

How to Begin “Re-evaluation Counseling”

If you have heard of Re-evaluation Counseling and of the advantages of using it in your life, and are eager to try it, the following will help you get started.

In its basic form, the practice of Co-Counseling simply consists of two people taking turns listening to each other. It's like a conversation in some ways, but it's different, too. It's a more careful, effective kind of listening. We are talking about listening and *paying attention to what you hear*. It is thinking about the person who is saying it, and thinking about what he or she is saying, without interrupting the listening by offering suggestions or comments, but simply listening wholeheartedly.

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TAKE TURNS LISTENING

It's simple to get started. It just takes two people. Find a friend (or co-worker or spouse) who will try it with you. Agree that you will take turns listening to each other without interruption for an equal amount of time, and agree how long that time will be. Then decide who is going to listen first. The other person then talks about whatever he or she wants to talk about. The listener just pays attention and doesn't interrupt to give advice or comment or tell how he or she feels.

After the agreed-upon time, the talker becomes the listener, and the one who listened first now talks about anything he or she wants to talk about.

It's a fair exchange. Neither person owes anything to the other. Afterwards, both people usually feel refreshed and think more easily. It's fun, too.

This is good to do whenever you get a chance. As you listen this way more times, you get to

know each other better and like each other more and more.

You also get better at listening. The whole process becomes more effective the more times you use it.

Co-Counseling “turns” or “sessions” can be as long or as short as you have time for. Even a few minutes shared with your Co-Counselor can make a big difference in how you are able to think and function, and two hours shared is that much better.

GETTING ONE’S FEELINGS “OUT”

Sometimes the person talking (the “talker” or the “client”) may begin to laugh or cry or speak loudly, or sometimes tremble or yawn. This is a fine thing to have happen. It simply means that the person is tense about something, perhaps feeling some embarrassment or grief or fear or physical discomfort, and she or he is releasing the tension this way. She or he is becoming “un-embarrassed,” “un-sad,” “un-afraid.” We sometimes call any release of tension in these ways “discharge.” The person

listening (the “counselor”) can feel pleased and relaxed if this happens, and just continue to pay attention to the client without trying to stop any discharge that is occurring. If the client stops his or her own discharge, the listener can reassure him or her that it is fine to continue.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

This is the basic idea of Co-Counseling—two people take turns listening to each other. You can make many changes in your life just by knowing and doing this.

If you’re reading this with someone, you might want to stop reading at this point and try listening to each other, ten minutes each way. Afterwards, tell each other what your impression was.

Once you have “Co-Counseled” a few times with the same person, take time to talk it over and see what you each think of the experience. How did you like having someone listen to you without interrupting? Did you enjoy it? How did you like listening without interrupting?

Would you like to continue trying this? You can read on in this booklet for more information about how to do this well.

WHAT TO DO IN A SESSION

Time spent listening to each other without interruption is often called a “session.” Below are some things that you can experiment with doing in your sessions.

“News and Goods”

You can start your session as client by telling your counselor about “good” things, big or small, that have happened lately. It could be the beautiful sunset you saw last night, or your new job, or a problem you figured out last week. The idea is to give yourself a chance to notice the things that are going well. (This is especially a good idea if you feel discouraged. It helps remind you that maybe things aren’t as bad as they feel.) Sometimes people spend whole Co-Counseling sessions just telling “news and goods” and leave feeling much more positive and thinking more clearly.

Recent Upsets

If something has happened recently that you are upset about, a Co-Counseling session is a good place to talk about it. You can tell as much or as little about it as you would like, and you can tell it once or you can tell it over and over. You will probably find that lots of your problems seem to get much smaller if you just get a chance to talk about them without someone trying to give you advice or solve them for you. You will find, more often than not, that you can think of a good solution if you just have someone hear you out and show some confidence in you while you feel upset and talk about the problem.

Troubles from the Past

If you use your turn as client to talk about something that is bothering you, you can sometimes, after you have had a chance to talk about the upset for awhile, ask yourself (or your counselor can ask you), "What does this situation or this feeling remind you of? When have you felt like this before?" You will almost

always think of some situation from the past that was hurtful or upsetting in a similar way. It will be plain that old feelings from that time are still lingering in your mind, adding more confusion and bad feelings to the present situation than there would otherwise be. If you can talk about the earlier situation, what happened then, how you felt, and how it affected you, some of those old bad feelings can then be discharged, leaving you with a fresher look at the present difficulty.

Life Stories

If you come to your session as client and there seems to be nothing in your present life that you need to talk about, try telling your life story. Most people have never had a chance to tell the whole story of their life, and everyone needs a chance to do this. As you tell the story of your life, certain incidents will seem more important in their effect on you, good or bad, than others. These incidents are worth coming back to and talking about many times in Co-Counseling sessions. Getting a chance to review them over and over, with someone who is really listening, can

make a surprising difference in your thinking. Bad feelings left over from old, hurtful experiences (including experiences that you thought were “behind you”) can come to the surface and discharge, leaving you with a lighter step and freer thoughts. Good experiences, when reviewed with the attention of a good listener, can also help bad feelings from old, difficult times to discharge, and this can help you regain a positive outlook.

Self-Appreciation

Most of us have been belittled or mistreated enough that it is now difficult for us to feel good about ourselves. We have been “blamed” for things when we were doing our best. We have been told many untrue things. We have been told that if we like ourselves, we are “conceited” and that we shouldn’t feel good about ourselves. This isn’t true. People need to feel good about themselves. When we do feel good about ourselves, we treat other people better, not worse.

In a Co-Counseling session when you are client, tell your counselor what you like about

yourself. Tell this to him or her in a tone of voice that sounds like you are proud of yourself (not “superior,” just proud). Tell your counselor this over and over. You may find it difficult, but stick with it. Don’t stop yourself from laughing or crying or any other type of discharge. Try to appreciate everything about yourself (EVERYTHING). When you notice which things feel harder to appreciate (for example, how you look or how smart you are), focus on appreciating those things. You will probably remember incidents from your life of being criticized, blamed, or mistreated. These incidents will be good to look at and talk about in a Co-Counseling session when you are client.

Goals

It helps your life go better to set goals for yourself or review your progress towards goals that you have already set. This is a useful thing to do when you are client in a Co-Counseling session. Talk through the different periods of your life, tentatively deciding what you want to accomplish tomorrow, next week, this year, in the next five years, in the next twenty years,

in your lifetime. As you talk about each future period, you can think through the steps that you will need to take to reach these goals.

Occasionally reviewing your goals and any apparent obstacles will tend to assist you in achieving them.

Letting Discharge Continue

If you talk about something as client that results in lively talking, laughter, tears, shaking, sweating, or yawning (all forms of discharge), don't rush on to something else. Try repeating what you were saying or doing several times until you are no longer discharging. It's worth doing this over and over for as much time as you can take. The greatest benefits of Co-Counseling come after these releases of tension. They make it possible to think and act in ways that have been inhibited before.

Ending a Session

At the end of a Co-Counseling session, especially if you've been talking about something difficult for you, take a few moments to

re-direct your thoughts to something you are looking forward to, or to some simple subject you don't feel tense about, for example, the names of some friends or some favorite foods, or some scenery that you enjoy looking at. This helps make a relaxed change from being a client to becoming a counselor if it is your turn to do this, or to going on to other activities.

For each person to feel safe to talk about whatever he or she needs to, it works best to agree that you won't discuss it with anyone later. Also, keep in mind that alcohol and drugs interfere with the good effects of discharging.

SUPPORT GROUPS

It also works well to get a small group of people together to take turns listening to each other. (In RC we call this a "support group.") Each person gets a roughly equal amount of time to talk while the rest of the group listens.

One person acts as the leader of the group to help the group decide how much time each person will get, who will go first, and so on. When

each person has had his or her turn as client, you can end the group meeting with each person getting a chance to say what he or she liked best about being in the group meeting or something he or she is looking forward to.

Support groups can meet as often or as many times as the group members wish. The group can be a group of friends, co-workers, neighbors, or people with a similar background or interest. Sharing something in common with the group often helps people feel safer to talk about things they need to talk about. For example, there have been support groups of women, men, parents, young people, working-class people, people of a certain ethnic group or religion, disabled people, artists, and many others.

Inviting friends to the group is a good way to introduce more people to Co-Counseling. If the group becomes too large, it can be divided and a second group formed with a new leader chosen for the new group. About eight people seems to be the optimum size for a group, but they can function well both smaller and larger.

Support groups are a good structure for people from a similar background or similar situation to use to talk about what they like about being a part of that group and what they are proud of about the people from that group. Support groups are also good for talking about what has been hard, what they wish people understood about their group, what hopes and dreams they have for people from their group, and what they would like to do in relation to that group.

For example, in a women's support group, each woman would get a turn sharing what she likes about being a woman, what has been hard about being a woman, what she would like men to understand about women, how she would like to see women's lives improve, and what ways she would like to reach out to other women.

IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE

If you try Co-Counseling and you decide that you'd like to learn more, you may get in touch with the main Re-evaluation Counseling office

(look at the end of this booklet for the phone number), and ask that office if there are any Co-Counselors who live near you. You could also order a few introductory publications from <www.rationalisland.com>. Some good readings to start with are:

The Human Side of Human Beings (the theory of RC), \$4.00 (US)

The Fundamentals of Co-Counseling Manual (the beginning practice of RC), \$8.00 (US)

The Art of Listening (an introductory talk about RC), \$2.00 (US)

An Introduction to Co-Counseling (a very short description of RC), \$1.00 (US)

The Human Situation (essays on different topics), \$7.00 (US)

Present Time (a general journal published four times a year), \$5.00 (US)

DVDs and CDs are also available. (They are all in English, but we *do* have typed transcripts for them.) Someone at the main office can tell you which ones might be good for you to start with.

If you can't afford to pay for literature, explain this to the office and ask if it is possible for Outreach Funds to pay for some literature in order for you to get started.

If you are *very* interested in learning more about RC and know other people who are eager to learn, we may be able to send a teacher to your group or bring one of you to a workshop.

There is an RC Web site on the Internet, <http://www.rc.org/>, with lots of information and articles. If you are in an area which does not yet offer RC classes but you can connect to the Internet, you might find the on-line "class" on this Web site helpful.

People who use Re-evaluation Counseling find that it helps them think better, improve relationships, stand up for the right things, and enjoy life more. Co-Counselors usually get "smarter" as they use RC, and they get better at using it. They teach other people about RC and teach them how to teach other people, so that

in some places lots of people are using RC, holding classes and workshops, learning from each other, and supporting and encouraging each other.

We have literature published in about forty different languages, written by Co-Counselors from all over the world, with stories about using RC and with RC information about people of different ages, backgrounds, and situations.

There are a few ground rules and a set of “Community Guidelines,” which help Co-Counselors keep things well organized.

Good luck.

The International Re-evaluation Counseling Communities

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