

## Helpful Skills for Building Relationships

**W**hen a counselor is able to feel and communicate caring, understanding and acceptance for a caller, s/he enhances his/her capacity to be of help to that person. A relationship is an experience between two individuals; the relationship you are asked to build with the caller is unique in many ways. It may come at a time when the caller is particularly vulnerable and sensitive. The conversation may focus on painful feelings, losses, confusing situations, situations where the caller feels inadequate, unsolvable problems, etc. and will take place without the benefit of eye contact and physical presence. As a telephone counselor, you will put your understanding and caring into your verbal exchange and will have only a limited time with this person. In spite of those obstacles, building a strong relationship will be an essential tool for working with this caller.

### **Attending Skills:** (paying attention *physically*)

Attending is giving your physical attention to another person - listening with the whole body. Attending is nonverbal communication that indicates that you are paying careful attention to the person who is talking.

This may seem rather difficult to do while on the telephone, but it is important to practice these skills whether or not the person can see you. In the phone room there can be numerous distractions (other volunteers, television, solitaire, homework, etc.) Give the caller your undivided attention. When the phone rings *minimize environment distractions* and utilize these skills.

### **SOLER SKILLS**

- S** Sit Squarely
- O** Sit Openly
- L** Lean forward
- E** Eye / Ear contact
- R** Relax

## **Reflecting Skills:** (paying attention *mentally*)

Feeling understood, accepted, and cared about is important to each of us, especially at a time of crisis. Reflection is the process of identifying, making clear and expressing back feelings and thoughts. This process involves grasping what the other feels and means, and then stating this meaning so that the person feels understood and accepted.

While reflecting may seem contrived in our everyday ordinary conversation, it is an essential skill in counseling. People rarely report that it feels contrived. Rather, they seem to appreciate the degree of concern and focus. Except in extreme emergencies, you can never reflect enough.

- Reflecting is nonjudgmental and accepting. It conveys the desire to understand what the caller is feeling and saying by trying to understand the *feeling* behind the message and then reflecting that feeling back to the caller (e.g. “Sounds like you were really angry about that” or “It seems you were very scared when that happened.”) This is also called “active listening.” Active listening helps callers clarify their thoughts and helps them ventilate and better understand their feelings.
- Don’t pretend you understand if you don’t. Ask the client for more information instead (“Can you tell me more about that?”).
- Don’t ever tell the caller that you know exactly how she or he feels.
- Vary your responses and monitor your tone of voice. A great deal of empathy and warmth can be conveyed through your tone of voice.
- If the caller begins to ask personal questions or for your opinions, reflect the feeling behind the question back to the caller (e.g. “What do you think I should do?” – “Sounds like it’s confusing figuring out what to do. I can’t give you answers, but we can talk about what you see as your options.”). Self-disclosure will be discussed more later in this section.

### **Name what you hear**

“You’re confused about her feelings toward you”.  
“You’re afraid to be alone”.  
“You’re really upset about your daughter”.

Clearly state these feelings and facts. If you use a question format (“Do you feel sad?”), you will sound unsure, unbelieving and perhaps patronizing. Questions also force a response from the client and may cause defensiveness.

### **Name what you hear as long as you hear it**

The caller will introduce new feelings only when ready to deal with them; it may be necessary to reflect some feelings many times. View these reflections as a gradual release of pressure: some people can let it all out at once, while others need a series of little releases. Multiple reflections may be a way of looking at something from different angles until the whole picture is seen.

## **Reflect verbalized and non-verbalized material**

While some feelings are mentioned, others are perceived by tone, content and word choice. It is preferable to reflect the feeling that the caller has stated. Sometimes, however, we may reflect feelings that we perceive beneath the flow of conversation. For example, the caller may be discussing the death of her husband. While she may not state anger, the listener may perceive it because of her angry tone. By mentioning our perception of the tone, the caller may feel freer to discuss this feeling. If the listener misinterprets, then she will almost always correct the impression, perhaps disclosing more valid feelings in the process. Don't let fear of being wrong silence you!

## **Be aware of incorrect uses of the word "feel"**

In general conversation, the word feel is used to express thoughts, as well as feelings. It can be used to express an indefinite thought ("I feel like having a drink."); as a statement of opinion ("I feel that Roger's brashness is..."); or as a statement of belief ("I feel that all men are created equal"). Generally, anytime "feel" is followed with "that" ("I feel that...") it has been used in a factual, not an emotional way. Avoid this usage when you are reflecting an emotion.

## **Reflective listening is active**

Reflective listening may seem to be a passive process. To be successful, however, it relies on intense concentration. We hear more than just the words of the caller; we also hear the feelings, values, and attitudes of an individual. To do this requires empathy and acceptance of the importance of the caller's concern.

Experiencing and expressing feelings are major ways of interacting with others. Effective communication occurs when people take responsibility for their thoughts, feelings, and behavior—when individuals own who they are and what they do. Many of us have conditioned ourselves to screen awareness of our feelings, blocking effective communication and self-understanding.

## **Empathy is necessary**

Empathy literally means "to feel in", to stand in another's shoes, to get inside his or her feelings. Empathy is a learned skill and can be improved through attention and practice. To improve your empathy...

- Pay attention to your own feelings
- Listen with genuine concern, interest, and full attention
- Listen first, then speak
- Understand and accept what another is experiencing; do not judge

Pity, sympathy, projection and transference sometimes masquerade as empathy. Pity is feeling sorry for another, and tends to patronize the client.

Sympathy is feeling for another (becoming emotional involved), and tends to cause one to be less objective and neutral. Projection attributes our feelings to another. ("I would feel this way in

that situation, so you must also".) Transference is when we react to a client because he or she reminds us of someone else. All of these situations interfere with and detract from our ability to empathize with another individual.

### **Why Reflection Is Effective**

It is respectful. When you mirror emotions and thoughts, you help the speaker see her image. The speaker can decide whether it needs alteration.

It helps the speaker feel deeply understood; often getting at un-verbalized feelings of which the speaker is sometimes unaware.

It serves a supportive function by communicating to the speaker that you are in tune with her.

It shows that you are paying attention. You cannot give an interchangeable response unless you are really listening. Careful listening is not an accident!

Concentrating on how the other person feels eliminates the need for personal judgment. All feelings are legitimate even if you can't accept the person's behavior.

Feelings can sometimes be the causes of behavior. If you can help someone with her feelings, it may help her to examine her motives as well.

It provides the opportunity for emotional catharsis, i.e. a feeling of relief from tension and pressure.

Since the speaker is free from having to defend her feelings, the speaker can face her problems more directly.

# Ways to Reflect

## VERBATIM

Repeat back to the caller word-for-word exactly what he or she has just said.

Client: “I just don’t know what I’m going to do. I feel trapped.”

Counselor: “You just don’t know what to do.... you feel trapped.”

## PARAPHRASING

Reflect the words that the caller has just stated, but change the wording a little bit.

Caller: “I just don’t know what I’m going to do. I feel trapped.”

Counselor: “You sound like you’re at a loss as to what to do because no options seem like the right one.”

## REFLECTION FORMULAS

This is a lot like paraphrasing, but the counselor leads with a frequently used “formula.”

1. When \_\_\_\_\_ happens, you feel \_\_\_\_\_.

Caller: “I just don’t know what I’m going to do. I feel trapped.”

Counselor: “When you don’t know what to do, you feel stuck.”

2. It sounds like \_\_\_\_\_.

Caller: “I just don’t know what I’m going to do. I feel trapped.”

Counselor: “It sounds like you feel trapped because you don’t know what to do.”

3. What I’m hearing you say is \_\_\_\_\_.

Caller: “I just don’t know what I’m going to do. I feel trapped.”

Counselor: “What I’m hearing you say is that you feel stuck because you’re not sure what you can do.”

## REFLECTION OF FEELING

It’s debatable, but many mental health counselors believe that addressing feelings is the priority before any thoughts or actions can be had in problem solving. At the Crisis Center, we place a lot of importance on feelings as a way of affirming and empathizing. Reflect feelings often.

Instead of using the Reflection Formula, you go immediately to reflecting feeling. Remember, all feelings can be traced back to the primary feelings: SAD, MAD, GLAD and SCARED.

Caller: “I just don’t know what I’m going to do. I feel trapped.”

Counselor: “You feel trapped.” OR “You sound scared.”

## **REFLECTION OF THOUGHTS**

If the caller sounds as if he or she is working from a cognitive approach, reflect thoughts or if it is difficult to connect with him or her around feelings, then reflect thoughts.

Caller: “I just don’t know what I’m going to do. I feel trapped.”

Counselor: “It sounds like you really want to know what to do, and when you don’t, you’re uncomfortable.”

## **REFLECTION OF EVENTS, ACTIONS, BEHAVIORS**

When you need to reflect facts, so as to make sure that you’re hearing the story correctly, reflect the facts, events, actions or behaviors as you have heard them.

Counselor: “Let me see if I’m hearing you correctly . . . your doctor told you that \_\_\_\_\_.”

Or

Counselor: “Let me see if I’m hearing you correctly . . . you were in a car accident and you have not been working for three weeks.”

Or

Counselor: “Let me see if I’m hearing you correctly . . . you’re saying that you have not slept or eaten in three days.”

# List of Feeling Words

## **AFRAID**

scared  
alarmed  
frightened  
terrified  
anxious  
panicky  
terror-stricken  
fearful  
apprehensive

## **CONFUSED**

perplexed  
confounded  
distracted  
disconcerted  
flustered  
bewildered  
mixed-up  
puzzled

## **FRUSTRATED**

defeated  
thwarted  
exasperated  
baffled  
hindered  
fighting a losing battle

## **HATE**

abhor  
loathe  
resent  
dislike  
detest  
despise

## **HELPLESS**

powerless  
defenseless  
vulnerable  
resourceless  
crippled  
dependent

## **HOPELESS**

*futile*  
*desperate*  
*desolate*  
*despondent*  
*dejected*  
*pessimistic*  
*disappointed*  
*forlorn*  
*give up*  
*despair*

## **ANGRY**

irritated  
mad  
enraged  
hostile  
furious  
announced  
exasperated  
inflamed  
provoked  
incensed  
infuriated

## **AMBIVALENT**

ambiguous  
vague  
undecided  
unsure  
uncertain

## **DISGUSTED**

nauseated  
sickened  
revolted  
repelled  
aversion

## **EMBARRASSED**

demoralized  
disconcerted  
humiliated  
ashamed  
degraded  
lose face

## **GUILTY**

bad  
at fault  
to blame  
sinful  
culpable  
reprehensible

## **HAPPY**

joyous  
contented  
*ecstatic*  
*glad*  
*cheerful*  
*pleased*  
*lucky*  
*fortunate*  
*up*

## **LOVE**

*fondness*  
*like*  
*admire*  
*affection*  
*idolize*  
*care*  
*attached*

## **HURT**

in pain  
aching  
alone  
injured  
wounded  
in agony  
anguish  
broken-hearted

## **SAD**

sorrowful  
downcast  
dejected  
unhappy  
melancholy  
gloomy  
dismal  
heavy-hearted

## **TIRED**

weary  
fatigued  
exhausted  
beat

## **LONELY**

solitary  
alone  
lonesome  
desolate

## **WORRIED**

anxious  
uneasy  
fearful  
apprehensive  
concerned  
disturbed  
fretting  
upset  
tormented  
trouble

## **SHOCKED**

appalled  
*horrified*  
*disgusted*  
*revolted*  
*surprised*

## **WORTHLESS**

*useless*  
*no good*  
*valueless*  
*miserable*  
*lousy*  
*good-for-nothing*

## Reflective Response Exercise

Feelings and content are two components of communication. An important skill in counseling is the ability to discriminate between feelings and content in a caller's statements. A simple formula for reflection that includes feelings and content is:

"You feel \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_"

However, it would be unnatural to continue using only this formula; as the counselor becomes more skilled and relaxed, he/she will find a number of ways to say the same information.

In this exercise, please read each statement from a supposed caller. The first set of blanks asks you to fill in a response using the formula "You feel \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_." In the next set of blanks you are asked to re-write the reply in your own words, making sure that you include **feelings** and **content** in your response.

1. Girl, age 14. "I really don't want to lose him. We have been going out for seven weeks. And I don't want to just throw that away, cause I know if I don't have sex with him, he'll break up with me. I don't know what to do."

Formula: \_\_\_\_\_

Your own words: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Businessman, 38: "I really don't know what my boss wants. I don't know what he thinks of me. He tells me I'm doing fine even though I don't think that I'm doing anything special. Then he blows up over nothing at all. I keep asking myself if there's something wrong with me. I mean that I don't see what's getting him to act the way he does. I'm beginning to wonder if this is the right job for me."

Formula: \_\_\_\_\_

Your own words: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Woman, 73, in the hospital with a broken hip: "When you get old, you have to expect things like this to happen. It could have been much worse. I'm not a complainer. Oh, I'm not saying that this is fun or that the people in this place give you the best service—who does these days? But it's a good thing that these hospitals exist."

Formula: \_\_\_\_\_

Your own words: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Girl, age 9. "My little sister is such a pest! She follows me everywhere I go. She even wants to come in my room when I have friends over."

Formula: \_\_\_\_\_

Your own words: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. Man, 35, who has not been feeling well: “I’m going into the hospital tomorrow for some tests. I think they suspect an ulcer. But nobody has told me exactly what kind of tests. I’ve heard rumors about these kinds of tests but I’m not really sure what they’re like.”

Formula: \_\_\_\_\_

Your own words: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. Boy, age 16. “I mean, everything I do, my mom’s on my back. She’s always telling me to do something, and whatever I do it’s wrong. If she doesn’t stop pretty soon, I might just get pushed too far.”

Formula: \_\_\_\_\_

Your own words: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. Woman, 43: “It was all I could do to call here. A friend told me to call the police. And then I’d become one of those stories you read in the paper everyday! Or they’d be asking me all sorts of questions. I just want to forget it. I don’t want to keep reliving it over and over again.”

Formula: \_\_\_\_\_

Your own words: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. Female high school student, 17, talking to a male counselor about an unexpected pregnancy: “I, well, I don’t think I can talk about it. (Pause). You being a man and all that. (Pause). What happens between my boyfriend and me and my family—well, that’s all very personal. I don’t talk to strangers about personal things.”

Formula: \_\_\_\_\_

Your own words: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Open-Ended Question Skills

With an expressive caller attentive listening and reflection may be all the communication skills you need. Some callers will not communicate as easily because they are not used to putting their feelings into words. Open-ended questions may help a reluctant person to talk more freely. By definition, an open-ended question is a question that cannot be answered by “yes” and “no”. The question requires the caller to answer in sentences and encourages him/her to reveal something about him/herself, his/her feelings and his/her situation. It serves as an invitation to talk and avoids the sharpness that can be contained in “why” questions. At times, the question may actually be a statement, though serving the same purpose. Some examples of open-ended questions are:

- “What do you think might happen when you talk to your husband?”
- “How is living on your own different than living at home?”
- “Who would you most like to talk to about this?”
- “How would you like her to respond when you talk with her?”

Some examples of statements used as questions are:

- “Tell me about your relationship with your boyfriend”
- “Tell me when you first began to feel uncomfortable”
- “I wonder what would be comforting to you right now”
- “I’m curious about what you were thinking at that moment”

A series of open-ended questions and reflections can help a caller to share his/her inner experience. The questions help him/her to explore the situation more thoroughly and perhaps express for the first time what s/he thinks or feels. The reflection acknowledges and accepts the point of view. If you find yourself asking a series of questions and sounding like you are taking a survey, check yourself out. Your questions are probably close-ended and need to be re-phrased.

Open-ended questions are designed to:

- Get the caller/client talking, telling the story
- Give definition in the caller’s/client’s terms about what “it” means to them
- Give the counselor information about what language to use in mirroring
- Reduces the counselor’s temptation to do mind reading, which does not work.
- Give the caller/client a chance to give expansive information, rather than narrow yes/no responses. The more expansive the better.

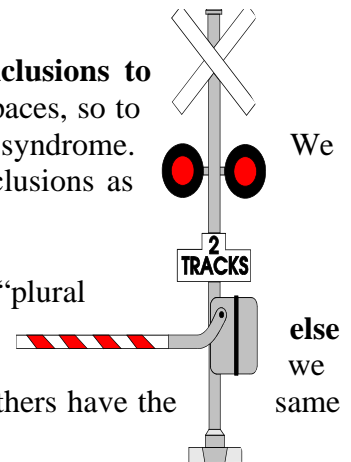
Closed-ended questions are designed to:

- Limit how much a caller/client can say.
- Reduces the information to Yes/No responses.
- Assists when assessing for an emergency risk. (Do you have a gun? Is the gun loaded?)

## Roadblocks to Effective Listening

Over time most of us have developed a series of bad listening habits. In our efforts to become effective crisis interventionists, we have to discover and unlearn them. If you are free of the following ten blocks to good listening, you are well on your way to mastering the art of crisis intervention.

1. There is our almost universal **tendency to judge or evaluate everything we hear**. A person speaks and, before she/he has hardly started to express their idea, we, in our infinite wisdom, have decided either that she is preparing our own verification or rebuttal. From that point on, we simply are not listening to what the person is saying.
2. Another bad listening habit is our **tendency to jump to conclusions to supply our own details and ramifications** – to fill the black spaces, so to speak. The psychologists call this the “non-critical inference” syndrome. We put words in each other’s mouths. We jump to our own conclusions as though our lives depended on it.
3. Still another bad listening habit is what the psychologist call the “plural inference” syndrome—**our tendency to assume that everyone thinks as we do**. We have certain beliefs and convictions, and are so firmly fixed in these that we make the assumption that others have the beliefs.
4. One of the most serious bad listening habits is the **closed mind**. We KNOW the answer—we are happy in our belief that we know the answer—and no one can get through to us.
5. Unfortunately, most of us have an **extremely short attention span**. We are inclined to let our thoughts wander after a fairly short period of attention. We “listen” with our eyes, our ears, all of our senses—and it takes a real effort to concentrate our attention on the speaker over an extended period of time.
6. How about wishful thinking, or in this case **“wishful hearing”**? Aren’t we just a bit inclined to hear what we want to hear? Ever have someone try to put words into your mouth? Ever leave a meeting and find that there are a dozen different versions of what took place? Ever made a statement, “He hears what he wants to hear?”
7. **Semantics**. The meaning of words, phrases, and terms is often very subtle and evasive. Professions, vocations, even avocations, have a language all their own. This matter of semantics is not only a personal and industrial problem; it is also a word problem. In any language, there are words that simply cannot be translated into another language.
8. Probably one of the most common bad listening habits is **our infatuation with the sound of our own words**. **We’re often not quiet long enough to listen to anyone else. The talker is NOT a listener!** Benjamin Franklin considered silence high on his list of virtues.



9. We must overcome **our own arrogance**—the idea that WE, the listener, are superior to whoever is doing the talking. **We** must listen to accept thoughts, ideas, and concepts from others. The teacher invariably learns more than his or her students do. We can learn from every single person with whom we come in contact.
10. **Fear! Fear of being changed.** Fear of having our ideas, our convictions, upset. We tend to seek out a black and white world—a world that simply does not exist. We are happy and comfortable in our ideas, and we resist anything that might change them.

**T**he following ways of responding to a person are further roadblocks or barriers to communication. These responses have a negative impact on communication because they get in the way of an equal and open exchange. These responses imply that the listener is uncomfortable with the topic and that the listener is judging, feeling superior to, or condescending to the client's feelings and the flow of the conversation. There may be some situations where these roadblocks are appropriate, but the listener should be aware of the effects of using them.

#### **Ordering, Directing, Commanding**

- Telling the client to do something, giving her or him an order or command: “You have to stop thinking about all the bad things that could happen!” or “You should call the police.”

#### **Warning, Threatening, Promising**

- Telling the client what consequences will occur if she or he does something: “If you do that, you’ll be sorry” or “If you calm down, I’ll listen to you.”

#### **Moralizing, Preaching, “Should” And “Ought”**

- Invoking outside authority as accepted truth: “You shouldn’t act like that” or “You ought to tell her what you’re feeling”; “Think of all the women you will let down if you don’t report.”

#### **Name calling, labeling, stereotyping**

- Making the client feel foolish, shaming or categorizing her or him: “That’s a typical male way of thinking” or “You’re smarter than that” or “Police tend to be ...”

#### **Interpreting, analyzing, diagnosing**

- Telling the client what his or her motives are or analyzing motives, communicating that you have the client figured out: “You’re just jealous of your friend” or “You only feel that way because he won’t give you what you want.”

#### **Offering praise, reassurances**

- Trying to make her or his feelings go away, denying the strength of the feelings: “You’ll feel better tomorrow” or “Don’t worry, things will work out.”

## **Guidelines to Being a Better Listener**

### **Really want to listen.**

Almost all listening problems can be overcome by deciding to really hear and be interested in people.

### **Act like a good listener.**

Be alert, sit straight, lean forward if appropriate, and let your face show interest.

### **Listen to understand.**

Don't just listen to be listening; try to really understand what is being said.

### **React!**

Be generous with applause, nods, comments, questions, and encouragement as appropriate.

### **Stop talking.**

You can't listen while you are talking. In a conversation, let the other person finish and hear what he or she is saying before you go in.

### **Empathize with the speaker.**

Put yourself in the speaker's place and try to clearly see that point of view.

### **Ask questions.**

When you don't understand, when you need further clarification, ask questions. However, don't ask questions that will embarrass or put down the other person.

### **Concentrate on what the other person is saying.**

Focus on the words, the ideas, the feelings being expressed, and the body language.

### **Look at the other person.**

Facial expressions and body language will all help the other person communicate with you.

### **Reacts to ideas, not to the person.**

Don't allow your personal attitudes to influence your interpretation of words. Good ideas can come from anyone.

### **Don't argue mentally.**

If you are trying to understand the other person, arguments will set up barriers.

## The Temptation to Self-Disclose

All counselors, professional and volunteer alike, must grapple with the concept of self-disclosure. Where does self-disclosure fit into counseling? What kind of self-disclosure is helpful? What kind of self-disclosure is harmful? Is there *ever* a time when it would be helpful to someone?

It is tempting to self-disclose as a counselor and even to convince oneself very earnestly that it is helpful. A caller may even encourage and thank you for self-disclosing. But let's think through the possible reasons why self-disclosure is tempting and potentially harmful to callers. Our volunteers would never intentionally hurt a caller, but the subtle temptations of resorting to self-disclosure might be found in the following.

### **"If it worked for me, it could work for you"**

When a counselor has had personal experience with a specific problem and has achieved resolution with it, it is tempting to say, "*Hey, this worked for me.... it could work for you too! I want you to be happy (or in recovery) just like I am.*" In other words, the counselor is perhaps over-eager to facilitate towards the most expedient and solution based on personal experience. The counselor intends to help, but we all know about the road paved with good intentions...

### **"I feel your pain"**

We have as our core conditions of counseling unconditional positive regard, empathy, and genuineness. Some textbooks liken genuineness to authenticity. It seems reasonable that one way a counselor can join with a caller is by stating a similarity, a shared point of view, or a history of similar suffering. This is not exactly what is meant by authenticity. The skilled helper must be aware of the thin between self-disclosure and authenticity. It is not synonymous with self-disclosure.

Rather, it is more in the realm of "use of self," not self-disclosure. Use of Self would be comments that suggest to the caller that "*I am really here for you,*" "*I am really trying to understand how it feels for you.*" Examples might include comments such as "*I am really feeling scared for you right now*" or "*If I were in your shoes, I would be so sad*" or "*I'm worried for you as I hear you describe this situation.*"

### **"Bait and Switch"**

Even though our mission statement is to give a person in need a helping response, it is not uncommon for callers to turn the tables, to role reverse, to begin to interview you, the counselor, instead of the other way around. Callers often ask questions like, "*Do you have this problem?*" or "*Do you have children?*" or "*Are you married?*" or "*What do you think?*" Some callers use this as a distraction. Other people's problems are easier to examine than one's own. The caller may just want to see if you can connect with you, as if the questions are really about "*Can you empathize with me?*" Another possible reason may be the caller begins to see you as a friend. Friendship development is much more comfortable than facing one's problems.

### **“What was I thinking?”**

Sometimes I have heard volunteers after the fact exclaim, *“I don’t know what came over me! I know I should not self-disclose, but I totally lost my sensibilities about it during the call!”* This might be an occasion to examine how you in your own life are doing. What stressors, difficulties, or “issues” are going on currently that would make you vulnerable to forgetting whom the caller is. We hope that volunteers and staff alike are helping each other on our shifts when our own “issues get stirred up.” Counselors are often accused of being ‘wounded healers.’ This is a very real phenomenon for all counselors and so it is not abnormal; that’s why being in counseling oneself is a routine for many counselors. Self-awareness, self-monitoring, self-containment and intentional awareness are better substitutes for self-disclosure.

## **ALTERNATIVES TO SELF-DISCLOSURE**

If callers or clients tempt one into self-disclosing, there are four strategies to immunize oneself from doing so. Try these methods and review the grid below and the sample questions.

**REFLECT:** The counselor mirrors what the caller is saying, reflecting back to him or her what seems important, without answering the question directly.

**DEFLECT & CLARIFY:** The counselor puts emphasis back on the caller while asking the caller for more information about his or her needs.

**OBLIQUELY CONFIRM:** One way to avoid self-disclosing is to offer a very broad and expansive confirmation that what the caller is asking for is something that you can understand. It is a truth that you can honestly confirm without revealing your personal story.

**BECOME AN ALLY:** I find that many want to know about their counselor so as to determine if he or she is safe, trustworthy or a potential ally or advocate. Encouragement is a way to affirm your interest in your caller’s situation without self-disclosing.

The following table is a synthesis of the many responses we might offer when callers ask us to self-disclose. I invite counselors to review and practice these, while putting them into your own words. Also, it is possible that we might employ more than one type of response to a caller and more than once during a call.

## ALTERNATIVES TO SELF-DISCLOSURE

	<b>REFLECT</b>	<b>DEFLECT &amp; CLARIFY</b>	<b>OBLIQUELY CONFIRM</b>	<b>BECOME AN ALLY</b>
<i>Are you married (coupled, single, divorced, widowed)?</i>	It sounds like you have a problem with an important relationship?	Tell me about your relationship. What is it that you need help with?	Relationships are very important to me.	I try to be very supportive of people in significant relationships.
<i>Do you have children?</i>	It sounds like you have a problem that involves children.	Tell me about your children. What is it that is bothering you about children?	Children are important to me and I also understand that they can be challenging.	I am an advocate for parents and for children.
<i>Have you ever had this problem? Or Are you a recovering alcoholic, (or _____ problem)?</i>	It sounds like you want to know if I can understand your problem.	I'd like to hear more about you. Help me to know more about what you're struggling with.	It is true that I, just like everyone else, have had to face difficult times before.	I'm very aware of how people with this problem struggle.
<i>How old are you?</i>	You want to know if I can relate to someone your age.	Tell me what matters to you about age. How is age important to you?	I'm aware of how important it can be to feel as if someone close in age can relate to our problems.	People of all ages are really important to me. I try to relate to all age groups as well as I can.
<i>Will you call me sometime?</i>	No, but it sounds like you wish that we could maintain contact.	No, I can't call you back, but let's focus on what we can talk about right now. What would you need from someone who could talk with you on a more regular basis?	No, I can't call you back, but I can relate to the feeling of wanting a comforting and supportive person in life.	It's really important to me for every person to have a good support system. While I can't call you back, I want to help you expand your support
<i>Are you a Christian (Jewish, Muslim, etc.)? Or where do you go to church?</i>	It sounds like your faith is very important to you and you want for me to be able to understand.	I'm really interested in your faith. Tell me about how your spirituality is important to you.	A guiding belief system or a set of values is important to me.	I know how important a belief system is to all people and I really want to understand yours.
<i>Will you pray with me?</i>	I'm hearing you really needing my support.	What would your prayer be for yourself?	I believe in the importance of prayer, contemplation, and reflection.	Many people find comfort in prayer, contemplation, and reflection and I really support that.
<i>Are you gay, lesbian, straight?</i>	Am I hearing that if you knew my sexual orientation, you might feel I could understand?	Help me to know how I can be supportive with you related to your sexuality.	Being able to be free to be oneself is very important to me.	I want to be available to you and to all callers so that you do not fear judgment.
<i>Where do you live?</i>	You're curious about where I live.	What is important to you about knowing that?	Having a sense of community and belonging to a neighborhood is important to me.	I really believe in the concept of community for all people. Help me to know about yours.
<i>What do you think about this issue?</i>	You want to focus on my thoughts about this.	What are your thoughts about this issue?	I have some thoughts about this issue, but the most important thing to me right now is your thoughts.	Everyone has thoughts and feelings about life's challenges, and I really want to help you find your way through your thoughts.
<i>What would you do if you had this problem?</i>	You wish I could give you some advice about this.	If you had advice for a friend about the same problem, what would it be?	With problems, I find that I have to come to my own decisions through a process of reflecting. I'd like to help you to do that.	I believe that the best solution for most people is the one that they come up with for themselves. Let me try to help you.