

# Reflection

If the assumption is correct, that counsellor responses greatly influence both the dynamics of an interview and the client himself, then we should look for a way of responding which will lead to more complete self expression and a more explicit statement on the part of the client. What is needed is a way of responding which affirms the client, conveys a warm attitude, manifests respect for client meanings and experience, facilitates communication and impels the client's further self exploration whilst at the same time increasing the counsellor's understanding. This way of responding is reflection.

Apart from the 'echo response' which offers no evidence of trying to understand the client's world, (echoing is an impersonal procedure and research evidence shows that it is the effort to understand which is effective, not an imitation of it.) reflection consists of repeating in other words, and more concisely and explicitly, what the client has just said, and doing this in such a way that it wins the client's agreement. Such 'repeating in other words' opens up possibilities in terms of types or degrees of reflection. Just as one counsellor's reflection may be a sensitive reformulation whilst another response to the same client and material may be an indulgence in cliché, so the individual counsellor may manifest degrees of client world understanding by the nature of his reflective response.

- 1a) Paraphrasing            using words considered equivalent in the client's terms.
- 1b) Summarising            using equivalent words but expressing what is essential for the client from the client's point of view.

Both of the above prove that attention is focused on the client. They are also objective reflections as in a mirror. What the client has said from his own experience comes back to him from outside and he is forced (if the reflection is good) to recognise himself in it. This produces a reactive response which heightens self awareness. At the same time he is assured of being heard with understanding.

- 2      Figure and Ground      nothing is added or subtracted from what has been disclosed but a latent meaning is made apparent. Without being able to deny the content of the reflection which is a reversal of the figure/ground relationship, the client sees a new meaning appear for the same subjective ideas, and he is at the centre of this meaning. This may be quite shocking for the client and therefore particular care should be taken that the tone of the response is sensitive and empathic.
- 3      Clarification              this most difficult dimension of reflection involves absolving the client's account of hesitation, muddle and confusion and shedding light ... giving back to the client the very meaning of what he has said. The difficulty here is to start from the essential as seen by the client and avoid the huge risk of making an interpretation. For the client, drawn from all the ideas he has expressed, there is an essential experience presented to him which he recognises as being fundamental for him, although he has not yet formulated it in such a way as to produce a synthesis. (This type of reflection 'puts its finger on' an essential subjective meaning which the client hasn't necessarily been able to express clearly.) If it really is the essential experience that is put at the centre of the clarification reflection (and not an interpretation) the client feels himself to be really understood and feels helped already. He is given a fresh impetus .... encouraged to explain further what he has to say, starting from this new insight. Eg: Client: When I was young my father was really popular, when I grew older he became just like everyone else. Counsellor: It's as if he became less of a hero for you.

There is obviously a progression from the echo to the clarification response, hence no more than simple paraphrasing is usually possible at the beginning of an interview or during a first interview.

Should the impression have been gained that 'reflection' is a multi-faceted technique to be applied to the client then the importance of listening to affect cannot be overemphasised. It is here that for example latent meanings may be heard and it should be remembered that empathy is much more concerned with emotional climate than it is with the use of techniques.

Both figure/ground and clarification responses are constituent parts of advanced empathic responding. Whereas in basic empathy, response match the feeling and content of client disclosures and are largely neutral (eg; leaving decisions about depth to the client) ... advanced empathic responding tries to reflect feelings and experiences at a slightly deeper and possibly more threatening level than the client's current disclosures. Advanced empathic responding expands or advances the level of client awareness, yet remains primarily in the internal frame of reference.

It follows that the chances of being wrong are greater and therefore it is important to work with client's so that they can correct faulty responding.

Finally in order to minimise client feelings of threat, attention must be paid to how (eg; tone of voice, body language) such responses are made. The how of saying must be appropriate to the what is said. Whilst advanced empathic responding may help the client to explore more intimate, personally relevant and emotionally threatening areas of experiences, inaccurate, clumsy or badly timed responses can do more harm than good. Be tentative rather than authoritarian.

## **Bibliography**

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