

# PART I

## THE HELPING PROCESS

*The LORD is close to the brokenhearted  
and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*

Ps. 34:18

### **How do you help?**

How do you incorporate listening skills?

How do you work on the issue?

The next few pages are designed to help you get a view of what a helping session could look like.



# 1— THE POWER OF LISTENING AND THE STAGES OF HELPING

*He who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame*  
(Prov. 18:13).

A key to the helping process is being a good listener. Few people seem to have natural listening skills. We tend to think about how a conversation relates to us rather than the other person. Putting ourselves in the shoes of someone else can be difficult.

As a helper, the more you practice the listening skills introduced in the first part of this chapter, the more aware you will become of the needs of others. Learning these skills means, for a short time, letting go of your own needs. Once you can focus on what another person is going through, you will be able to guide him or her through the helping process, as described in this chapter's second part.

Begin by asking yourself these questions:

- Am I tuning in to what a person is saying, or am I relating it to myself?
- Am I assuming I know what a person is going to say and stop listening?
- Do I concentrate on the meaning of the message?
- Do I watch verbal and nonverbal behavior?
- Do I consider the best way to respond?
- Do I practice these skills with others to sharpen my ability to really hear what a person is saying?

## Basic Listening Skills for All Helpers

If you are talking more than the helpee, you are not helping and you are certainly not listening. Listening is a unique skill that few people master. The art of listening comes by much patience, compassion, and care. We will examine basic active listening skills.

### 1. Validating—a Skill All to Itself

People need to identify and state their pain to begin the process of restoration. Validating the helpee's feelings shows that you want to truly walk alongside the helpee to help him or her find healing and peace.

Skipping this step and jumping to advice (i.e., "I think you should just give it to God and move on") indicates to the helpee that what you have to say is more important than what he or she is saying. Instead, by validating the helpee's pain, the door is opened to the path that will lead to healing.

Examples of validation include statements such as the following:

"I can see that you feel hurt when you think about it."

"It sounds like you have been in a lot of pain over this."

"I can't imagine what you have been through."

"I can see you are hurting."

You do not need to have all of the answers, but simply as James put it, "be quick to listen [and] slow to speak" (James 1:19).

As a counseling professor I have found the most difficult thing for students to remember is to reflect the helpee's pain by verbally validating before asking the next question or, worse yet, thinking they need to give a quick fix. Validation is essential for healing.

#### *Ask Yourself the Following*

What is the depth of the helpee's pain?

How often is it interwoven in the story?

Have I acknowledged his or her pain verbally each time pain is demonstrated?

#### *Example*

HELPEE: It has been very hard for me the past three weeks. My aunt—who I was close to—died, my job role is changing daily, and now because of finances I am having to take my children out of private school and put them in public school. I have little energy and life seems so bleak now.

HELPER: You have certainly gone through a lot of change. That would be very difficult to experience all at once.

*Or*

HELPER: Wow, that has to be overwhelming. I can see why you would have little energy. That is a lot to go through.

## **2. Paraphrasing**

This skill involves saying the same thing as the helpee but in fewer words. This assures the helpee that you are listening and know what he or she is saying.

### *Ask Yourself the Following*

What is his or her basic message?

How do I restate it in less words?

Did the helpee feel that I heard him or her?

### *Example*

HELPEE: I don't know about him. One moment he's nice as can be. The next moment he lashes out and says hurtful things about me. I am always so upset that I either walk away or lash out myself. Then it really becomes ugly.

HELPER: So he changes from one moment to the next.

## **3. Clarifying**

This skill guides the helper into a better understanding of what the helpee is saying. This method of questioning brings the content into a sharper focus. What does the helpee really mean?

### *Ask Yourself the Following*

What doesn't seem to make sense?

What part needs more information?

What parts am I not putting together?

### *Example*

HELPEE: I don't understand why I get so upset with my husband. He is such a wonderful guy. He just annoys me. He thinks he always knows what is right to do. He always ends up with the last word. This frustrates me. It doesn't matter what I say. Sometimes I say how I feel. Then he gets upset.

(Examples of clarifying responses)

HELPER: He gets upset at what kind of feelings?

HELPER: I'm not sure I understand. Could you tell me more?

HELPER: Give me an example of what you mean.

HELPER: Let me state what I think you mean to see if I understand.

#### 4. Reflecting Feelings

This skill can show an understanding of the helpee's feelings. It can bring reflection to the helpee on ideas or thoughts he or she hadn't realized or understood.

##### *Ask Yourself the Following*

What is the overall feeling?

What does the helpee's tone suggest?

Is the helpee's body language saying something different from his or her words?

Does the helpee concur that the identified feeling is correct?

##### *Example*

HELPEE: I'm wondering if you can help me find a new way of responding to my wife. I spend most of my time listening and not saying much. What is the use of saying anything? She will just get upset anyway.

(Examples of reflecting responses)

HELPER: You seem to feel frustrated. Do you think you feel like giving up?

HELPER: It really hurts to be rejected by someone you love. You seem to feel angry in this situation.

##### *Example*

(Here is an example of reflection of inconsistencies between verbal and nonverbal.)

HELPEE: I feel like I am doing well. I have plenty to do each day, and I am sure I am feeling better about my marriage.

HELPER: You are smiling, but I sense you are really hurting inside.

HELPER: You say you really care about your wife, but when you talk about her, you clench your fists.

#### 5. Confrontation

This skill can aid several areas. A safe environment must first be established if confrontation is to take place. Always use a noninvasive method of confronting. Learn to soften your words. This skill is used to tell the helpee about his or her discrepancies, lack of awareness of self or perhaps recognition of fear and/or anger.

##### *Ask Yourself the Following*

What appears to be inconsistent in what the helpee is saying?

Is there something the helpee fails to recognize in his or her life?  
Is the helpee blind to the hurt he or she may be causing another person?

*Example*

HELPEE: I feel really hurt by my mom. She spends all her time at work. Everything is more important to her than me and my sister. When she comes home, she never has anything nice to say. She just says she is tired and doesn't want to be bothered with us. She always had an excuse when we asked her to go to school events. Not that my family is bad or anything—my parents really love me. They always did the best they could. My mom is really a good mother. Our family always had a lot of love.

HELPER: There seems to be some real hurt with you and your mother. You seem to have difficulty talking about that hurt. Do you feel you need to be protective of your mom?

HELPEE: I feel bad saying anything bad and who wants their family to sound awful? We are just a normal family.

HELPER: I can see this is difficult for you. It is OK to talk with someone about things that have hurt you. No one has gone without at least some hurt in his or her family. Most parents are trying to be the best parents they can be. But in order for you to heal, we have to look at the whole truth about all that has happened. Let's look at this a little more.

## **6. Summarizing**

This skill involves listening to all parts of the message (thus far) and bringing them all together. This method has a variety of purposes, one being to bring the content to closure and another to demonstrate to the helpee all that has been discussed.

*Ask Yourself the Following*

What are the main issues and emotions that have been discussed?

Would it be more meaningful for me (the helper) to sum up this information or for the helpee to do it? In deciding, consider your purpose. Was it to

- Warm up the helpee at the beginning?
- Focus scattered thoughts and feelings?
- Close discussion on a particular theme?
- Check your understanding of the helpee's progress?
- Encourage the helpee to explore themes more completely?

- Terminate the relationship with a progress summary?
- Assure the helpee that the sessions are moving along well?

Or was it to

- Test your own understanding of what has been said?
- Evaluate how the helpee is feeling at the end of the session?
- Evaluate the importance of the topics discussed?

In the first group of questions, the helpee hears you summarize; in the second, the helpee summarizes.

### *Example*

Here is a scenario. A young college girl has just discussed her fear of her boyfriend breaking up with her. There doesn't seem to be much reason for her to worry continually about this. The helper has asked her also about her parents. She has explained that her dad was never at home and that when he did come home, he was busy and distracted. She never remembers sitting down and talking to him about her life. Once, when she asked her dad for help with some hurt she was experiencing with her friends, he told her the problem was her fault and what else could she expect.

HELPER: We have talked about your relationship with your boyfriend and how you worry a lot about him breaking up with you. We've looked at that from several angles but didn't come up with anything concrete that could substantiate that fear. The fear of breaking up is definitely there. We also discussed the hurt you had with your dad and how he seemed to never be there for you. You seem to have a difficult time talking about your dad and the things you missed. You even mentioned that he isn't here for you now. There is a lot of hurt in these relationships, and I would like us to look at the possibility that there could be a link between them. Do you think you fear rejection from your dad? From your boyfriend?

The above is just a sample of the summarization of a session.

Now that we have surveyed the necessary listening skills, we will examine what a counseling (helping) session is like.



## Diagram of a Helping Session

1. Prepare yourself	2. Ask: How can I be of help to this person?	3. What does the helpee need to recognize?	4. What is the issue? How can the helpee work on it?
Keep yourself in the Word of God.	A. Compassion is your main tool—feel with helpee.	Incorporate listening skills to promote listening. These do not need to be in this order. These are skills to be used when needed.	A. What Is the Issue? Have you connected the fruits to a root?
Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you.	B. Respect Being nonjudgmental	How does helpee feel? What is his or her understanding?	B. Solving the Issue What does God say? Is there an issue to solve? Connecting the fruits to the root—if so, see “Steps to Assist the Helpee . . .” in the chapter for the root.
Be aware of your own personal issues of sexuality and burnout.	C. Care about what is happening in helpee’s life.	A. Validation Use this when pain is expressed. This skill is vital to healing.	C. Work on the Issue Help the helpee think of ways to resolve his or her issue and make any needed decisions. This may mean looking more at the “root” chapters in the book and the questions given. There may not be a decision to make.
A. Time to Listen How are your listening skills?	D. Genuineness If you are real, the helpee will feel free to open up. Carl Rogers states that being genuine, respectful, and showing empathy is foremost in this process. <sup>1</sup>	B. Paraphrasing Be sure you are understanding what helpee is saying. This also helps helpee see you are listening. This may be used when necessary to show understanding.	D. Information Gathering Sometimes the most helpful solution can be having the helpee read information on the issue to bring further understanding. Is forgiveness a part of solving this issue? If so, look at the unforgiveness chapter.

1. Prepare yourself (continued)	2. Ask: How can I be of help to this person? (continued)	3. What does the helpee need to recognize? (continued)	4. What is the issue? How can the helpee work on it? (continued)
B. Begin with Prayer	E. Being Culturally Sensitive Carl Rogers emphasizes the need to understand the inner world of the person you are seeing.	C. Clarification Clarify what you don't understand—tune in to what helpee is saying. Does helpee have a goal? This helps bring clarification.	Is the helpee serious about changing? Make sure helpee is committed to the process. Give him or her materials to work on. See homework sections.
	It is vital to be aware of family values and issues that relate particularly to other groups.	D. Reflecting Feelings How is the helpee feeling? Is helpee aware of his or her feelings?	E. Ending a Session Make sure you have brought God and His Word into this.
		E. Confrontation Use if needed—that is, if there is a discrepancy in what helpee says and does. Are you seeing the fruits? Is what helpee came in for really the issue?	F. Pray with Helpee See Scripture sections. Give helpee scriptures to take home and study.
		F. Summarizing State briefly what has been discussed, bringing all parts together. See summarization in the listening skills section.	
As a result of your preparation, you will be ready to help helpee become involved.	As a result, the helpee will be open to speak from his or her heart.	As a result of this process, the helpee should be experiencing some clarity.	As a result of this process, the helpee should be learning new behaviors.

## Explanation of the Helping Process

To start with, keep in mind that if you're talking more than the helpee, you are not helping; you are probably giving advice, teaching, or talking about yourself. The homework you assign is what teaches helpees more

about the issue and helps them work on their behavior. See “Understanding Self” in chapter 22, on pages 277-78, to aid you in this process.

What follows are the stages of the helping process with their explanations. (An overview of the process is also found in the diagram beginning on page 25.) Some adaptation will be needed, but these are the general steps.

### **First, You Need to Be Prepared**

- Keep yourself in the Word of God.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you.
- Be aware of your own personal issues of sexuality and possibility of burnout from too much counseling.

#### **A. Time to Listen**

- See the active listening skills in previous pages.
- Notice verbal and nonverbal cues.
- Attend to the helpee’s feelings as well as the content—what the helpee is saying.

#### **B. Open in Prayer**

### **Second, Ask the Helpee, “How Can I Be of Help?”**

Or ask, “How can I help you today?” Let the helpee tell you his or her story.

**A. Compassion.** Answer with meaning, feeling, and compassion.

**B. Respect.** Are you showing value to the helpee?

**C. Care.** Are you caring in your responses? What does your body language say? Are you in a rush?

Make sure you understand the helpee’s story. Be sure to ask the helpee what he or she means. Do not interrupt with your own stories, opinions, or reflections. Reflect how the helpee feels. Always keep an attitude of acceptance. Use only the information he or she has given you. Carl Rogers, founder of Person-Centered Counseling, says the most important technique is the helper’s attitude toward people: “congruence (genuineness), unconditional positive regard (respect), and empathy.”<sup>2</sup>

- D. Genuineness.** Are you real? Carl Rogers says being real, warm, transparent, and caring will facilitate the process.
- E. Culturally Sensitive.** It is vital to be aware of family values and issues that relate particularly to other groups.

### **Third, You Need to Help the Helpee Recognize and Understand His or Her Issue**

The helpee needs to know how his or her feelings affect his or her content (the issue) so he or she can start understanding the issue.

Use empathy but add insight into the problem: “You feel \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_ and you want \_\_\_\_\_.”<sup>3</sup>

Using the skills listed below (when needed) you will be able to guide the helpee toward recognition of the issue and eventually healing.

- A. Validating the Helpee.** Validating pain and hurt is essential to the healing process:
  - “I can see why you feel so hurt.”
  - “You have been through a lot.”
  - “I can’t imagine how much that would hurt.”

Validating needs to be spoken every time a significant pain is expressed—especially before the next question. This is essential for most people. Some men feel better being validated by a nod or expression of acceptance than words of validation.

**B. Paraphrasing.** At times it may be necessary to paraphrase what a helpee says to show you understand his or her problem. This could be anywhere in the session.

- C. Clarification.** Clarify by recognizing uniqueness and generalities and helping the helpee become specific. What is it you don’t understand about the helpee’s story?
- D. Reflecting Feelings.** What does the helpee need to understand about his or her own feelings? Is the helpee aware enough of his or her feelings to put words to them?
- E. Confrontation.** Confronting a helpee might be necessary in several situations. Seeing a discrepancy between what the helpee says and other actions the helpee shows you in the session could prompt a need for confrontation. It might also be necessary when you observe the helpee changing his or her words or being inconsistent in his or her stories.

The right to confront must be earned by your relationship with the helpee. You also must know from God that it is necessary to confront.

Confrontation could have a harsh tone, but you can confront in a gentle, kind manner. Preface your words by saying, “I want to ask you a question about something I have noticed in what you said . . .”

- F. Summarizing.** Summarizing goes a step further than paraphrasing. Summarize the whole discussion of the session—the key points. This helps you as well as the helpee see clarity and progress. You need to attend to everything the helpee has said—the content as well as the way it was said, or the feeling.

Put the content and feeling together: “In this session we have talked about \_\_\_\_\_.” Describe the content and feelings, bringing in the important details. Ask if the helpee sees the same things in the summary. This helps you and the helpee see clarity.

#### **Fourth, What Is the Issue? How Can the Helpee Work on It**

Consider what God says on the issue, and bring the Word of God into the matter. Approach sin if that is the issue.

Never use words such as, “You have a problem.” Some words we use can be very discouraging.

**A. “What Is Really the Issue at Hand?”** It might be a matter of goal setting or working on behaviors. It might be a problem-solving issue. This is a good time to look at the symptoms (fruits that have been identified) and decide what possibly could be the root(s). It is often necessary to see if forgiveness is a part of solving the issue? Unforgiveness is common to many issues.

**B. Solving the Issue.** This may not be possible at the moment. Remember the decision about what to do always belongs to the helpee. The helpee may already know what to do and just needed validation of his or her hurt. Maybe the issue is one the helpee must work out over time, or it may be an issue dealing with choices. This is when you should be considering what possible fruits you are seeing and what root is present. Study the questions in the chapters of this handbook corresponding to the different roots: rejection, unforgiveness, pride, perfectionism, rebellion, sexual abuse, and/or dysfunction.

#### *Example*

“From what you say, you seem to be allowing anger (fruit) to control part of your life. Perhaps we need to look closer at your relationship with your mother (possible dysfunctional family root) as you mentioned earlier.” Ask yourself, “Where does God fit into this? What biblical character experienced the same issue? Or what does God’s Word say in response to the issue?” See what you can contribute to this issue to bring clarity.

**C. Work on the Issue.** You can say to the helpee, “We will come up with a way to work on this,” or “What do you see as a way to help you through this anger?” Or if you have established a root, see the Steps to Assist the Helpee in the chapter of this handbook covering that specific root.

**D. Information Gathering.** What could you give the helpee to do from the homework sections to help him or her throughout the week?

There are several ways a helpee could work on an issue. For example, the helpee could write a letter expressing the anger he or she feels toward another person but not send the letter. You could also ask the helpee what he or she has already done to work on an issue. Or if it is an issue such as a young girl breaking up with her boyfriend, having her list the pros and cons of the situation might help. Ultimately, any decision has to be made by the helpee. See the homework assignments under the root(s) if needed.

*Ask the helpee, “What have you done that hasn’t worked?”* If the helpee is still angry or unforgiving, ask him or her if he or she would like to try something else. Give the helpee suggestions. For example, the helpee could consider talking to the person who caused the hurt.

In many ways, you suggest the kinds of homework and ask the questions that have been described earlier, including asking the helpee if there is a decision that needs to be made. Again, if you have found the root, go ahead and start on the Steps to Assist for the root. This helps the helpee see potential results so that he or she can really commit to the process. For example, have the helpee pray about forgiving his or her mother. Pray blessings on her. Read *The Art of Forgiving* by Lewis B. Smedes (Ballantine Books, 1997). For the next week, ask the helpee to fill out the “Understanding Self” exercise in chapter 22 of this book.

Knowledge about the issue can bring more light to understanding. See the list of books in each root, fruit, and problem chapter. This can help the helpee learn ways to change or work on his or her behavior. What materials could you give the helpee to help him or her learn about this issue over the next few weeks?

**E. Ending of Session.** Here are some steps to help you bring a session to a close:

1. Let the helpee know what you have covered and again what he or she is to do.
2. Review with the helpee and make sure he or she knows what you are expecting in the next week or two.
3. Make sure you talk to the helpee about establishing prayer and Bible reading each day—even if for a short time.

4. Be sure to give the helpee specific scriptures appropriate for the issue.
  5. Make a referral if needed. Know when something is over your head.
- F. Pray with the Helpee.** Give the helpee hope though the Word.

### **The Don'ts of Helping**

When interacting with a helpee, you must know not only what to do but also what not to do. The following list will help you with the things to avoid in a helping session.

1. Don't look shocked when a helpee gives you information.
2. Don't say, "I know just how you feel."
3. Don't disclose experiences in your own life unless it is done rarely and then only briefly.
4. Don't make life-changing decisions for the person you are helping.
5. Don't minimize the helpee's issue.
6. Don't say, "If you just trusted God more, you would be OK," or "If you would pray more, you wouldn't be depressed."
7. Don't lecture, "Be glad it isn't worse."
8. Don't be too sympathetic: "You poor thing."

## Notes

1. Quoted in Charles Thompson and Linda Rudolph, *Counseling Children*, 5th ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Brooks/Cole, 2000), 145.
2. Ibid., 119.
3. Ibid., 123.