

Democratization of Counseling Versus Protection of the Financial Interest of Counselors

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Should counseling knowledge and skills be made common public knowledge through education programs in public schools and community programs?

There are numerous advantages to the health and well-being of individuals and of society as a whole, that would result from the dissemination and proliferation of counseling knowledge and skills: the vision and goal of the College of Mental Health Counseling (www.collegemhc.com).

Everyone is a Counselor

Empathy is a natural innate quality of being human, and so the exercise of this natural quality can be improved and enhanced through public counselor education. In addition to empathy, the common counselor qualities of warmth, sincerity, and unconditional positive regard for others, are common human values and abilities and not the private possession of certain professional groups.

Since everyone is a counselor naturally by virtue of empathy, altruism, and social connectedness, the function of public counseling education programs is to assist individuals to exercise empathy, communication, and helping skills in the most effective and intentional manner for a predictable helpful outcome: the definition of professional counseling.

Humans are social beings, and their social interactive ability is significantly improved by the acquisition of counseling knowledge and skills. Training already exists for the public to gain parenting and communication skills. The details of understanding and helping others can be added to existing socially accepted training in order to further the health of individuals, children, and families.

Areas of Personal Benefit

The special skills, concepts, and knowledge of counseling have become the private protected possession of certain professional groups for their financial gain, much to the detriment and loss of the public needing help. Professional counselors benefit personally from their knowledge of counseling, and such personal benefit can therefore be realized by those who acquire counseling knowledge.

The specific areas of counseling knowledge and skills and their associated benefits can be identified, described, and elaborated. For example, knowledge of one's personal history helps the individual gain insight into how childhood experiences have affected adult life and relationships. This personal awareness has a healing effect in itself allowing the individual to live consciously and intentionally rather than driven by the unconscious compulsion to repeat unhealthy patterns of unresolved conflict and loss.

The art and science of listening is the core of counseling, and the personal benefit to the effective listener is intimacy and closeness in personal relationships, the reduction of unresolved conflict, and ultimately the harmony of the planet. It is only sensible if not mandatory, therefore, that this core counseling skill should be made public knowledge and part of every core curriculum in public school education.

Emotions, Conflict, and Grief

Much of the general population suffers from a low emotional quotient (EQ), unable to distinguish thoughts from feelings, and lacking a vocabulary and awareness of basic painful emotions such as fear, anger, guilt, sadness, emptiness, low self-

worth, and despair. Knowing these terms helps put feelings into words, getting the feelings from inside to outside, which is integral to healing emotional and psychological pain from unresolved conflict and loss.

Knowing how to help someone process painful emotions of grief, is an area that is virtually unknown within the general population, yet one cannot avoid the common experience of loss. Making public the knowledge and skills to support the grief of others moving through different types of loss, would go far in preventing the unhealthy effects of unresolved grief.

Public Education Programs

Public education programs can provide information and training to assist individuals to counsel in the most intentional and effective way for the person seeking help. The basic principle of counseling and inner healing is to ask questions and make statements that help the person to put their thoughts and feeling into words so that the helper can then validate and normalize the person's experience.

The public can learn how to do counseling beginning with effective basic communication skills, reflective listening, asking open and close-ended questions, asking permission to explore personal areas, validating and normalizing, reaching for feelings, problem solving, crisis intervention and suicide prevention. A person wanting to help others can progress to learning professional boundaries, more complex approaches, and actually providing professional services.

Basic Counseling Skills

Here are some examples of basic counseling skills adapted from the College training text "Effective Counseling Skills" by Daniel Keeran, MSW, on Amazon in digital or hard copy at <http://www.amazon.com/Effective-Counseling-Skills-therapeutic-statements/dp/1442177993>

1. Invite the person to talk, by saying: "Tell me what's happening."
2. Reach for emotions, by saying, "What emotions do you feel right now: fear, anger, sadness, low self-worth, hopeless, some other feeling?"
3. Explore the background, by saying, "How long have you been feeling this way. What was happening when you first started feeling this way?"
4. Validate and normalize the experience, by saying, "It makes sense you would feel the way you do. You are normal. Anyone would feel the same if they went through your experience."
5. Elicit a self-validation, by saying, "Is it OK to feel as you do?" (If the person denies or is doubtful, reassure him or her that his or her struggle is normal.)
6. Build hope by saying, "Once you have let yourself feel the pain and are feeling stronger, what will you do? What are some possibilities for moving forward?"

Building on these basic skills, more advanced and complex approaches can be added in order to address a wide range of common life challenges.

In summary, because counseling is a natural human activity and because people personally benefit from counseling knowledge and skills, then it is reasonable to regard such knowledge as the common property and right of every human being to acquire and not the sole possession of certain professional groups.

There is no aspect or area of counseling knowledge and skills that the general public cannot understand and employ to enhance and improve the health of their relationships with themselves and others and to help others with their personal challenges. Therefore, it is the mandate of the College of Mental Health Counseling to make counseling skills common knowledge for a healing community.