FOURTH EDITION

THE COUNSELING PROCESS

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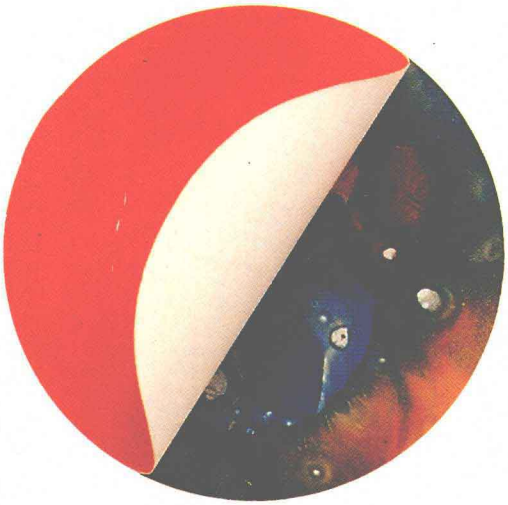

THE COUNSELING PROCESS

Fourth Edition

Lewis E. Patterson
Elizabeth Reynolds Welfel
Cleveland State University

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TO

Janice, my companion in all things
L.E.P.

Brandon and Fred, who bring me joy
E.R.W.

PREFACE

This fourth edition of *The Counseling Process* is intended for use in introductory courses in counseling at the graduate or advanced undergraduate level. We expect this edition to be used as the earlier ones have been—as a single text in a counseling laboratory or pre-practicum course or as one of two texts in a course on counseling theory and process. The book is also suitable for use in the training of social workers, rehabilitation counselors, substance abuse counselors, paraprofessionals, volunteers who staff hotlines and others who work in human service and mental health settings. The third edition was used in schools of theology as a guide to pastoral relationship building and counseling.

As in previous editions of *The Counseling Process,* our purpose is to help readers develop an understanding of the generic principles of effective helping, regardless of the theoretical orientation of the counselor. We define counseling as a process with three major stages and delineate the knowledge, attitudes, and skills we see as essential for effective helping at each stage. Our view is that counselor and client work together as partners to understand the issues the client faces, illuminate their causes, and then establish more effective actions. New to the fourth edition are a greater emphasis on diagnosis and goal setting and a more detailed description of how the generic process of helping ought to be adapted to meet the needs of several kinds of clients—those of diverse cultural backgrounds, women, children and adolescents, clients in crisis, and reluctant clients. This edition also includes more discussion of issues facing counselors who work in community mental health agencies and other mental health settings.

The broad outline of the counseling process described in the third edition has been retained, but the material has been reorganized and expanded. The book is now organized into three major parts: Fundamentals of the Counseling Process, Adapting the Counseling Process to Diverse Clients, and Theoretical and Professional Issues. There are three entirely new chapters in the book. The first focuses on counseling clients in crisis, delineating the ways in which the three-stage model needs to be adapted for these cases. All counselors encounter clients in crisis at times, and this chapter provides the essential knowledge for intervening in such circumstances. The second new chapter attends to the counseling skills necessary to work effectively

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with female clients and those of culturally diverse backgrounds. This new chapter integrates the growing body of literature on these topics and provides specific guidelines for helping counselors develop the sensitivity and skills they need to be effective with these kinds of clients. The third new chapter elaborates on ethical standards and issues in counseling, an area that has received great attention in the professional literature since the last edition of this book was published.

All of the other chapters have been substantially rewritten and updated. Commitment to action and termination are now covered in one chapter, and the material on the relationship of goal setting to action planning has been greatly expanded. The chapter on diagnosis has undergone the most substantial revision and now includes a six-component model of effective diagnosis. Also, the material on counseling theories has been expanded to give greater attention to cognitive models of counseling. The chapter on research in counseling has been dropped from this edition to make room for the additional practice-oriented material.

The book employs three learning aids to facilitate students' understanding of the material. First, case studies accompany most chapters. These cases include questions that encourage the reader to place himself or herself in the role of helper and to consider client material from a counselor's point of view. The cases in this edition are written to reflect the cultural diversity in American society. Second, the book includes several exercises that may be completed individually or with partners to assist in the internalization of learning and give practice in using specific counseling skills. Finally, Appendix C provides a format for counselors who wish to evaluate their effectiveness after a counseling session. We have found this format particularly useful in practicum and internship supervision.

We have written the book in a personal style geared to the student interested in becoming an effective helper, and at the same time accessible to the layperson interested in understanding what professional counseling is all about. After using the text in an introductory course, the student should have sufficient knowledge to begin contact with clients under careful supervision. The text is also a valuable resource for students in internships who wish to review principles of effective counseling as they embark on that stage of their training.

We wish to acknowledge the contributions of our reviewers, whose careful reading of the manuscript helped us refine our thinking and writing. They are Arthur J. Clark of St. Lawrence University, Sheldon Eisenberg, Stephen S. Feit of Idaho State University, and Brenda Freeman of the University of Wyoming. The support and encouragement of Claire Verduin and Fiorella Ljunggren of Brooks/Cole have been especially valuable, as has the assistance of Jane Hoover of Lifland et al., Bookmakers.

We also wish to thank Toni Foster for her masterful word processing and unflagging good spirit throughout the writing process. We acknowledge

the help of Nancy Waina and James Toman, our graduate assistants, for careful library research and indexing. We owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Daniel J. Delaney for his germinal ideas in creating the first edition of *The Counseling Process* with our former colleague, Sheldon Eisenberg. Dr. Eisenberg's contributions to the first three editions and the stimulus of his thinking about counseling have influenced the form and substance of the fourth edition. Finally, we wish to thank our families for their support and patience during the long months we spent at the computer writing and rewriting this book.

Lewis E. Patterson
Elizabeth Reynolds Welfel

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PART ONE

FUNDAMENTALS OF THE COUNSELING PROCESS

CHAPTER 1

SOME PERSPECTIVES ON EFFECTIVE HELPING

People seek the services of professional helpers—counselors, social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists—when their capacities for responding to the demands of life are strained, when desired growth seems unattainable, when important decisions elude resolution, and when natural support systems are unavailable or insufficient. Sometimes the person in need of help is urged or required to seek counseling by a third party—spouse, parent, employer, teacher, or judge—who believes that the individual is failing to manage some important aspect of life effectively.

The purpose of counseling, broadly conceived, is to empower the client to cope with life situations, to reduce emotional stress, to engage in growth-producing activity, and to make effective decisions. As a result of counseling, the client increases his or her control over present adversity and present and future opportunity.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THIS BOOK

Persons of any age, in any walk of life, and with almost any kind of problem can be helped to gain power over the adversities and opportunities of their lives. Counseling to achieve client empowerment is viewed in this text as a generic process that includes essentially the same elements whether performed in a community counseling clinic, a rehabilitation center, a school, a hospital, or any other facility. Certain methods may result in more effective work with certain clients (see Part Two for discussion of counseling with children, women, minorities, reluctant clients, and clients in crisis), but the *basic* structure of the helping process is the same.

The power to live effectively is enhanced by knowledge of two kinds: understandings about self and understandings about conditions of the environment. Aspects of self include capacities, knowledge, emotions, values, needs, interests, and ways of construing self and others. Conditions of the

environment include, among other factors, interpersonal contacts with family, friends, and work or school associates; social and economic factors associated with where one lives and how one earns a living; and cultural heritage. Because we believe that a client's control over his or her destiny is enhanced by increased understanding of self in one's environment, the generic model we present in this book must be regarded as an insight approach to counseling. We believe that a client who develops improved insights about his or her needs, desires, and capacities in relation to the opportunities and challenges afforded by his or her particular environment will be empowered to live more effectively.

The model of counseling presented here focuses on both cognitive and affective issues. We recognize that the ability to solve cognitive problems is enhanced by a positive affective state and that progress in solving cognitive problems is likely to make the client feel better about himself or herself. Improvement in either the cognitive or the affective domain enhances the ability to behave more effectively.

In our view, no one personality or learning theory accounts for all of human experience, and no one counseling approach embodies the "whole truth" about the helping process. Our generic model for counseling integrates ideas from most contemporary approaches to counseling, and subsequent chapters of this book acknowledge the special contributions of the creators of those approaches.

The three-stage model of helping is introduced in Chapter 2 and elaborated upon in subsequent chapters. The first stage emphasizes the quality of the counseling relationship and is based heavily on the work of Carl Rogers (1942, 1951, 1961, 1980, 1986) and other authors who subsequently devised methods of teaching and evaluating relationship skills (Carkhuff, 1969a, 1969b; Egan, 1990). The second stage of counseling focuses on helping clients gain deeper understandings of self. Here we rely on psychoanalytic concepts of ego function and defense of the ego, as well as unconscious motivation, to provide a basis for a counselor's understanding of a client's motivation. The counseling techniques suggested for promoting in-depth understandings of self emerge from a broad literature on counseling but have special relevance to Freudian procedures (Alexander, 1963; Strachey, 1964) and Gestalt procedures (Perls, 1969; Polster & Polster, 1973). The third stage of counseling involves goal setting and action planning. We have relied on the work of trait-factor counselors (Williamson, 1939, 1950, 1965) and cognitive-behavioral counselors (Beck, 1972, 1976; Cormier & Hackney, 1993; Ellis, 1979; Ellis & Bernard, 1986; Meichenbaum, 1977) for certain ideas about decision making and reinforcement of positive action.

Each of the theoretical positions seems to have special merit in describing some aspect of the counseling process. Although the proponents of each system tend to believe that their particular focus comprises all of the most important elements of counseling, we believe an aggregate of the several

systems to be more complete than any one alone. Of course, we do not suggest that a counselor randomly select techniques or strategies. We have provided a basis for selecting particular techniques according to the stage of counseling and the nature of the client's concerns, allowing a consistent progression through the counseling process to be planned. Chapter 12 provides synopses of selected theories and describes how each theory contributed to our generic model.

FUNDAMENTAL PRECEPTS OF EFFECTIVE HELPING

The search to identify those common elements that form the basis for effective helping continues. This section presents a set of fundamental precepts that form the basis for our understanding of the helping process.* These precepts have emerged from four sources: our study of the range of counseling theories, our experiences as helpers, our experiences as counselor educators, and our collaboration as authors interested in describing the helping process to others. The precepts are intended to orient you to some of the principles we believe to be most important in understanding the helping process. These principles will take on deeper meaning as you assimilate subsequent chapters and should be studied again when you have finished reading this book.

Precept One: Understanding Human Behavior

To be truly effective, the counselor must have a thorough understanding of human behavior in its social and cultural context and must be able to apply that understanding to each client's particular set of problems or circumstances.

Diagnosis and hypothesis generating are critical and inevitable parts of a counselor's work. The process of diagnosis has two interrelated functions: (1) to describe significant patterns of cognition, behavior, or affective experience; and (2) to provide causal explanations for these significant patterns. The process is one of developing tentative hypotheses, confirming their validity, and using them as the basis for making critical decisions concerning the focus, process, and directions of the counseling experience. The process of arriving at a diagnosis is a mutual one in which the client and the counselor work together to identify significant patterns and their roots in the client's experience.

---

*This set of precepts has been adapted from Chapter 1 of *Helping Clients with Special Concerns,* by S. Eisenberg and L. E. Patterson (1979). Boston: Houghton Mifflin. Reissued (1990). Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.

Understanding human behavior means having a set of concepts and theories that help one account for and explain significant human reactions and relate them to experiences. These concepts and principles provide the core for the counselor's diagnostic and hypothesis-generating work. Counselors use theories and concepts about human behavior to understand their own behavior as well as the concerns, actions, perceptions, emotions, and motivations of their clients.

There are two dangers involved in the diagnostic and hypothesis-generating process. One is that the process often becomes a game of applying labels to clients, thus putting them into categories. Once categorized, a client is stereotyped; all of the general characteristics of those in the category are attributed to the client. As a result, the client's uniqueness as an individual may be lost. Worse, other important attributes of the client are missed because categorizing creates perceptual blinders for the counselor. A second danger is that helping professionals often make mistakes in their diagnoses, and these mistakes often result in ineffective and sometimes counterproductive helping efforts.

We agree that these dangers are real. But they are not inherent in the diagnostic process itself; rather, they are dangers arising from the misuse of the process. Counselors who comprehend the role that an understanding of human behavior and its social and cultural context plays in their work and who recognize the proper function of diagnosis will work very hard to avoid these dangers. It is part of their ethical responsibility.

Precept Two: Change in the Client

The ultimate purpose of the counseling experience is to help the client achieve some kind of change that he or she will regard as satisfying.

Virtually every significant theory of counseling states that creating growth-oriented change in the client is the ultimate intended outcome of the counseling experience. Some say that overt behavior change is the *sine qua non* of the experience. Others say that behavior change is just symptom change; real and lasting change comes when the client develops new perceptions of self, significant others, and life. Furthermore, some counselors take a remedial approach; they attempt to help the client change dysfunctional behavior into more functional patterns, such as by overcoming shyness, reducing debilitating anxiety, controlling counterproductive anger, or reducing interpersonal conflicts. Others believe that the goal of counseling is to help people make important life decisions; in this case, the counselor's role is to help the client use a rational thinking process to resolve confusion and conflict. Still other counselors view their work as stimulating favorable personal and interpersonal growth. As they see it, remediating dysfunctionality and assisting in decision making are just some of the means to the end of personal growth. For these counselors, helping people to become more

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