

FOURTH EDITION

THE  
HELPING  
RELATIONSHIP

*Process  
and  
Skills*

LAWRENCE M. BRAMMER

FOURTH EDITION

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# *The Helping Relationship*

*Process and Skills*

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# *Introduction*

People want to help one another, and helpers experience deep personal satisfaction through this helping process. The basic purposes of this book are to describe this helping process and to provide a road map for interested people helpers to guide them in using relevant principles, skills, and research.

Although great progress has been made in material technology, we are still in the dark ages of human relations and exploration of human potentiality. Now that humans have substantial mastery over nature, we are searching for better ways to manage ourselves. We want improvements in our relationships so that we can be better parents, workers, spouses, and friends. The popularity of self-help psychology books, growth centers, parent education, self-help and peer helper groups, and voluntary services are ripples on the surface of our strong desire to help others. Once basic survival needs are satisfied, people often search for deeper meanings in their lives through service to others.

Our basic problem is how to apply the vast resources for helping to the acute human problems plaguing our society. We cannot depend solely on helping specialists and human relations experts to close this large gap. Helping communities must be encouraged and helping skills must be widely dispersed in the population until human satisfactions and better social organization make formal helping, as we now know it, unnecessary. One

scenario is the possibility that we all become helpers, facilitating one another's development and search for happiness. The other extreme would be to leave helping services to specially trained and committed professionals.

Even though we are at a primitive stage of research and development in our human relating skills, a keen interest in human problems is present in all of our institutions. Helping attitudes and skills have penetrated schools, with counseling at last achieving more central attention than previously. Severe problems associated with suicide, drug abuse, pregnancy, AIDS, and dropouts have accelerated this development. Business and industry have given much attention to human factors in light of the evidence that humane environments, employee assistance programs, career ladders, and managerial training in human relationships, for example, increase profits as well as employee satisfaction. Government and military organizations have developed similar helping and human relations programs. Developments like these have created many opportunities for formal and informal acts of helping in spite of reduced governmental funding for human services in the public sector. These reductions in sponsored helping programs make even more imperative the development of a helping society in which all of us are responsible helpers of one another in need.

While there is a need for specialists trained to cope with the complexities of human problems, most human needs can be met by nonspecialist helpers. This book is written mainly for such nonspecialists who want a framework in which to view their helping functions, and for those who wish to join classes studying helping functions and skills in a systematic manner. Thus, people who work as generalists in counseling, group leadership, child care, youth work, teaching, nursing, rehabilitation, employment, police work, community relations, mental health, parent education, crisis centers, or church work will, it is hoped, apply these principles and techniques to their work settings. In addition to these special helpers it appears that about half of all jobs involve some human contact service, and this proportion is likely to increase. Therefore, all people with personal contact positions will find this book useful.

Persons in consulting and instructional roles in community agencies and educational institutions will be able to use this book for in-service education on helping skills and human relations. Those persons following a programmed learning approach to human relations, communication skills, or counseling will find this text a useful framework for their skills training.

This book focuses on helping normal individuals to function at a higher level. It emphasizes self-help and improved coping skills. It is not a book on psychotherapy and the pathology of human interaction. I emphasize basic communication skill improvement, since a fundamental problem in all human relations is our difficulty in reaching one another successfully.

The two keys to the helping process are the helper as a person and his or her skills. This book concentrates on the helper's task of becoming a more aware and effective person. He or she is first of all a human being, and secondly, a helping instrument in the form of parent, teacher, coun-

selor, adviser, interviewer, or friend. The second key the helper needs is precise skills to realize the outcomes people desire. These skills are presented in the categories of understanding, support, and action.

I have attempted to present in simple form many principles and skills gleaned from forty years as teacher, counselor, and behavioral science researcher in the people-helping realm. Yet I recognize that the helping function can be complex and controversial. We possess no neat body of valid knowledge about the helping process, but we have a good start. This book is an effort to describe this evolving process and to consider the helping process in light of changing social needs and diverse definitions of helpfulness.

I have minimized citations, quotations, and technical terms in my quest for clarity and simplicity and have included, reluctantly, only a sampling of the extensive literature from the helping professions. Suggestions for further study are included with each chapter. The appendix includes three brief learning packages as samples of what students or instructors can construct for themselves. This text is not intended as a collection of systematic skills exercises.

I wish to acknowledge with thanks the assistance of my wife, Marian, for her editorial help as well as cogent suggestions from her experience as a teacher and parent.

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# 1

## *Helping: What Does It Mean?*

This is a book about people helping other people to grow toward their personal goals and to strengthen their capacities for coping with life. Few of us achieve our growth goals or solve our personal problems alone. We need other people in some kind of helping relationship to us, but what does this need imply for helpers and the helped?

### **WHAT IS YOUR VIEW OF HELPING?**

Think about your own view of what helping means and examine your motives for helping people. My principal goal in this chapter is to assist you in thinking through and in extending your views of the helping process, because you must develop a style of help that is comfortable and effective for you. Take some time for the following activities. First, lean back, relax, and picture yourself helping another person. Imagine a specific setting.

1. What does it mean to be a helper? What are you doing? What are you saying? What are you feeling? How is the other person responding? Make a list of the behaviors you regard as helpful.
2. Try to recall people who have helped you. What were the behaviors

and personal qualities that made them helpful people? How did you feel about their actions? What did you infer about their attitudes? List their helpful behaviors.

3. Ask close friends or relatives to describe incidents when your behavior was helpful to them. List their descriptive words and phrases.
4. Compare your three lists of your concept of a helper, your perceptions of others as helpers, and other people's views of you as a helper. Keep them for later comparison with lists in the following chapters.
5. Spend time thinking of all the phrases and feelings that occur to you when you consider the questions: Why do I want to be a helper? Whom do I want to help? What do I get out of the helping process? How do I want to be perceived by those I intend to help? How do I feel about what comes to my awareness during this activity? Write a descriptive paragraph about yourself as a helper before these thoughts and feelings disappear.

If possible, share these ideas and lists with others doing the same activities. Sharing and receiving reactions helps to clarify and amplify one's ideas and feelings about such a personal topic. It is difficult to be honest about motives for helping others. Compare your lists with the discussion of illustrative motives in later paragraphs and in Chapter 2.

No doubt you found that *helping* is a difficult process to describe because it has such individualized meanings. It is necessary to understand these numerous meanings of help, however, because all of us have work, community, or family responsibilities that demand helping relationships.

A further complication in definition is that *help* means different things to people in various subcultures. The idea of helping, in the formal sense of counseling, is largely an American white middle-class phenomenon. In most other cultures, helping functions are unobtrusive acts performed in informal settings, such as families. *La familia* brings up immediate meanings of loyalty and service, for example, when mentioned in Spanish-speaking groups. One's concept of helpfulness must be placed in a cultural framework and must take into account the special meanings and unique language associated with it by various racial, ethnic, and sex groupings.

This chapter explores these meanings further, and the following chapter examines the characteristics of effective helpers. A detailed presentation of helping skills and action principles is made in the remaining chapters. Theories about helping processes and basic helping relationships conclude this book.

For purposes of this book the helping person will be designated as the *helper*, and the helped as the *helpee*. While awkward terms, they serve as more generalized designations for counselor-counsee, worker-client, therapist-patient, parent-child, teacher-pupil, and interviewer-interviewee commonly used in public agency and private-practice settings. My underlying assumption is that the basic interpersonal communication processes implied by these specialized helping relationships are similar.

## **SOME GOALS AND VIEWPOINTS**

It follows from our discussion that helpers need to know:

1. What helping means—its potentials and pitfalls;
2. What steps both helper and helpee need to take to reach their goals;
3. What skills and personal characteristics helpers need and what coping skills helpees need;
4. How helpers learn and apply the required skills; and
5. How helpers improve their helping services—how they develop a theory and research base.

I will begin with some of my ideas about helpers and helping as building blocks for the remaining chapters. These generalizations are primarily value statements and assumptions with varying degrees of demonstrated validity, because very few statements about helping are universally true. Some statements are based on my experience, and some are verified generalizations from behavioral science research.

## **OUTCOMES YOU CAN EXPECT FROM THIS CHAPTER**

By studying this chapter you should be able to: (1) state your own view of helping and why you want to help; (2) list three sources of personal gain to the helper from engaging in the helping process; (3) identify the basic points of view of this book; (4) describe the essential nature of the helping process in terms of need fulfillment and responsible independence; (5) list three arguments that support, and three that refute, the professional and nonprofessional approaches to helping; (6) describe and illustrate self-help, peer, cross-age, and community helper projects; and (7) list thirteen basic helping skills and six key coping skills.

## **THE HELPING PROCESS**

Figure 1-1 shows that the main elements of the helping process: the helper's personality, combined with specific skills, produces growth conditions that lead to definite outcomes important to the person, the helper, and society in general. Whereas helper personality and skills constitute the basic ingredients of the process, specialists add a third element that broadens helpers' awareness and that realizes their helping potential. Specialists investigate the recorded experience of other helpers as well as the contributions of the behavioral sciences, and they formulate helping theories of their own. Helping specialists also commit themselves to strict ethical standards and legal requirements. The more specialized helpers also ask questions about the usefulness of their helping services and learn research skills with which to answer those questions.

PERSONALITY OF HELPER	+	HELPING SKILLS	→	GROWTH-FACILITATING CONDITION	→	SPECIFIC OUTCOMES
Traits		For understanding		Trust		For the person
Attitudes		For comfort		Respect		For society
Values		For action		Freedom		For the helper

FIGURE 1-1 The Helping Process

Considerable emphasis is placed on outcomes of the helping process. Issues around cost effectiveness, accountability, and efficacy of different helping methods add to the importance of outcomes. The goals of helping have been stated many ways, but generally they reduce to changes in behavior and lifestyle, awareness or insight and understanding, relief from suffering, and changes in thoughts and self-perceptions.

Another view of *process* is described in Chapter 3, where process is defined as the sequence of events and their meaning to the helpee. It has two simple phases—*building a relationship* and *facilitating positive action*. Initially, the helper uses understanding and support skills to develop the relationship. In the second phase of the process decision and action skills become important.

One purpose of this book is to make some of the learnings of helping specialists more available to persons not having specialist responsibilities, and to encourage more widespread volunteer helping behaviors. Specialist helpers are far too few to make a strong impact, and it is a social tragedy to restrict basic helping functions to a few specialists. This effort is not designed to minimize the contribution of specialists nor to disparage the skill and knowledge acquired in years of research, study, and practice. Meeting the health, psychological, and spiritual needs of dysfunctional people in our increasingly dehumanized society is so complicated and demanding that specialists will continue to be needed. But these specialists should be employed only when their unique knowledge can be used effectively. Overreliance on a specialized approach to helping often ignores and fragments the needs of the whole person.

## UNIVERSALITY OF HELP

Helping is a function of *all* concerned human beings and is *not* limited to professional helpers. One of the controversial developments in our specialized technical society was the professionalization of the helping process. Professional helpers realized that they could not be all things to all people, so specialization developed. They also wanted to protect the unsuspecting public from unscrupulous or ignorant helpers who charged fees. The consequence of this development was to assign helping functions by custom and law to specialists! Another result of professionalization was a whole substructure of special terminology, organizations, credentials, status lev-

els, and ethical codes. As we shall see later in this chapter, these developments in the helping professions have created some agonizing public issues surrounding credentialing, legality, competence, ethics, funding, and service delivery. Many helpers, as a result, want to deemphasize credentials and simplify the formal helping relationship.

The overlapping functions of helping specialties are another confusing reality, since there are many labels for substantially the same helping process. The process, furthermore, has much in common with friendship. A quarter century ago, Schofield (1964) made a clear case that helping specialists offer a substantial amount of friendship to their clients. The irony is that these clients pay for friendship they should obtain in the normal processes of living. It is a severe indictment of our culture that people must purchase friendship.

### **FACILITATING HELPEE GROWTH**

Helping another human being is basically a process of enabling that person to grow in the directions that person chooses, to solve problems, and to face crises. This process assumes the helpee is aware of alternatives and is willing to take responsibility for acting on an alternative. Helping involves facilitating awareness of such alternatives and assessing readiness to act. Help, however, should be defined mainly by the helpees, who select the goals of their own growth, and who also determine whether they want help at all. To avoid feeling patronized, helpees define desired help on their own terms and to fulfill their own needs. They may, for example, ask for information, or for assistance in making a decision, solving a problem, or expressing their feelings. We need to be aware, though, that people seldom admit directly that they want help, because it is difficult to admit having a problem one cannot solve on one's own. Even when helpees admit to themselves that they have problems, the degree of trust they feel will determine the extent of their sharing with a helping person. In any case, this view of helping assumes that people know their needs.

This voluntary quality of the helping process is a crucial point since many persons wanting to help others actually seek to meet their own unrecognized needs. Some helpers, for example, *need* "victims," meaning that the helpers may maintain relationships to satisfy their own affiliative or dominance needs and may even continue their relationship longer than necessary in order to feel needed. Doing anything for other people without their initiative and consent frequently is manipulative and often is destructive. Even when the help is solicited and given with the best of human motives, it may have an unplanned detrimental effect on the helpee. The reason is partly that persons being helped experience a loss of self-esteem. Although appearing outwardly grateful, they may interpret the gift or act of help as a message that they are incompetent. This interpretation is accompanied by feelings of dependency, helplessness, inferiority, or inadequacy. They say to themselves, for example, "Receiving this help makes me feel as if I can't take care of myself; I don't like leaning on somebody else."



On the other hand, some people accept the help with dependent eagerness and relief. They say, in effect, "Good, now I do not need to be responsible for carrying this burden alone anymore." Such feelings often turn quickly to resentment or guilt, especially for informal help. These common self-protective reactions are one reason the helping process has such unpredictable outcomes and why helping actions are often resented or rejected.

The underlying issue of this section is the extent to which one should or can take responsibility for another person. Helpers vary over the full spectrum of responsibility, from feeling a deep sense of human obligation to meet the needs of others to a view that others are totally responsible for their own experience and need fulfillment. The former group believes strongly that "I am my brother's keeper." The latter group claims that giving help perpetuates dependency and immaturity in the helpee. Help may vary over the entire range depending on the circumstances. Generally the aim is to make the helpee self-sufficient; thus, bids for help and our inclinations to be helpful need to be scrutinized with this goal in the foreground. There are times, though, when the human thing to do is to give total support to another without regard to dependency problems. Important questions for helpers to ask themselves are, What is this person's capacity for responsible independence and self-support at this time? How can I be supportive without reinforcing this person's dependency? What needs and rationalization prompt my own desires to be helpful at this time? Chapter 2 contains a more detailed discussion of helping motives and rewards for the helper.

A dilemma facing helpers is, help for whom—the person, the agency, or society? If helpers indicate by behavior or attitude to their helpees that they are looking after the agency's interests only, they incur wrath and rejection. On the other hand, helpers cannot always support their helpees with the attitude that society or the agency is the enemy. The most helpful stance is to assist helpees to see how their present behavior is shaped by their environment. The aim is understanding, not blame.

There is research evidence that some ostensibly helping relationships may have no effect on, or even be detrimental to, the helpee (regardless of whether the helpee showed any evidence of pathology prior to the relationship). Carkhuff (1969) surveyed this body of research, concluding that the positive effects of the helping process for some people were canceled out by the negative effects of this process for others. The net result was that no significant differences were found between average gains of groups that received help and groups that did not. Every helper should be aware of these findings, and be alert for signs that his or her own helping behavior may be counterproductive in a particular case.

The act of helping people with the presumed goal of doing something for them, or changing them in some way, has an arrogant quality also. This implication of superiority raises hostile feelings in the helpee because the act presumes that the helper is wiser, more competent, and more powerful than the helpee. Although these conditions may be true, as judged by external observers, the motive for help and the nature of the helping task as perceived by the helper must be made clear to the receiver.



The principle that helpees must initiate the help request is confusing in another way. Must they always ask for help in words? A hurting child, for example, often cannot state clearly what he or she wants verbally, but facial expressions and body tension may be crying out "Help me!" Our inferences from reading these behaviors could be wrong, but the only way we can know is to respond and then be alert to the reactions. A similar and unusual situation is the attempted suicide, which may be interpreted as a desperate call for help. The idea that help must always be requested in verbal terms certainly can be carried to extremes, particularly in situations that present danger to the person.

The aim of all help is *self-help* and eventual self-sufficiency. I have emphasized that much of our growth is the result of self-help and self-searching rather than something done to or for us. Our needs for autonomy and self-actualization are strong, yet sometimes they are subdued temporarily by life experiences. These needs must be respected and strengthened for psychological survival, at least, and self-actualization at best.

A further assumption I wish to include here is that each of us behaves in a competent and trustworthy manner if given the freedom and encouragement to do so. Sometimes this confidence is shaken when working with people who have been hurt deeply by life and who behave consequently in an irresponsible and untrustworthy manner. We must communicate to helpees our confidence and trust in their ability to move toward goals best for them and for society. In this discussion of helping I have stressed the significance of helpee *responsibility* for such goals and self-determined growth because, in my view, this is the main purpose of helping. To assist helpees in carrying out their responsibilities we provide them with life management skills whereby they can help themselves. Improving interpersonal communication skills alone can have a dramatic positive effect on other areas of living also (Authier, Gustafson, Guernsey, and Kasdorf 1975; Myers, Finnerty-Fried, and Graves 1981; Ivey, Ivey, and Downing, 1986).

We, as helpers, also must assume some responsibility for creating conditions of trust whereby helpees can respond in a trusting manner and help themselves. Helpers do this through the *process*, a term which refers largely to their methods for reaching helpee goals. These outcomes are realized through managing the environment, providing conditions for understanding and comfort, and modeling trusting behaviors. A trusting approach means that helpers view their task as facilitating and supporting rather than teaching or persuading. Helpers who are open and honest about their own ideas and feelings tend to be perceived as trustworthy by their helpees. Consistent behaviors that show caring and are clearly in the helpees' best interests also inspire trust.

While we are concerned with the helpee's feelings, values, and goals, we must be alert also to the impact on the helpee of other people and of the physical environment. One implication of this view is that the helper needs to understand the special life circumstances of helpees and to "get out of the office and into the street." Another implication is that a helpee is anyone who brings a matter to the helper's attention—a teacher or parent