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Learning Helping Skills

There is no enterprise more complex than helping someone work through a difficult problem. Often, the person cannot articulate clearly what is most bothersome. Professionals often do not agree on the most accurate diagnosis, much less the preferred treatment strategy. Even when people do appear to make progress in sessions, they are not necessarily making lasting changes in their lives. To complicate matters further, sometimes the people you think are cooperating the most with your efforts do not actually apply outside of sessions what they have supposedly learned. They may report that that things are getting better when, in fact, nothing much has changed. In other cases, you may feel frustrated that you do not appear to be doing much good at all when the person is really quite different, even though the reports sound discouraging.

Why Be a Helper?

Regardless of your chosen field, becoming a helper brings incredible satisfaction in knowing that you have made a difference in people's lives. The skills you learn to promote greater self-awareness and understanding, as well as to promote constructive action, work equally well in your own life as they do with those who approach you for assistance. You will find that the more you learn about helping others, the better you will become at enhancing all of your relationships.

Why do people seek professional help in the first place? The most obvious answer is because they cannot handle things on their own. They have

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already exhausted all the internal options that have been available, and they find that what may have worked in the past is no longer providing needed relief. In many cases, they are not seeking help out of personal choice, but rather because they are being forced to do so by family members, the court system, or others in positions of authority. It is not only normal that people will feel a certain ambivalence, if not outright resistance, to help that you offer, but also to be expected.

People may consult you for a variety of reasons—they feel depressed or anxious or out of control; they are having problems with family or friends; they are struggling with addictions; they are unhappy in school, their jobs, or at home; they feel trapped or lost or confused; they seek guidance about the future; they wish to understand the present; they want to live more in the present; they seek to overcome procrastination, inertia, underachievement, poor school, or job performance—the list is endless. Yet in most of these situations, and in the variety of problems and issues you will encounter, there are some fairly universal concepts and helping skills that will serve you well in your efforts to provide assistance. As an added bonus, most helping relationships can potentially change you for the better, just as they transform others.

Changes in the Field

Helping relationships have traditionally taken months, if not years, to promote significant relief of symptoms. Changes in the professional landscape precipitated by the managed care movement have led to briefer forms of intervention, as well as increased accountability by practitioners regarding what they believe is the problem, what they propose to do about it, and what specific, identifiable, results are observed.

The originators of counseling and therapy, theorists such as Sigmund Freud and Carl Rogers, would hardly recognize the current scene. Brief therapies are now the order of the day. Group and family structures are rapidly replacing individual sessions as the preferred choice. No longer can it be expected that any therapeutic approach will be applied universally without considering the gender and cultural background of each client. A new generation of medications is being used routinely for treating depression, panic disorders, and other emotional problems that previously were treated with counseling alone. These drugs are not only more effective than their predecessors, but they also have fewer side effects.

There have been dramatic changes in the past few years, not only in how helping is done, but also in how professionals are trained. New innovations in teaching methods, supervision strategies, and technology have made it

possible to proceed in an orderly, logical path along the journey of helping others. Training methods are now far more integrative, often including components that involve content, skill development, supervised practice, experiential learning, field studies, simulations, online instruction, and internships.

What all this means is that the training that you will receive is quite different from what took place just a decade ago. Consider that in another decade what you are learning now may be just as obsolete. This is one reason why the helping professions are such a dynamic, exciting discipline to study. Although some concepts and approaches remain somewhat stable, other facets evolve in as little as a few years. This means that your commitment to becoming a helper will hardly end with your formal education; learning will involve a lifelong devotion.

A Daunting Journey

Taking into account the ambiguous, abstract nature of helping relationships; the severity of intractable, chronic problems; and the limited time and resources currently available to make a difference, it is no wonder that professional helpers need years of training to do their jobs properly. Whether functioning as a social worker, psychologist, psychiatrist, counselor, teacher, family therapist, nurse, mental health specialist, minister, or human resource worker, several years are often invested to learn the basic approaches and put them into practice. This includes, but is not limited to, theories of human learning; physical, social, intellectual, moral, emotional, and spiritual growth; interpersonal behavior in families and groups; multicultural perspectives; educational and vocational development; ethical and legal issues; research and evidence-based methods; and the assortment of various intervention approaches. In addition to this conceptual foundation, professionals learn several dozen core helping skills and a few hundred basic interventions that can be applied to individual, group, and family settings.

Perhaps you can appreciate why it takes a long time, and such an investment of time and energy, to become highly skilled as a helper. Once theory is learned and skills are mastered, it takes years to accumulate enough experience with diverse clients to feel confident and reasonably effective.

It may, therefore, seem presumptuous to create a primer that purports to cover the essence of helping in such a modest volume. How on earth can you possibly learn all there is to know to help people? The answer, rather obviously, is that you cannot grasp all of it in a single dose, no matter how clearly, concisely, and accessibly the material is presented. The intent of this book is to get you started.

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Making a Difference

It so happens that with some basic background, some introductory concepts, a few core skills, and some elegantly simple strategies, you can make a difference in people's lives in a reasonably short period of time. No longer must helping take years in the hands of doctors to work well. Recent studies have demonstrated that beginning helpers, teachers, paraprofessionals, even high-school-age peer counselors with as little as a few weeks training, can have a significant, positive effect on those they are helping. When goals are limited, specific skills are employed, interventions are targeted, and supervision is available, it is entirely feasible to promote lasting changes.

Although the goal of this book—to teach you helping skills—is somewhat ambitious, the scope of our mission will be rather modest. We will concentrate on the more basic concepts and skills that you will need to get started immediately in service to others. Because this is an accelerated training program of sorts, it is critical that you find ways to practice the ideas in your life and work. After all, you cannot learn helping (or anything else) from a book unless you put the concepts into action. Although there will be opportunities for you to experiment and practice with classmates, you will find helping skills to be just as useful in your personal life—with your friends, family, coworkers, and other loved ones. In fact, one of the most absolutely amazing aspects of this field is that everything you learn to make yourself a skilled helper also makes you a more compassionate, responsive human being. When you learn to listen carefully, assess systematically, analyze logically, respond empathically, confront nondefensively, and problem solve creatively, you are also able to apply these methods to areas of your own life. So if you are really serious about mastering the skills of helping, I urge you to look for as many opportunities as possible to use the methods on a daily basis.

Personal Qualities

Although this is a primer about helping skills, this enterprise is as much about *being* as it is *doing*. In other words, who you are is as important as how you behave. Effective helpers are well trained in the theory, research, and skills that underlie their craft, but they also convey certain personal qualities that make them most influential and competent. If you consider what characteristics you would want in a helper, some traits come to mind immediately:

- Kindness and caring
- Interpersonal sensitivity

- Self-confidence and poise
- Emotional stability
- Flexibility and openness
- Noncritical and nonjudgmental
- Wisdom
- Morals and ethics

There are other qualities that might be important to you as well, depending on your own values and preferences, but most of all, you would want a helper who can actually practice in his or her own life what he or she is teaching to you. You would want someone who is actually living the same principles that he or she espouses are important for others. This means that effective helpers are good at applying all their skills and knowledge to improve the quality of their own lives in every important dimension—physically, emotionally, intellectually, morally, and spiritually.

As you read the list of important qualities for a helper, you cannot help but take inventory of your own functioning in each of these areas. The good news that lies ahead is that no matter how limited you feel in any one area (sensitivity or wisdom or stability or flexibility), you will find yourself growing far more fully functioning as you learn the skills of helping others.

Take Some Advice

In a brief primer such as this, the main goal is to get you started with basic helping skills in a way that increases your confidence, sense of competence, and positive outcomes as quickly as possible. As a beginner, it is also important that you practice safely, ethically, and cautiously—even if you do not help someone the way you had hoped, at least you do not want to hurt them. Such negative results happen most often when you (a) push people to do things for which they are not ready or prepared, (b) are disrespectful or insensitive to people's unique values or needs, (c) impose your own values on others, (d) attempt to meet your own needs, or (e) tell people what to do with their lives so *you* can feel better.

I am now about to violate one of the major cautions for beginning helpers: Don't give advice! There are several reasons for this admonishment, some of them fairly obvious. For one, people do not usually listen to advice in the first place; if they did, helping would be a simple matter of telling people what to do with their lives. Even if you give in to this impulse, usually to make yourself feel less helpless in the presence of others' pain, it is rare that anyone will respond as you imagine: "Gee, I hadn't thought of that.

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Thanks so much for straightening things out for me! If you don't mind, I'll just leave right now so I can immediately go out and do what you suggest."

I don't know about you, but people rarely do what I tell them to do anyway, even when I think I know best. Imagine an adolescent boy walks downstairs in the morning with a shirt in each hand, one red and one blue.

"Dad," he says in a sleepy, irritable, morning voice, "which one of these shirts should I wear with these pants?" He is holding out a pair of fairly ordinary jeans.

The parent knows this is a trick question, but he cannot see where the trap is. It seems obvious to him that the red shirt is the way to go. He takes a deep breath and offers his advice: "Well, they're both nice shirts, but I guess I prefer the red one. With those pants, I mean."

"The red one!" the boy spits out in disgust. "Why *that* one?" He then turns around and heads back to his room, only to reappear a few minutes later wearing the blue one.

This is not an unusual situation. We all think we know what is best for others: whether they should wear their hair short or long, get divorced or stay married, quit their job or stick it out, get an abortion or have the baby, buy a sports car or a hybrid vehicle, confront their boss or let things slide. The problem is that even if your advice is perfectly correct (and there is rarely a way to know that), if you tell people what to do, you are reinforcing the idea that they need someone like you to make their decisions in the future.

If, on the other hand, what you tell people to do turns out as a disaster, you are the one who will get blamed for the outcome. Most people do not want to be responsible for the choices they make in life, so they are delighted to have a scapegoat they can hold accountable if things do not go the way they prefer.

Finally, I don't know about you, but I rarely know what's best for me at any given moment. How am I supposed to know what is best for you or anyone else when I agonize over whether to order the salmon or swordfish on the menu? How can I know for certain which way you should go when I have so many doubts about the direction I am headed? Much of the time, whether as a pedestrian or a helper, I feel lost.

In spite of these warnings to the contrary, there are some instances when giving advice is warranted, especially when research and experience show consistently a predictable pattern that can be anticipated. It is for this reason that lawyers, nurses, doctors, and other helping professionals have few compunctions about telling you what is in your best interests.

Although the advice I am about to give you for the best ways to learn helping may not fit your situation and style, I think you will find most of these points useful. But don't take my word for it; ask others in the field what helped them the most. That, in fact, is the very first point.

Find Professionals Who Are Doing What You Want to Do

Identify individuals who are working in a setting that most appeals to you. Interview them. Ask them how they got to where they are now. What helped them the most? What helped them the least? What do they wish they had done differently?

One of the best ways to learn helping is to watch the best ones in action. One easy thing to do is to check out all the masters on tape or DVD. Your school library or department is likely to own demonstration videos in which the most prominent practitioners show how they work with clients, often in actual sessions.

There is no substitution, however, for seeing the real thing live. You may be fortunate enough to be able to arrange to sit in on a group session or perhaps to watch counseling from behind a one-way mirror.

Get Counseling for Yourself

If observing master helpers gives you a valuable perspective, actually experiencing the role of client may be even better. Many veterans believe that among all their training experiences, being a client helped them the most. You come to know, not just in your head but in your heart, what really works. You can sell your services more convincingly because you have seen the results, up close and personal. Finally, being a helper is not only about *doing* things, but also about *being* a particular way. The confidence, poise, serenity, and compassion that are so important in helping cannot be faked easily; you must become a more fully functioning human being.

Record Yourself and Solicit Feedback

One of the most enlightening aspects of training involves the critical examination of your helping behavior. Perhaps you are not aware that you raise your voice at the end of sentences, diminishing the power of your interventions by turning everything into a question. Maybe you have not realized how bored you appear at times. Also common in beginners is the overuse of interrogatory questions and a great need to fill any silence with “noise.” These mistakes, plus any other patterns, will become obvious once you can review your performance and receive critical, yet supportive, feedback from experts. In fact, it may very well be part of your class that you will tape yourself while practicing helping skills and then receive feedback from your instructor.

Once you become introduced to a new skill—for example, the use of rephrasing as a means to promote deeper exploration—record a brief session

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with a friend or classmate in which you practice what you learned. Listen to the recording several times, critiquing your own behavior. It is even more useful to make a typescript of the conversation to review in greater detail. After you have analyzed the session, recruit the assistance of a more experienced helper to debrief you and make suggestions. This is, by far, one of the best ways to become a more critical observer of your own helping efforts. It is also exciting to hold on to these samples of your work so that you can note improvements over time.

Volunteer to Work With Someone You Admire

Colead a group with a more experienced helper. The crucial variable here is that your partner is truly an expert in ways that you would like to be; otherwise, you might develop bad habits from watching and working with someone who knows less than you do.

It might seem difficult to find opportunities in which you can actually practice helping, even under the direct supervision of a trained professional. You would be surprised, however, how many agencies and organizations are staffed by paraprofessionals who have mostly learned on the job. Many other experts trained at the graduate level may also be open to working with an apprentice.

Increase Your Tolerance for Ambiguity

Helping is one of those disciplines in which there are few right answers or clear solutions to problems. Often, people do not know what is really bothering them; if they do think they know, it might not be the real issue that needs to be addressed. To make matters worse, people are sometimes not honest with themselves, much less with you, so it is hard to determine what is true.

It is not unusual that some of those people who you believe you helped the most will not even acknowledge the progress, much less show gratitude for your efforts. To further confuse matters, there are some people you will try to help who do not seem to have changed a bit, even after many conversations, yet others will report dramatic progress outside of sessions. There are times you will find it difficult to figure out what the real issues are in someone's life; he or she may not be able to articulate what is at the core. Then when transformations do take place, you may never know what it is that you said or did that made the most difference.

The issues that people struggle with are often complex, abstract, and difficult to describe. What solution do you offer someone who wants to find meaning in her life? What concrete plan do you come up with for someone who doesn't so much want to change anything as he wants to understand

himself better? What specific steps do you take with a client who wants to explore her relationship with God or who seeks to find some deeper purpose for the recent death of a loved one? What do you say to someone who cannot even tell you exactly what is most bothersome?

The answer to all these challenges is that you had better develop a great deal of patience and tolerance for the ambiguous, complex nature of human struggles. In many cases, there are no single, correct answers; sometimes, you cannot even figure out what the questions are. Although it is certainly helpful in some situations to proceed in an orderly, sequential, problem-solving style, in other cases, you will be exploring unknown territory without a compass or a map. You had better get used to feeling lost.

Solicit Recommendations of Important Books

Read them. Do not just restrict yourself to professional books, but also check out fiction and trade books that describe the nature of human change. Certain novels, biographies, and other genres provide a glimpse of how people cope with adversity (see the suggestions at the end of this and other chapters).

Ask your instructors, as well as professionals in the field, to recommend a list of books that they consider “must reading” for any literate helper. Do not let yourself feel overwhelmed: Hundreds of such suggestions will be made. Start with the few that are mentioned most frequently.

Immerse Yourself in Different Cultures

So much of helping involves the ability to enter the world of those you are trying to help. This means learning their unique cultures, family histories, languages, customs, values, and priorities. It means being able to transcend the “differentness” between you and others so that you can help from their perspective rather than imposing your values on them. This is especially the case with those clients who are not from the “majority culture,” meaning white, Anglo-Saxon males. Of course, what constitutes minority status, especially an oppressed people, will vary from location to location.

You will most likely receive some training in multicultural or cross-cultural issues. Although this formal coursework is invaluable to familiarize you with the importance of adapting methods to fit the unique cultural context for each person, it may have its limits. Prejudices, biases, and racist beliefs are so deeply rooted they are not easily changed by intellectual challenges alone; often, something fairly dramatic is needed.

It is especially useful to identify some culture about which you do not have much experience and that would represent a significant proportion of

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your future clients. I am not referring here to only ethnicity, such as the case of African American, Vietnamese American, or Mexican American cultures. I am using the term *culture* broadly to include any group of people who share similar values and context for their experience. This could include cultures such as “feminists,” “rural small town residents,” “gays and lesbians,” “construction workers,” “Mormons,” “West Texans,” or “accountants.” Culture can thus be determined by geography, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, and a variety of other factors that shape who people are and how they experience the world.

Travel as much as you can, and when you do, make an effort to learn the customs of each place you visit. Suspend your own orientation and preferences so that you can appreciate the unique perspectives of people who live in quite different ways than you are used to. Make an effort to control your tendency to judge others who live in ways you do not appreciate or understand.

Create Support Groups Among Peers

Learning the skills of helping is not only intellectually challenging but emotionally draining. You will likely experience a lot of stress along the way, not the least of which will result from performance anxiety about whether you are cut out for this type of work. There is no way that you can delve deeply into other people’s pain without being profoundly affected in the process. Some experienced practitioners believe that despair is contagious; when you get close to people who are miserable, conflicted, or just downright ornery, you will be touched by their anguish. Your buttons will continually be pushed when you face the exact issues that you fear the most. Again and again, you may see yourself, including your own unresolved stuff, in every session you conduct.

It is for this reason that you will need lots of support from family and friends along the way. Sometimes, even that is not nearly enough. You might decide to seek professional help if stress symptoms become too disruptive. At the very least, you may wish to join (or begin) a support group of your peers so that you have a regular forum to work through the accumulated pressures you face. This group should not be a “bitch session” in which you take turns complaining and whining about how unfair the world is, how uncooperative your clients are, and how unappreciated and underpaid you feel. Neither should you use the time to problem solve and give advice (I hope I was convincing earlier about urging you to avoid this). Instead, you can use the group to hear one another and to offer encouragement and support. You will find immeasurable relief in just realizing you are not alone in your struggles.

Ask Lots of Questions

There is much you will be exposed to, in this book as well as in your coursework, that will not make a lot of sense. One of the common issues of beginners is the feeling that you are not good enough or that you are not as smart or talented as your peers. As such, there is reluctance to ask questions about things you do not understand, out of fear that this will give you away as the fraud you really believe yourself to be.

I can recall vividly, for example, being utterly confounded by the assortment of different helping approaches, all of which seemed to work effectively. Each instructor or supervisor had a different style, some in direct contradiction to others I had seen, yet they all seemed to be convinced that their method was right and others were wrong. I so badly wanted to ask how it was possible that you could help people effectively by reflecting their feelings, challenging their irrational beliefs, constructing an alternative narrative, or realigning the power hierarchies in their families, but I did not want to reveal how stupid I felt. It was only after I was out in the field for a while that I realized that few people really understand this as well as they think they do.

If you do not feel safe asking questions in class, then start cataloguing them in your notes or journal. Once you can secure some private time from patient supervisors, mentors, and experienced professionals, you can address your questions then. Be prepared, however, to hear some contradictory answers from two (or more) equally skilled professionals (remember the point earlier about increasing your tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty).

Keep a Journal

Helping is, by its very nature, a reflective activity. You are continually called on to make sense of confusing situations, to decode underlying feelings, and to unravel mysteries that have previously gone overlooked. This analytic mindset does not come naturally for most; it is a learned way of looking at the world. One of the most useful vehicles for training yourself to think like a helper is to use a journal to record your impressions and experiences (see Table 1.1 for some examples).

Journaling is a time-honored method employed by writers who jot down ideas for stories, as well as character sketches that may find their way into published material at a later time. In the same sense, helpers need a safe repository to store plans for the future, not to mention a place to debrief themselves after a poignant or stressful session.

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Table 1.1 What to Write in a Journal

Type of Entry	Example
Personal note	<i>I notice that I become defensive whenever the instructor calls on me. I want to read something about defensive mechanisms and what they mean.</i>
Dumping	<i>I am so sick of my parents intruding in my life. They won't respect my boundaries, no matter how many times I tell them I need my privacy.</i>
Introspection	<i>I wonder what it means that I have such a high need for people to like me. I go to such extreme lengths to win others' approval.</i>
Processing insight	<i>I seem to have trouble with confrontation. I think this is related to the ways I was punished when I was younger.</i>
Dialogue with instructor	<i>I really like it when you use personal examples from your life to illustrate the ideas in class. I wish, though, that you gave us more time to talk in groups.</i>
Goal setting	<i>I've got to get better organized with my studies and work schedule or I'm never going to catch up. I will spend one hour studying each night this week.</i>
Creative expression	<i>I feel lost. Wandering around. But lost is good. It means I can't be found. Except when I'm ready.</i>
Rehearsal	<i>When I see my brother, I'm going to tell him: "You can't keep expecting me to be there for you when . . ." No, I need to say it without complaining.</i>
Self-talk	<i>Every time I get myself in a situation like this, I back off. It's all about avoiding conflict. I need to try something different next time.</i>

Although journals may be useful to help you remember important ideas, categorize significant insights, work through difficult cases, play back confusing dialogue, and draw together important connections, they are also critical to help you metabolize things going on in your own life. Because helping requires a high degree of clarity and serenity on the part of its practitioners, you will need a way to work on your own problems that crop up along the way.

Practicing helping skills leaves you no place to hide from your own unresolved issues. The people you try to help will push your buttons (accidentally or on purpose to prevent you from getting too close). They will struggle with gut-wrenching themes that you can easily relate to—fear of losing control, fear of mediocrity, loneliness, growing old, abandonment, failure, intimacy, stagnation, enmeshment, or helplessness. Every conversation you undertake

with a needy person is likely to stir up a whole host of problems that you thought were resolved long ago.

A journal becomes a place where you can write every week, or every day, recording the things you have learned, the insights you want to remember, the goals you have for the future, and the issues you need help with yourself. You can practice your helping skills on yourself, especially new techniques that have not yet been field tested. Finally, you can talk to yourself in an honest, authentic way, knowing that your written words will hold you accountable in the future.

Go to Conferences and Workshops

Academic pressures do inspire a degree of commitment that would be difficult without this structure. You are forced to read, study, and practice in ways that you would not do otherwise. Writing papers, taking exams, giving oral presentations, and doing other assignments require you to devote time and energy to your training. Nevertheless, there are limits to what can be done in the classroom. Besides, tests and grades often get in the way of learning, because you may be as concerned with how your performance is being evaluated as you are with actually learning the material.

As a way to supplement your schoolwork, you would be well advised to attend as many conferences and workshops as you can afford. Besides the networking opportunities that are available to meet and interact with other professionals, there is a very different atmosphere in workshops than in the classroom. There tends to be a greater focus on practical applications and cutting-edge innovations that is often not possible in school, given the priority on providing background concepts. Second, you can pick and choose the workshops that fit your interests and specialties.

If workshops supply intensive study and practice during concentrated periods, then conferences provide a smorgasbord of offerings in a longer time frame. You can attend a half-dozen different sessions per day, if that is your priority. Others may prefer the informal interactions that take place during social encounters. You can make new friends, generate job opportunities, exchange ideas, and find support among hundreds of others who do the same thing that you do.

Involve Your Friends and Family, or They Will Be Left Behind

One of the exciting, yet disconcerting, phenomena often observed by newcomers to the field is the number of ways that you will change as a result of

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your training. Just as you will become more sensitive and interpersonally skilled, so too will your standards for intimate relationships change and grow. You may find yourself hungering for more intense engagement with others because you will have had a taste of such encounters with your clients. You may grow intolerant and impatient with superficial conversations. You will notice things about your family and friends that have previously been beyond your awareness. In short, you will become transformed into a different person altogether—someone who is more powerful, influential, and persuasive, yet also more empathic and compassionate.

Although you may be delighted with these changes in your personality, others may not be so impressed. In fact, some of your friends and family members may be threatened by what you have become. They may not like the ways you are more direct and assertive. They may resent the steps you are taking to improve yourself. Worst of all, they may fear being left behind.

Such worries of abandonment are neither unusual nor unrealistic. When one person makes a concerted effort to improve life skills, while others sit around doing the same old things, there may very well develop some distance between them. This is especially likely if you do not keep loved ones up to date on what you are learning.

You may very well decide to change some relationships after becoming aware of ways they have been unsatisfying or dysfunctional. Other relationships, however, can actually be improved if you apply the things you learn to your personal life. Let loved ones know how much you appreciate them. Make an effort to initiate more intimate conversations. Practice the listening and responding skills you learn. Finally, be patient with others as they struggle to adjust to the new you that is emerging.

Apply Everything You Learn to Your Own Life

Helping others is one of the few professions where it is not only possible, but highly desirable, to apply the theories and concepts to your own life. All of the things you will learn in class or in this text are not only useful for understanding people you want to help, but also yourself. All the strategies you will practice to motivate clients can work equally well with yourself. Each of the theories you will study can be personalized in such a way that you can supply examples from your own life to support the arguments made.

In the next chapter, it may seem at times that the various theories presented are unnecessarily complicated and esoteric. Trust me when I tell you that each of these models has something to offer, not only in your work helping others but also in understanding yourself better. In fact, before you can ever hope to translate the skills of helping into a natural style that fits your

unique personality, you must first be able to apply what you know to yourself. Only then can you be a passionate and convincing advocate for the principles that you claim matter most.

For Review

- Change is difficult to measure and even harder to assess over time.
- Helpers are called on to be accountable for what they do, justifying their best practices and documenting their efforts.
- Many changes in helping have evolved in the last few years, making the process more responsive to cultural and gender differences.
- Mastering the skills of helping takes considerable time, commitment, training, and supervision, but a working knowledge can be achieved in a semester if you dedicate yourself to that mission.
- Helping is not synonymous with giving advice, a strategy that has many negative side effects.
- Taking a proactive stance toward your own learning is required to become a skilled and compassionate helper. The helping attitudes, skills, and strategies are internalized only through considerable reflection, practice, and feedback.

For Reflection and Practice

1. Start a journal, beginning right this moment, in which you write down your feelings, thoughts, reactions, fears, struggles, and goals related to anything that was triggered by this chapter or your class thus far.
2. Identify several helpers who are working in the sort of job that you would like some day. Interview them with respect to how they learned to become comfortable and effective in their helping skills. Ask their advice about what you can do to promote your own growth and development.
3. Think about a time in your life in which you were struggling terribly. What made the greatest difference to you in regaining your stability? Talk to someone (or classmates) you trust about who has been most helpful to you in your life and what that person did that was most influential and effective.
4. Write a plan describing the kind of helper you would like to be some day. Set specific goals for yourself, as well as a program for how you intend to reach your objectives.
5. Become aware of instances all around you in which people attempt to be helpful to others—teachers explaining ideas, parents disciplining their kids, someone giving directions. Note what a helper does specifically that appears to be most and least effective.

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6. Ask trusted friends, family, and classmates for feedback on your personal attributes that might be most and least useful in your helping efforts.
7. Go to the library or bookstore and dip into several other books about the process of helping. Familiarize yourself with some of the journals in the field and look through several issues.
8. Go to the counseling center, a local agency, or a private practitioner and experience helping as a client. If you cannot think of anything else to work on, you can always sort through your uncertainty about the future, a conflicted relationship, or some lifelong theme that crops up again and again.

For Further Reading

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Some Novels That You Might Find Interesting

- Mark Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*
- Jonathan Kellerman, *When the Bough Breaks*
- Barbara Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible*
- Wally Lamb, *I Know This Much Is True*
- Irvin Yalom, *Schopenhauer's Cure*