

# **A gift that is so annoying**

I really don't like a pattern of events that has happened at times among groups of co-counsellors. Talking to other co-counsellors I realise that it has happened more often than I was aware of. I would like us to learn to stop doing this.

## **What has happened?**

It would start with Brady, for example, doing something that someone doesn't like. Brady is accused of breaking some rule or doing something that is unacceptable. At this point other people get involved and the issue becomes increasingly public. Brady would be criticised, rejected, blamed, shamed and excluded. Often they gave up and went away.

## **So**

I don't see this as kind or helpful for anyone concerned. Also it goes against the core ideas that I believe underpin co-counselling.

Co-counselling for me is fundamentally a humanistic approach, meaning in particular that we believe that:

- Human beings are fundamentally good, and
- our emotions are normal and valuable parts of being human.

Can we handle these situations better?

## **Doing my own work**

If someone does something that I, and maybe others, find upsetting, in effect we are restimulated by it. This is not a problem, it is a gift that is worth its weight in gold. It is an opportunity for me to learn more about myself, so I can work on it in my co-counselling sessions. I can explore the questions below, discharge any emotion that comes up and hopefully get some reevaluation.

- What, as far as I can tell, actually happened?
- What was it about this that I found restimulating?
- What does that tell me about me? Maybe it is a familiar pattern of mine.
- What did I do in this situation? What else could I have done? And what else?
- What might have had better outcomes?
- What might be getting in the way of me doing any of these other things?

Until I become able to accept the other person as a fellow human being doing the very best they can then I have work to do. That is not the same as saying that I agree with what they do or that I should put up with them crossing my boundaries.

## **Then what?**

So what if the other person is actually being aggressive, i.e. crossing other people's boundaries, rather than other people just feeling annoyed by how they are being. As always there are two approaches, one is being assertive and the second helping the other person to learn.

These are not part of co-counselling, they are ways of being more clear and successful in how we relate to others. What we can do is use co-counselling ourselves to help us learn how to do these things well.

## **Being assertive**

There is no one way of being assertive, there is always a range of assertive options. The objective is to clearly communicate something to someone, for instance a boundary of mine,

without being aggressive. It can be verbal, for example “I want you not to do that” or non verbal like putting my hand up. It is owned, “I”, this is about me, and it is not judgemental or blaming. Generally it helps to be assertive from the start, in other words not letting someone cross my boundaries at all.

Anne Dickson’s book ‘A Woman In Your Own Right’ <sup>1</sup> is an excellent guide to being assertive. Anne is a former teacher of CCI co-counselling.

## Helping

If I have done my own work, got to a point of being non-judgemental and holding my own boundaries then I may choose to think about what I can do to support other people. In particular I be able to help them to learn in holistic ways. I may be helping them learn something about what they do, what effects it may have and to feel different. It may also be about learning what else is possible.

In helping someone I need to be doing it for them, trying to help them learn the sorts of things that their higher self would suggest it would be good for them to learn. It is not about getting them to be or do something for me. If I want something from them then it is up to me to be clear and assertive. To help them I need to be supportive of them, accepting and non-judgemental.

If they are trying to cross my boundaries they may be acting in ways that are not useful to them either. One thing that can help them is to stop them crossing my boundaries. In effect I may be interrupting a pattern. They may find it restimulating and they could use co-counselling to learn from this.

There are many ways of helping others all of which have their place. John Heron’s Six Category model which is central to his book *Helping the Client*<sup>2</sup> offers a brilliant overview of all ways of helping.

## If I am accused of being annoying?

What if I am the person who is supposed to have upset others or crossed their boundaries? First I need to process what has happened to me and how I feel about it. Co-counselling is a good way of going about this.

Next I need to understand as clearly as possible what the other person or people are experiencing. It is helpful if I can check out my understanding with them, without defending myself or making excuses, and see if I can get to a point where they agree that I have understood well enough.

Then what do I learn from this, about me and about others? After that I can try to work out what the many possibilities are for me to do, maybe trying different things and co-counselling to stay clear and learn. And I can talk things through with anyone who is willing to help me to learn.

## Learning about groups

Learning about interpersonal interactions in groups is not a part of co-counselling. Nor are there any rules about how we should be outside of sessions apart from the confidentiality of clients’ work in sessions. Nevertheless we do learn to be fairly good at it because we often get together in groups, we bring ideas from other activities we may be involved in and we can use co-counselling to learn from our experiences.

Often we manage in groups very well and sometimes we make a right pig’s ear of it. I think we can keep learning and make silk purses out of our pig’s ears.

---

1 Dickson, A. (2022) *A woman in your own right: The art of assertive, clear and honest communication*. Richmond, England: Duckworth Books. ISBN 978-0715654545

2 Heron, J. (2021) *Helping the client: A creative practical guide*. 5th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications. ISBN 978-0761972891