which could interfere with the present client-counsellor relationship.

Questions to ask are:

"Who do I remind you of?"

"In what ways am I like them?"

"What did you really want to say to them?"

"How am I different from them?" "Who am I really?"

5.9. Non-Verbal Work

5.9.1. Uses of non-verbal work

- i) Non-verbal sessions are particularly valuable for clients who use language to diminish feelings or who compulsively analyse or intellectualize their material.
- ii) They can be used as a loosening technique near the beginning of a session.
- iii) They can be used as a helpful gear change when the client gets stuck.

- iv) Sometimes a feeling has to be discharged before its source can even be defined and in this case words are not available initially.
- v) They are good at cutting through some client patterns in relation to the counsellor 'I must explain, justify, prove myself to you', 'I must put you in the picture', and 'I must be fully coherent and logical with you'.
- vi) If the client is feeling uneasy with the counsellor, with another mutually known person, or is working on an issue involving confidentiality with someone else, non-verbal work gives the client more space to explore, retain confidentiality and avoid counsellor re-stimulation.

5.9.2. Types of non-verbal sessions

- i) To work non-verbally, you can think of a topic that concerns you, act into the feelings and catch the thoughts but don't use words to explain the situation. Instead use postures, gestures and noises.
- ii) Alternatively, you can start off lying down, take some deep breaths, make contact through touch or eyes with your counsellor and go with what comes up. Often people get quickly into sobbing, shaking, kicking, etc. The counsellor is there to encourage and comfort where appropriate.
- iii) Another version (David Boadella's) is for the counsellor to watch for any tiny signs of movement and encourages them through touch.

5.9.3 Encouraging non-verbal work as Counsellor

Non-verbal work can be introduced by the counsellor where there is a normal contract, e.g.:

'Tell me that all over again non-verbally'.

'Repeat what you've just been saying in nonsense language'

'Make the sound that goes with your feeling, exaggerate it louder, louder'

'Make a posture which sums up how you feel'

'Describe your friend's way of talking in nonsense-language'

As a role-play technique, the counsellor's use of nonsense language (also known as jabber-talk, gobbledygook or glossolalia) can be particularly effective in reminding the client of the frustration of someone who talks non-stop, always avoids an issue, always has an answer, or behaves in a superior or dismissive way.

5.9.4 Using non-verbal cues

Counsellors should always be aware of their client's non-verbal presentation in posture, tone of voice, rate of talk, mannerisms and gestures. Interventions should encourage those forms of expression, that help the feelings emerge or prevent those which clamp down on discharge. Chronic muscle tension is a

way of locking distress in the body, so detecting a client's characteristic way of holding things in, and enabling a physical contradiction of this can produce both emotional and physical relief.

This method involves focusing on the process of the client's work – the way they do it – rather than on the content or subject matter.

Examples of such 'process' interventions are:

'Keep breathing when you say that'
'Try to say that without smiling'
'Try to say that without holding on to yourself'
'Try keeping your hands here' (gently positioning them opposite from where they were)
'Say that again but keep looking at me'
'Sit up straight, lift your head high and tell me'
'Say that as if you mean it, convince me'

You can also invite the client to work specifically with mannerisms and gestures, e.g.:

'Keep on doing that with your hands, exaggerate that movement, become your hands, what are you doing with your hands? 'what would the right hand say to the left?', 'What is your purpose as right hand, what do you want for yourself?'

On receiving a response you can ask:

'Does this ring a bell?'
'Scan the situations in your life which remind you of this', or
'Who else in your life has given you this sort of message?'

This is a technique from Gestalt Therapy (Fritz Perls) which is easily incorporated into co-counselling work.

5.9.5 Risk in Using Process Cues

Clients are usually far less conscious of their process in working than they are of the subject matter of their material. Because of this, interventions which draw the client's attention to this aspect of their functioning can pull them up with a jerk and start them thinking about their behaviour in a non-productive way. "Oh! Was I really doing that?..... I wonder what it's about....I don't know what it means.....isn't it terrible, you shouldn't talk with your hands".

Individuals who have been disapproved of for using gestures in expressing themselves are likely to have extra difficulty in making use of this sort of intervention.

To avoid this self-analytical reaction, be very specific with your instructions, so that the client isn't left wondering just what s/he was doing or should do next, eg "Be aware of your hands going up and down and keep doing this".

Given a good working relationship, mimicking the client's movements can be useful to reflect to them what they are doing and as an invitation to repeat this. However, you must be sure that the client understands this invitation to work, and does not confuse it with judging them or being derisive.

Chapter 6 THINKING AND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

After using cathartic techniques to break patterns and develop new perspectives, we are sometimes left with habits of thought and behaviour which are still inhibiting us in changing our behaviour or our environment. Fantasy and goal-setting are two methods which both help to dispense with unwanted residual habits and enable us to expand our horizons.

FANTASY

Fantasy is used in various interconnected ways:-

- To overcome blocks
- To reach material excluded from consciousness
- To liberate thought

Some methods to use it are:

- a) Free Association. Thinking aloud letting your thoughts drift without censorship.
- b) Sentence Completion. Take a theme and discover all the possibilities in it e.g. 'all the things I would do if I were really greedy', 'when I'm successful I shall', 'if I were to take more responsibility I should....'
- c) Detail the future, described in present time e.g. 'my life in five years time when I've overcome all my present difficulties – and the steps I took to get here' or 'I'm about to die: all the things I want to say to my nearest and dearest'.
- d) Guided Fantasies. The counsellor tells you the outline of a story and you fill in the details: e.g. meeting a sage on a mountain top: What route do you use to get there? What message does the sage give you? Or looking in the window of a magic shop: what do you see, what gift would you choose for yourself?
- e) Guessing the Past and describing it in present time e.g. what happened when you were under anesthetic in your operation? What happened to you when you were two years old?
- f) Brain-storming. e.g. 'If it were an ideal world', 'ways to improve my job are'.
- g) Contradicting ignorance expressed e.g. 'I don't know how to behave in this situation – if I did know what I would do is... or 'I don't know why I feel this way – if I did know 10 reasons are.....'

GOAL-SETTING

Whereas a 'direction' is a thought or attitude designed to contradict a distress pattern, a goal is a specific action plan that you decide to carry out. It should be clearly defined, narrow and practical. In deciding on a goal, you need to specify the place, time and exact method of accomplishing it.

A goal is something you can arrive at after working and discharging on a given topic. If you choose it 'cold' it is likely to involve a patterned 'should' and elude you because you have not discharged the negative feelings which have held you back from accomplishing it.

Vague goals are unlikely to prove useful. Saying, 'I'm going to be a punctual person' is a huge task for a habitual latecomer, but saying 'I shall come on time for 'X' appointment' is more attainable. In counselling on it you can explore all the little strategies you might use to lose time or forget time e.g. 'I shall not answer the 'phone just as I'm leaving the house', 'I shall not get into conversations with the neighbors / postman etc.', 'I shall make sure the kids are happily occupied so that they don't cling'. Each of these strategies can then be explored 'they will ring again if it's important', 'the neighbor will respect me more if I'm not always available', 'The kids are proud of me going out'. Then you can think of a way to contradict the attitudes which make you ambivalent to arriving on time: 'I'll say, lets get down to business straight away', instead of sitting and feeling uncomfortable while people dither about' or 'I'll tell myself 'I choose to be here'.

Contradictions, directions and goals all go against patterned behaviour but concentrate on different aspects of it, e.g.

Contradiction: "I'm always on time"

Direction: "I'm in charge of my time"

Goal "I shall arrive on time for the meeting tomorrow"

Once you have worked with these small (?) goals, you can become more adventurous, defining your goals for today, next week, next month, next year, the rest of your life. These can be in respect of yourself, your family, your work, your society, the Universe and so forth.

Chapter 7. SELF AND PEER ASSESSMENT

Although many co-counselling teachers take the view that no form of 'negative' feedback is acceptable in the co-counselling ethos,* I feel that students who wish to become members of the Independent Co-Counselling Community need to be open and receptive to how other people see them, whilst being able to separate the wheat from the chaff in criticism. The format that has developed so far is as yet exploratory and I would welcome ideas on how to make it better. Here is an example of current practice in my courses.

- a) The whole group does sessions on judging and being judged with participants finding directions for the better handling of these, which are shared in a group round.
- b) Group discussion about issues and learnings that have emerged from the sessions (only clients referring to their own content, of course) and some input on the difference between offering constructive criticism and being judgmental. This is tied up with valuing the person whilst objecting to their behaviour. Assertive criticism involves respecting the person you are addressing; labeling your feelings instead of their behaviour; specifying the exact behaviour that offends and the consequences of its being maintained or dropped.

Participants are reminded that the feedback they give to others is often a comment about themselves, and recipients are encouraged to discriminate as to which criticism are relevant and which are projections etc.

- c) Participants divide into small groups and draw up a list of skills and qualities they think a co-counsellor should have.
- d) The lists are read out and organized into categories. A typical list would be:
 - i) Ability to give free attention
Good eye-contact; recognizing client in charge; non-directive; non-possessive; non-judgmental; caring; empathic; creating safety.
 - ii) Professionalism
Confidentiality; good time-keeping; reliability; punctuality; making a contract and sticking to it; knowing theory and counselling interventions
 - iii) Ability to Encourage and Receive Feelings
Permission giving; encouraging, using specific techniques to evoke.
 - iv) Self -Awareness
Ability to detect and handle one's own re-stimulation.

Other suggestions involve intuition, risk-taking; ability to challenge adventurously.

- e) Participants who wish to undergo the process put their names in a hat and the first name is picked out. (Anyone particularly wishing to be first, second or last states their preference and this is negotiated with the remainder putting names in a hat. Participants can volunteer to go next at any point).
- f) The first person chooses a support person and a scribe is appointed.
- g) With consideration for the above categories or whatever else they deem important the first person assesses themselves for 3 minutes where possible giving themselves a rating out of 10. S/he states if they would like to join the community and invites feedback.

S/he then receives 'constructive' feedback from group members at random using the format:

"what I feel when you is.....

"What I would like you to change is ...

"My worst fantasy of you is

After this s/he receives positive feedback for three minutes.

"What I like about your counselling is

"How I feel with you is

"What I like/appreciate about you is.....

"My best moment with you was.....

Finally, the person being assessed responds by saying how s/he feels about what s/he has heard and what s/he expected or hoped to hear that s/he didn't. S/he does not get into discussion about whether the criticisms were right or wrong.

- h) After the assessment s/he may go elsewhere for a short session with the chosen support person.

Participants are encouraged to discharge embarrassment, fear, etc, as the process goes on, but not to argue or dispute the validity of the comments.

From time to time there are group shake-outs and opportunities to comment on, complain about, or make suggestions for improving the process.

Generally, this procedure is very well received (see chapter on feedback) in spite of initial trepidation.

Chapter 8: The Challenge of Peer groups

Co-Counselling Peer Groups are for people who have completed a co-counselling training ("Fundamentals" course) and who wish to meet together to continue their personal development and to support one another through co-counselling methods. They are called 'peer' groups because they have no designated leader, and each participant carries equal responsibility to make the group work.

8.1. Who Needs Groups?

Although a fundamentals course is aimed primarily at teaching participants to work in pairs, a much-overlooked aspect of the course is the opportunity to belong to a warm, cohesive group of people. Whereas some co-counsellors choose to pursue their self-development only on a one-to-one basis, there are many benefits to be gained from participation in ongoing groups or workshops. In addition to experiencing different styles of working and discovering new ideas and methods, you can learn much through seeing how others develop (or even block themselves from doing this?) and you can use other group members as a resource in your work. For instance, you can ask them to role-play social situations; to echo together messages from your past; to give extra support; to assist with physical exercises (holding; lifting; restraining; pulling etc.) or to imitate and heighten your awareness of your own non-verbal behaviours.

There is greater flexibility in a group to meet an individual's need, especially when the client is working on social difficulties. For example, a client who is feeling an outsider in the group can request the others to form a closed circle which s/he has to break to get into the middle. Or a client who is afraid of aggression can ask some members to enact having a terrible argument whilst s/he receives support and counselling from the others. Half the group can act into anger simultaneously with the rest acting into fear. (It's best to have a few people with attention out to encourage and contain all this). If the client is shy in groups, taking the direction 'I love being the center of attention' is much more enabling in front of a whole group than one-to-one. Finally, free attention from several people imparts enormous acceptance and gives the client confidence to explore and come to terms with issues which might seem to set them aside from other human beings. Working in a group also means you don't feel you are burdening any one individual with all your awful 'stuff' and this can be very permission-giving for some clients.

8.2. Why Peer Groups?

From the outset in a fundamentals course, I emphasize that as clients, members have the right to direct their sessions in any way at all, providing they stop at the required time; do not abuse the counsellor, and stay within basic co-counselling principles. As counsellors and group members, however, they are accountable and must take responsibility for counselling

properly and helping to create an atmosphere of safety, commitment and trust.

The client direction in co-counselling together with the reciprocity in the client-counsellor relationship honours our basic need for self-direction and encourages us as autonomous human beings. We can consider the views of others but do not feel bound by them in deciding how to be. The paradox lies in having leader-directed fundamentals, and I am beginning to explore ways of changing to a more student-directed approach. If it is possible to enable doctors to learn in this way, it should be possible for co-counsellors to do so (Carl Rogers 1978).

Whether or not there is justification for authoritarian leadership on the fundamentals, once participants have joined the community and are continuing to meet for mutual support, it is a contradiction of our basic assumptions about people to insist they cannot evolve their own programme or manage themselves without a leader to make things work! I reckon to be a pretty caring, flexible and facilitative leader, but I have often been delighted to see individuals who were previously very quiet emerge and flourish as group members when I step back and allow the group to take responsibility for itself.

In recognition of this principle, there has emerged in the London Independent Co-counselling Community a number of ongoing 'peer groups' which may designate one member to take leadership from time to time, or may invite a more experienced person to facilitate a special workshop, but who generally decide on their activities through mutual negotiation and sharing of tasks. Similarly, there are weekend workshops (London, UK and others) which are coordinated for administrative purposes by specified individuals but where the agenda is decided together by whoever arrives and is designed by the participants for the participants to meet their own needs. When I have had the privilege to attend such groups, I have been impressed by the professionalism and by the creativity and nurturing we have achieved. Having also attended many groups as a 'mental health professional', it is my firm view that co-counselling far excels the depth of work and degree of cohesion and collaboration than that achieved by most other approaches.

8.3.What Peer Groups Do

Clients in one-to-one co-counselling sessions work on personal concerns they have determined prior to the session; on those emerging from structured exercises e.g. 'What's on top', scanning positive memories, and on those thrown up by the counselling situation. So, too, in groups, clients can work on things brought in from outside; things raised from being in the group or exercises designed for consciousness raising. Usually a group starts with a 'new and good'; a 'warm-up' and a round of 'What I'd like today is....' Decision-making is carried out according to an agreed model, (see below) taking into account that people can work all together, in pairs or small groups. Afterwards, there is feedback about personal needs and discoveries as well as any views about the exercise itself. An effective group will have been able

to spot any common themes behind the individual's requests and design the exercises around these. Examples of group exercises are given below.

8.4.Culture-Setting in the Peer Group

Co-Counsellors are not perfect (pattern-free) people and they bring all their hang-ups about group membership into the peer-group. Handled well, this makes for an enabling experience. Handled badly, distress is restimulated and patterns reinforced instead of challenged. One transition involved in becoming a community group member as opposed to a fundamentals group member is the ability to recognize your need and be able to negotiate client-time for yourself. The distressed and intolerant group member who angrily makes accusations or judgments about the other members requires help to explore his or her views constructively, but not by 'dumping' on the group. The plaintiff retort 'Where can I really be myself and say what I think, if I can't here?' demonstrates a common-enough misunderstanding. Individual freedom of expression can flourish only where there is mutual respect and celebration of diversity. Reacting to intolerance with aggression, polarizes the issue and creates conflict in the group. Listening with care to an outburst helps you see the intolerance as distress. Appealing to the person underneath enables group and dissenter to hear one-another, producing growth and cohesion.

At the beginning of a new group, all the participants would be wise to discuss their view of co-counselling ground-rules (e.g. confidentiality; regularity of attendance; punctuality; challenge of oppression; listening; mutual respect; no socializing; no drugs; no violence) and make a group commitment to keeping their own particular version. These seem so basic and obvious that they are hardly worth mentioning. However, I have been surprised more than once in a group when problems have arisen where I have 'forgotten' to make one of these conditions of co-counselling explicit. 'Sloppy' co-counselling never meets participants' long-term needs, even if it is gratifying for a short while.

8.5.Patterns in Peer Groups

The kinds of problems that emerge just through being in a group typically involve the patterns below. When patterns interlock i.e. the first and the last, much chaos can ensue, since neither can hear distress in the other.

'Nobody will listen to **me**'

'I'm going to be criticized, ridiculed, and told off'

'People won't accept/care about me'

'My views aren't important'

'I can't influence anyone, so I'll just withdraw'

'I'm dissatisfied. Whose fault is it?'

'This is awful. Who will confirm this and fight it with me:'

'As I can't get my way, I'll wreck the whole thing'

'This is no good: I'll just walk out'

'If I suggest something they'll all get at me for taking over'
 'I'm all tense: I just know there's going to be an argument'
 'I can't stand dithering about and time-wasting'
 'Groups can make me do and think things I don't want to'
 'I know that someone's going to take over and I must stop them'
 'The only way to avoid being hurt is to take control and keep order'

Issues such as these are always around and can be usefully challenged. For example, you can all identify your most prominent patterns in a pair situation, and then take a Direction against this in front of the whole group.

Or you can do a group exercise like those specified overleaf.

8.6. Peer Group Structures

Milling	Choose a group theme and walk around the group encountering people with a contradiction or direction, e.g. "I feel perfectly safe here", "This is a wonderful group", "You know I won't boss you around".
Touch circle	all hold hands and celebrate; contradict or hold a group direction. As with milling, catch thoughts to take back to a feedback session or mini session in pairs.
Group vent	All screaming/pounding/shaking/writhing or weeping together, or half the group in a line pounding, paired with the other half in a line shaking. Some people outside to give attention, comfort and counselling.
Sentence – Completion	Each person finds his/her own ending e.g. "If this group was really working now", "If I had my way right now....."
'Put-in' rounds	Each person throws in a word or sentence, e.g. in answer to 'How I feel now is' or "What's on top is....."
Scanning	Celebration or historical perspective, but around the group, e.g. "A time this group worked well for me was..." and "This feeling in the group reminds me of...."
Story-telling	One person starts off and each person adds some, round and round the group.
Sociodrama	A group play e.g. cocktail party, being on an underground train, a committee meeting.

'Split 'n join'	Discuss, brainstorm or 'work' in small groups, bring subsequent reflection, goals or directions to the large circle.
Artwork	Either like group sentence completion or each person draws on a given feeling/topic followed by pair and group work.
Demonstration	
Counselling	One individual whose problem is echoed around the group works in the middle.
Guided fantasy	One individual relaxes the group and tells them a story. Afterwards pair work and group work.

After all group exercise pair work and feedback is recommended.

8.7.Sharing Leadership

In a peer group there is corporate responsibility for management of all aspects of the group's life. Different people can take on different roles at different times depending on their own development and that of the group. Here are some of the functions that leaders are responsible for doing or delegating, which in a peer group are shared.

Suggesting an agenda; structuring the time; permitting unstructured time;
making decisions
Managing discussions
Nurture / ensure individuals' needs are met
Energise, inspire
Lead recreation, celebration
Inform, educate
Detect mood change and quality of attention in group
Help articulate and meet group needs
Enable space for discomfort with the group to be voiced and worked on; hold the thing together!
Encourage self-revelation; create an atmosphere of safety with challenge
Encourage evaluation of self and group progress
Start and end each session
Deal with admin such as fees, location, refreshments, contacting absentees, taking messages for the group.

8.8.Decision-making

A good peer group takes care to be clear about the way it operates as well as what it accomplishes. For example, a new group begins after considerable time of people wondering whether to start. People shuffle uneasily, finding it hard to catch each other's eye. Someone ventures, 'shall we have a game?' and someone replies a bit sharply 'it depends what it is!' There's a scary silence 'till a third person ventures 'let's do a knot'. Several people express enthusiasm until one person declares that s/he definitely doesn't want to, and then someone else suggests 'shouldn't we introduce ourselves to one

another?' Where to go from here? There are lots of options. One dynamic person can get up, start a game, have most join in excitedly but leave a few disconsolate dissenters on the outside. Or, the group can ensure that the game does not start until the people who don't want to do it have a suitable alternative activity, or at least are satisfied that their objections have been heard and considered. A vote could be taken, but what percentage of votes would be considered acceptable to agree on any proposal? Whose proposals should be put to the vote and after how much discussion?

A new group is faced with many issues to deal with all at once. How do we get to know each other? How do we make it safe? What shall we do? What do we want? Will I be accepted or rejected here? Can I do what I want in this group or is somebody going to take over and stop me?

To deal with this, group members need sufficient maturity to recognize their fear, embarrassment, frustration at uncertainty and the patterns that arise for themselves and others in response to this. Dealing with all this effectively cannot be hurried and is worth spending time on. People often say they don't like leaderless groups because so much time is wasted. If a group can get through this initial frustration, work out an acceptable decision-making process and in so doing convey respect and care for its members, it will lay firm foundations for a happy, effective future.

8.9. Oppressive Autocracy v. Messy Democracy¹

In response to the group dynamics described above, there are three obvious pitfalls:

- To rush into activity prematurely, thus avoiding frustration but not choosing the right task to meet the groups' needs.
- To bend to the wish of a 'strong person' without due consideration of the silent minority (majority).
- To all fall over backwards not to make any proposal in case someone perceives us as over- dominant and bossy!

8.10. Handling Discussion

Unless some structure is imposed on discussion, group sharing can easily become dominated by one or two people. Some ideas to prevent this are:

- 1) Use a 'conch' so that only the person holding it is allowed to speak. This can be passed round in order, or picked up each time from the middle of the group,
- 2) Frequent 'rounds' where each person is invited to contribute or pass. Time limits can be set for possession of the conch.

¹ See John Heron's Teacher Training Manual

- 3) Have a rule that no one can speak three times 'till each person has spoken once.
- 4) Have a 'fishbowl' where certain members discuss a topic freely, with the remainder of the group observing. This can be 'closed' so that no one from the audience joins in, or 'open' – a member from the audience stands up and the person who has been in the fishbowl longest, or has said most, exchanges places with them.
- 5) If a lot of people contribute to a round, it can be hard to keep attention, or remember the arguments. It helps to appoint someone to be 'GATHERER' and recap the arguments offered after about five contributions. Alternatively, several people can be asked to gather, or individuals can choose to gather instead of having a turn in a group round.

8.11. More Group Dynamics

It is helpful to be aware of other characteristic patterns of leaderless groups, so that you can spot it when your group could be more constructive. Here are some examples:

Avoidance:	Finding something outside to blame or become involved with instead of working with something inside yourself or the group e.g. arguments about windows being open or closed or lights going on or off or why people are absent often reflect much deeper discomfort.
Scapegoating:	Making one person carry the group's bad feeling and then forcing them out.
Eulogizing:	Claiming that the group is wonderful and all agreeing this but not feeling it inside.
Collusion:	Getting together to deny the real issues.
Hidden Agendas:	Having a hidden or ulterior motive for belonging to the group e.g. wanting eventually to be a one-way counsellor or looking for friendship that is not compatible with group membership. (Some included or excluded – not all experiences available to all members).
Competition between different members e.g. who can give the best intervention!	

8.12. Leadership Battles

Creating a Leader to be the Fall-Guy for Group Dissatisfaction

Tension between individual needs and group survival

Pairing: Teaming up to collude in creating a messiah²

Fight or Flight: dramatizing dissent by aggression or staging a walk-out

Dependency: waiting for a magic leader/messiah to come and sort things out.

² See W.R. Bion "Experiences in Groups" Tavistock Publications

There are two approaches to dealing with group dynamics when they seem to be sabotaging the group's effectiveness. One method is to 'diffuse' tense frustrated feelings e.g. by instituting mini sessions on 'how I feel now'. This usually gets the group over a crisis and often enables the group to continue its business more constructively.

The other approach is to stay with the discomfort but try and enable the group to focus on its working processes rather than on the subject matter currently being considered. An example of this would be the question: "What are we doing as a group now, I wonder?" or a statement "I'm feeling a lot of hostility in the group that seems out of proportion to the topic: is it me, or is any one else uncomfortable?" If the group can own it; stay with it and resolve it together, there will be more trust, cohesiveness and flexibility than if the problem is shelved as a group issue.

8.13. Here and Now Relationships

Co-counselling has the image of being poor at dealing with interpersonal conflicts and being full of unrealistic 'mush, slush and gush' which avoids airing of genuine difficulties.

Certainly, on a fundamentals course where people are requested not to meet on a friendship basis and where the only interaction involves the sixty or so hours of the course, intense feelings of dislike or anger have a very high probability of deriving from identifications, projections and unfinished business from the past.

In a peer group, however, which is not structured and kept 'safe' by the teacher, individuality flourishes and participants' roles and contributions are seen much more clearly. For this reason, it is important that groups evolve methods for dealing with disagreements, hurts, and 'personality clashes' amongst its members. Similarly, if one person seems at odds with the group, it is important to be able to explore this. Where two people are in dispute, it is obviously better if each can co-counsel on it separately before dealing with it in the group. If this has not happened, the group can provide the venue for this. Similarly, if a group wishes to confront an individual, it's best to start with mini-sessions and/or a round on 'What I see in x that I would prefer not to see in myself'.

8.14. Methods of Conflict Resolution

In my view, which is not shared by all co-counselling teachers, it is important to have a vehicle for expressing resentments and giving constructive criticism to my co-counsellors and fellow group members, and to be able to receive and use feedback from them about my own counselling, group membership or teaching. Too much unfinished business clutters up a group and makes it suffocating, explosive, or both. Too much toleration of my patterns as group member deprives me of the chance for growth and discovery. Caring and gentle criticism is your gift to me to widen my choices about aspects of my behaviour that I may wish to change.

Some co-counselling teachers believe that safety in a co-counselling group is forfeited as soon as the prospect of negative feedback poses its ugly head. My experience is different from this, and I am increasingly introducing self and peer assessment into fundamentals courses. The sort of comments I receive afterwards: 'the group has become much closer': 'I was terrified of what I would hear but it was much easier than I expected'. 'I think the comments were very deep and I have a lot to think about.' 'I liked the appreciations but I feel particularly appreciative of the criticism. Thank you all very much'. 'I wish you had introduced this sort of thing right from the beginning of the course'. 'I think the reason for this positive response is that we kept strictly to a co-counselling approach in terms of our respect for the person undergoing assessment and in taking responsibility for our projections. As such, our comments were phrased in terms of our own perceptions not as labels of the other person'. E.g. 'I see you as being 'I wish you would my worst fantasy of you is.....'

Bearing in mind then that all interpersonal comments in a co-counselling group are owned as likely projections of the person offering them and should be phrased accordingly, here are some structures to help the ongoing rapport of the group and to deal with specific conflicts:

a) **Periodic resentments 'sessions**

Participants think about what most niggles them and throw or kick a cushion into the middle as a symbolic gesture of letting go this grievance. E.g. 'I resent that I was late', 'I wish we'd had more time working as a group', 'I'm fed up that I feel so 'put down' by you'. If what comes up is light and easy to throw off, not much more needs to be done. If heavy undercurrents come up one of the structures below might help.

b) **Mini sessions** on 'what is wrong for me in this group' ending with finding a direction or goal for dealing the group. The directions and goals are shared in a group round.

c) **Regular review times** allotted to a consideration of the group and its process. Rounds of 'how I feel in the group', 'is the group meeting my needs?', 'are we fulfilling the objectives we have set ourselves as a group?', 'What I would like to change about this group is', 'This group is at its best for me when' Followed by sessions and discussions.

d) **Feedback sessions.** Each individual has time to be given feedback about themselves by the group. The client sets it up as they choose with a support person and specify what sort of feedback is wanted (positive only; pos. and neg. just about my counselling; about any aspects of me; about me as a group member in particular). Allow plenty of time for sessions afterwards. Remind people giving feedback that they can learn a lot about themselves from the comments they make about others.

- e) **What I can't work on with you is.....** Participants go around the group stating their projections about other people. This of course will follow ordinary ID checks which should come near the beginning of group life.
- f) **Re-Capping.** If one person feels hurt through another group member, the person hurt explains their position whilst the person designated as 'oppressor' listens and recaps what they are saying. This process is continued until the person who has been hurt feels completely heard and understood. After this, if they wish, the 'oppressor' can similarly explain and be recapped. Often, the experience of listening in this way changes both viewpoints even if only done 'one' way. Where both parties to the dispute are re-stimulated, one-way listening is likely to be too difficult. The structure below is described by Rose and Richard of the Sheffield co-counselling community.³
- g) **Conflict Resolution.** Both persons in the conflict co-counsel separately if possible before starting. A facilitator and two support persons are chosen. The person most visibly hurt explains their position to their support person and is then recapped by their antagonist. When this is satisfactorily done, the antagonist explains how they stand to their support person and is recapped by the original speaker. This process is continued until both sides feel sufficiently heard and received to be able to continue in the group together without undue discomfort. The facilitator has to ensure that no one person has to listen for too long a period without an opportunity to speak; that the structures are kept to, and that there are no 'fouls' in co-counselling terms such as labelling the other person e.g. 'he's a stupid ignoramus' is best rephrased 'I don't think he understand this at all!'. Talking to the support person instead of the recipient reduces the intensity of mutual re-stimulation. Where this has become so great that participants are unable to keep to the format, the facilitator can suggest that everyone divides into pairs or that the two people in dispute go to other rooms for a session with their support person until they are better able to continue. This sort of situation only occurs when two parties have interlocking patterns and neither manages to keep any attention outside their distress. A good way to get attention out at the beginning is to have the persons in dispute validate one another. Inability to do this would indicate the consuming quality of patterns operating, and long sessions are advisable before they attempt to listen to one another.

³ *Rose Evison and Richard Horobin's papers on 'Conflict Resolution' and 'Relationship counselling'

8.15. Peer Communities as Natural Development for Co-counsellors

Wherever the time permits, I make it part of a fundamentals course to have participants work together without my leading them, so that they can catch the flavour of the peer process. Several times recently I have been impressed by the renewed energy, excitement and involvement of the group when relieved of my control. Persons who have been notably quiet throughout the course suddenly seem to find a powerful voice. I was particularly impressed with one group which managed to agree on a game and play it; to have a round on how they felt without me participating and to decide on topics to work on for any future gatherings. The zestfulness of the peer process I believe derives from the recognition that our own needs can and are being met through self-direction and self-responsibility.

Although in Britain we consider ourselves a democratic society, most of our organizations both formal and informal are strictly hierarchical and people are initially at a loss when they find themselves leaderless. Together with this there is a deep distrust which runs counter to co-counselling philosophy, of people acting responsibly together. This cynicism is expressed in William Golding's "Lord of the Flies" where some children abandoned on an island revert to primitive and savage behaviour. Many of us have had experiences in the school playground which bear out this vision of humanity or have been hurt repeatedly in group situations. We appear to have little confidence and little training in taking mutual responsibility. As co-counsellors, however, we have several advantages which lend themselves to making things work:

- *respect for each individual and their need for autonomy
- *ability to separate the person from their behaviour which we dislike
- *belief that underneath the patterns people are naturally loving towards one another
- *ability to spot it when current feelings of apprehension and distrust are coming from old distresses
- *ability to keep some attention outside our distress and work on it at an appropriate time.

Drawing out these factors at an early meeting of the group can be helpful in reinforcing the co-counselling culture and alerting one another to likely distress patterns that we shall need help in overcoming e.g.

- group rounds and co-counselling sessions on 'all the times I've been hurt in a group'
- direction-holding on such topics as 'whatever you discover about me, I know you'll stay supportive', 'I feel loved by you all'

My own experience of peer groups in the community is of a high level of co-operation and caring with no need for a leader. Groups which I have initially participated in and then left have also continued very ably without a teacher being present.

In my view these groups are the most natural way forward for co-counsellors and are a living challenge to society's myth that unled people can only be mutually destructive.

Chapter 9.

SEXUALITY AND ATTRACTION IN CO-COUNSELLING

Ideally sexual encounter involves joy and delight in being and sharing, a celebration of friendship, love, caring and vitality.

Too often, sexual behaviour is patterned and the desire for it derives from undischarged distress. There are many left over feelings from childhood and the more recent past in the areas of loving, nurturing, self-expression and exploration/enjoyment of bodies. Unfulfilled desires and interrupted needs from the past give rise to anger and grief which distort here and now relationships and lead the individual unawarely into a succession of unsatisfactory partnerships. For example, the girl who felt repeatedly rebuffed by her father might try to make up for this rejection by seeking out much older persons for intimate relationships. The son who had an overpowering and intrusive mother might find all women suffocating and be unable to allow them to get close.

Because of the intimacy and caring inherent in the co-counselling relationship, frozen needs from the past are highlighted and undischarged feelings begin to surface. These often take the form of desire for the counsellor and the temptation is to 'act it out' trying to by-pass the pain instead of discharging it. If this happens the relationship is subject to all the same difficulties which the client faces generally in relationships and when the problem becomes paramount, the co-counselling has been forfeited along with the 'friend'.

Instead of this, counselling on your attraction for the counsellor will enable you to identify and shed the patterns which diminish your relationships in real life. Some ways to work are repetition and holding of phrases such as 'I want to be your friend; I feel attracted to you', 'I desire you' and 'I want to make love to you' with appropriate discharge of any embarrassment, anger, grief or fear. You can then go on to explore your fantasies of what you would like to happen between the two of you using literal description.

Since this could be very re-stimulative (!) for the counsellor, it is advisable to negotiate working on this subject and seek permission from the counsellor before launching in. The counsellor may need some time to discharge or maintain attention.

If you are attracted to another co-counsellor but do not make this explicit, you will find it very hard to work as client or to give good attention as counsellor. You will miss a valuable opportunity to reduce irrationality in this very central area of being. When you work on your attraction in this way, irrational desire usually goes right away. However, if after working at length on this question, no distress emerges, the feeling remains and is reciprocated by your partner, you will be in a good position to choose awarely whether you wish to extend the relationship. There are some good reasons why this might still not be advisable:

- 1) co-counselling is not a good way to get to know someone – it gives a biased view of their acceptance, compassion and like-mindedness. It is very disappointing and hurtful when expectations of unconditional positive regard, caring and empathy cannot be met twenty-four hours a day.
- 2) Co-counselling provides a safe space to evaluate and reflect on your relationships. If your co-counsellors are friends and everyone knows everyone else socially, the advantages of confidentiality and detachment are at the very least muted.
- 3) There is a danger of retreating into co-counselling relationships instead of using co-counselling to help you enrich and expand your experiences.
- 4) Complications arise in separating sessions from living and establishing boundaries between being empathically 'with' your partner or being in a give and take relationship in present time.

In spite of all this, and many people 'having their fingers burned' some co-counsellors do claim positive experiences in making personal relationships work. As I see it, the important ingredient is awareness in taking charge of what you do, not just letting it happen as if some power outside yourself is driving you.

Some Exercises to Explore Sexuality

*Scan early childhood memories about bodies; information on 'facts of life'; children's games you played etc. and see what messages came to you from parents and society.

*Scan your body and fully appreciate every part. Then check to see if you've missed anything out and begin again.

*Direction-hold: 'I'm a sexually attractive person'
 'I'm wonderfully sexy'
 'I'm irresistible and alluring'

(also good for discharging anger at society's expectations!)

*Describe your most embarrassed/shameful moment using literal description and/or contradiction – tell it really proudly.

*Scan and celebrate all the sexual experiences you have enjoyed.

*Say 'what I haven't told you is' as if to your sexual partner.

*Talk about sexuality paying particular attention to body postures.

This kind of format – childhood memories, scanning, celebrating, direction-holding etc. can of course be applied to most important topics. I use sexuality mainly to contradict my own messages 'sex isn't important: you can certainly do without it!'

Chapter 10.

STYLES OF CO-COUNSELLING

Independent Co-counselling and Re-evaluation Co-counselling (RC) (Some subjective impressions)

Prior to actually taking an RC course, I had understood that the practice of co-counselling was identical in both communities, but that RC was much more hierarchical in the way its network is organized. RC is the original co-counselling movement started by Harvey Jackins. Independent co-counselling, of which I am a product, broke away in the early 1970's led by John Heron who founded the Human Potential Research Project at Surrey University. As I understand it, John objected to the way in which experienced co-counsellors were not granted autonomy either to teach or to question co-counselling theory but everything had to be channeled through Harvey. This seemed a denigration of the very essence of the co-counselling philosophy which Jackins had conveyed.

On becoming a student of RC, I found to my surprise that the theory seemed the same as I had already understood it, but clearly much more work had been done to develop its realm of application and it was certainly not static and inflexible as I had expected. New developments such as ways to work on issues relating to oppression and 'making commitments' were being taught on the Fundamentals course and there was an exciting sense of forward movement.

However, I found the practice of co-counselling differed very considerably from my experiences in the Independent Community. I found that the counselling relationship was more personal, more 'I-thou' and less possibility to use the counsellor as mirror. I found there was less reliance on techniques and more on intuition. Listening skills were not explained but rather assumed. No contracts were made at the beginning of the session and this reflected for me a more general lack of client-direction. It seemed to me on being counselled that the counsellors took too much responsibility for me, for example in designating areas of work. This made me feel uneasy. Similarly, as counsellor, I was surprised by the 'resistance' I encountered on making what I thought were fairly obvious suggestions.

This could have been simply an artefact of a small course and was perhaps an atypical situation, but I suspect not. In one exercise, a client worked, counselled by a participant in front of the group. At regular intervals, the work was stopped by a 'supervisor' (the teacher) who asked the group to identify what were the client's patterns and what might be suitable interventions to address them. After hearing the group members' views, the session continued with the counsellor bearing in mind the ideas discussed. This exercise would be anathema in the independent community as it puts the onus for diagnosis and intervention on the counsellor rather than the client. Labelling a pattern has judgmental overtones affecting the power balance between participants. Another aspect of the power and limitation of autonomy

was that I was asked to keep quiet about my own co-counselling experiences and do the course as if I were a complete beginner!

That said, both RC and CCI (Co-counselling International) are spreading to more people and more areas. My fantasy is that variations within CCI and RC may be greater than variations between us. I think it is a pity to polarize things and be enemies as this in the end is only evidence of inter-group distress and goes against what all of us believe. I am pleased to hear that there are now groups of mixed membership and I am sure we can learn much from each other.

Styles within Independent Co-counselling

Within CCI, different communities have evolved in different ways, reflecting no doubt, the skills and awareness of teachers and the predilections of their course participants. Certain widespread practices grate with me, and I'm sure some of my approaches must be unhelpful with some people. For example, I give quite a lot of non-verbal encouragement which can be very intrusive to some participants, who prefer a more neutral presence. Once, I squeezed a client's hand in a free-attention contract. He thanked me but asked me please not to do that again. Other clients have found such responses have helped them to let go, so it's a question of being alert and ensuring the client is in charge.

Two interventions I dislike are echoing what the client has said and asking clients how they feel. I think it's better just to listen or to ask the client to repeat their words, rather than to echo. Echoes or reflections are fine in a client-centered (one-way) counselling situation to facilitate the flow of the client's work. In co-counselling, the free attention should be sufficient a catalyst and clients need to be allowed their hesitancy.

Asking a client how s/he feels seems to me an invitation to stop feeling and think about the emotion instead. I'd prefer 'be aware of your feelings' or an intervention which picks up what it was the client did to portray the feeling e.g. 'say/do that again'. In spite of my objections, I'm sure there are occasions when both these are useful. My point is, that when I'm client and I'm offered something I haven't learned, it can pull me up sharp. I think it is the fact of knowing roughly what to expect that gives co-counsellors a sense of being in charge, and which is an important factor in generating safety to work.

In my view, we will meet our needs best if we are open to new ideas and approaches compatible with basic co-counselling approaches. However, the way in which these are introduced is of paramount importance to preserve the self-direction of the client. If we are sensitive to this always, and especially on meeting new partners, I believe we shall grow and enhance the depth of our work together.

Chapter 11

SOME CONSUMER VIEWS OF CO-COUNSELLING

Here are some examples of the feedback given:-

The Group have:

- It's taught me trust is possible
- I've learnt to cry
- It's a place where I can admit my feelings and not feel bad about it
- I've learnt to recognize happiness
- Counselling has made it easier on the family
- Through the group valuing me I've learnt to like myself
- I value hugging and like to be hugged

Counselling has:

- I've learnt to listen, to understand people's actions and be non-judgmental to other people.
- I look forward to the warmth the group brings to me
- I have learnt I cannot live with knowing I have broken a contract
- I can touch a stranger
- It's like being on a rough fishing trip and coming up to a safe haven each week to offload.
- I've learnt I'm not a lot different to anyone else
- I can bear to be touched now
- I've become unfrozen
- I don't get hot and sticky anymore
- Counselling has helped me cope with everyday life
- It's a place I've learnt to live with my inhibitions.

From Ascot & District Co-Counsellors 1989

READING LIST

A. BACKGROUND

Rogers, Carl, R. On Becoming a Person
(Pub. Houghton Mifflin Co., Sentry Ed., Boston)

Rogers, Carl, R. Client Centred Therapy
(Pub. Houghton Mifflin Co., Sentry Ed., Boston)

Rogers, Carl, R. Personal Power
(Pub. Houghton Mifflin Co., Sentry Ed., Boston)

N.B. – Not co-counselling books, but excellent for explaining helpful counsellor attitudes and convincingly demonstrating how much clients can do for themselves. Gives you a sense of being cared about even though you've never met him.

Heron, John The Role of Catharsis in Human Development
(Human Potential Research project, Univ. of Surrey)

N.B. – Explains the theory behind co-counselling methods

Heron, John Six-category Intervention Analysis
(Human Potential Research project, Univ. of Surrey)

N.B. – Places co-counselling in the context of other methods for training and therapy

Pinney, Rachel Creative Listening
(28, Wallace House, Caledonian Estate, Caledonian Road,
London, N7)

N.B. – Perceptive and useful comments on why and how to learn to listen.

Dickson, Ann A Woman In Your Own Right: Assertiveness and You
(Pub. Quartet Books, London, Melbourne, New York)

N.B. – Chapter on emotions is particularly useful for clarifying relationships between needs, feelings and behaviour.

B. MANUALS

Evison, Ross and How to Change Yourself and Your World
Horobin, Richard (Pub. Phoenix, 5 Victoria Road, Sheffield)

N.B. – This is an excellent exposition of Independent Co-counselling with a good bibliography.

Jackins, Harvey Re-evaluation Counselling

N.B. – This is his original manual, which is clear, direct and well worth going back to.

Heron, John Reciprocal Counselling

N.B. – This is written in rather telescopic style, but is a very clever, concise reminder when you are familiar with the material.

Saxton, Dick Co-counselling Manual
 3 Forge Steps, Milford, Derbyshire

N.B. – Clear, simple and short, but deep.

Saxton, Dick Self and Society
 (Journal of the Association for Humanistic Psychology –
 Special double edition on co-counselling)

N.B. – Interesting account of co-counselling historically and more recently with outsiders' critical evaluation.

C. SOURCE BOOKS

Jackins, Harvey The Human Situation
 (Pub. Rational Island Pub., Seattle)

Jackins, Harvey The Human Side of Human Beings
 (Pub. Rational Island Pub., Seattle)

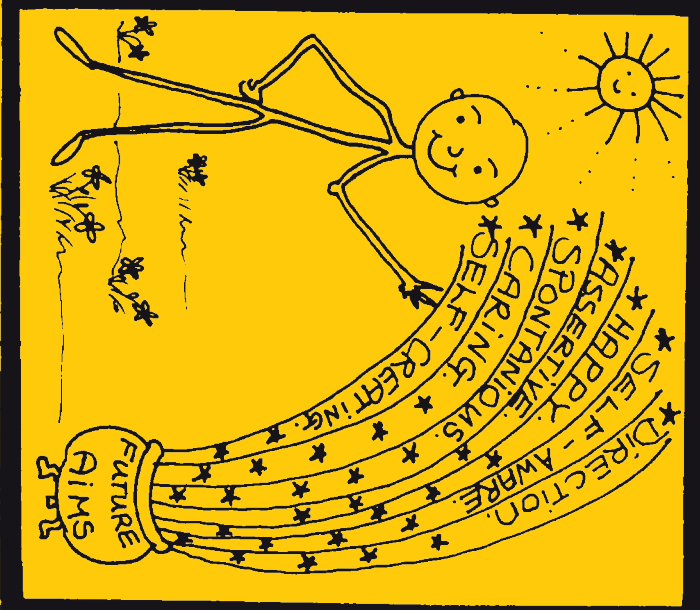
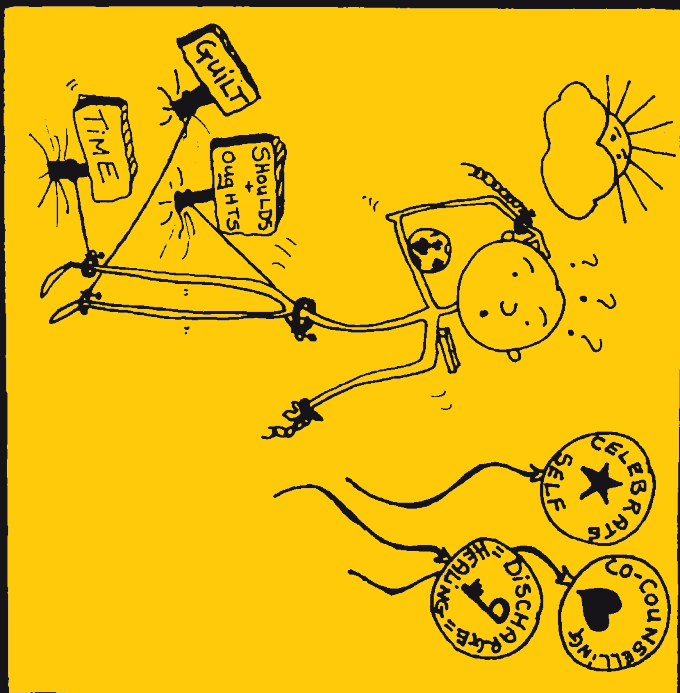
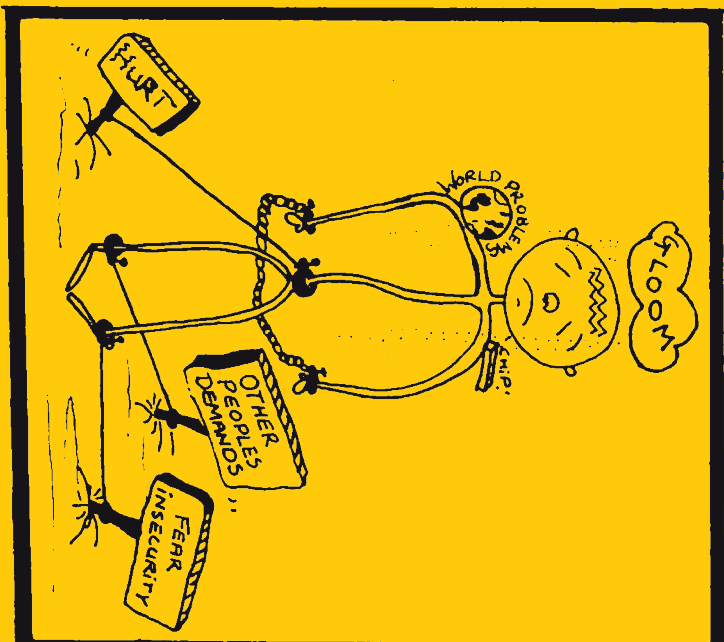
Jackins, Harvey Rough Notes from Buck Creek
 (Pub. Rational Island Pub., Seattle)

Jackins, Harvey The Upward Trend
 (Pub. Rational Island Pub., Seattle)

N.B. Glib American style, heavy going often, but containing pearls of wisdom and the essence... of co-counselling

Magazine

'Firelighter' – ed. Rose and Richard as above



Barnes College 1988

BYA
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