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Teaching the Helping Skills: A Field Instructor's Guide

THE PHASES OF WORK

1. PRELIMINARY PHASE

TUNING IN. An exercise in which the field instructor develops a tentative, preliminary empathy with the staff member's feelings as well as those of the field instructor.

RESPONDING DIRECTLY TO INDIRECT COMMUNICATIONS. The skill of articulating a staff member's thoughts and feelings in response to indirect communications.

2. BEGINNING PHASE

CLARIFYING PURPOSE. The skill of making a brief, opening statement, without jargon, which helps to clarify the purpose of supervision.

CLARIFYING ROLE. The skill of describing in a brief, non-jargonized manner, the kind of help the field instructor can provide.

REACHING FOR FEEDBACK. The skill of encouraging students to explain their perception of the problem and the areas in which they wish to receive help.

CLARIFYING MUTUAL EXPECTATIONS. Developing an agreement on what the student may expect of the field instructor as well as defining the staff member's obligations.

DISCUSSING AUTHORITY ISSUES. Dealing with any issues, raised directly or indirectly, which concern the authority of the field instructor (e.g., evaluation; confidentiality; the student's past experiences with field instructors).

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3. Middle (Work) Phase

Sessional Tuning In. The skill of developing a tentative, pre-liminary empathy for issues which may emerge at the start of a specific session (e.g., the impact of a traumatic event in a staff member's life; issues left over from the previous session; the staff member's potential reactions to information the field instructor must share).

Sessional Contracting. A collection of skills designed to determine the issues or concerns facing students at a particular session. These may include: remaining tentative at the start of the session while listening for indirect cues; asking students what is on their minds; raising previously agreed upon issues directly with the student and checking to see if they are still relevant; checking in with group members at the start of a session.

Elaborating Skills. The skills required for helping students to tell their story (e.g., listening, containment, questioning, reaching inside of silences).

Empathic Skills. The skills which address the emotional content of the staff member's experiences (e.g., reaching for feelings; acknowledging feelings; articulating the staff member's feelings).

Sharing Field Instructor's Feelings. The skill of spontaneously sharing appropriate field instructor affect which is in response to the productions of the students. Boundaries need to be respected so that the sharing of field instructor affect is professional and responsive to the needs of the students. Issues of counter-transferance, student stereotyping, inappropriate field instructor frustration, etc., need to be considered and closely monitored.

Demand for Work. A facilitative confrontation in which the field instructor asks students to engage in the work agreed upon in the contracting stage. Specific skills can include confronting denial, reaching inside of a silence, directly raising a taboo issue, challenging the "illusion of work", etc.

Providing Data. The skill providing relevant, unavailable information which students need to deal with the task at hand. Data can include facts, values, beliefs, etc. Data should be provided in a manner which leaves it open to challenge.

Sessional Endings and Transitions. The skills involved in bringing a session to a close. These skills may include summarizing, evaluating progress and discussion of transition issues (e.g., the staff member's next step; how to deal with "door knob" communications; role play of anticipated future conversations based upon the work of the session).

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4. ENDING AND TRANSITION PHASE

POINTING OUT THE ENDINGS EARLY. The skill of raising the impending termination of supervision in a timely manner designed to allow the ending/transition phase to be experienced as a process rather than an abrupt disruption.

IDENTIFYING THE STAGES OF ENDINGS. The skill of pointing out to staff the verbal and non-verbal clues which indicate the stages of the ending process: denial; anger; mourning; bargaining; trying it on for size; and the “farewell party” syndrome.

MUTUAL EXCHANGE OF AFFECT. The honest exchange of feelings by the field instructor and his/her clients, both positive and negative feelings, which may be associated with the termination of the helping process.

IDENTIFYING THE LEARNING. The skill of helping staff to review the work and to summarize the important ideas, insights and feelings which have emerged during the sessions. This process also involves the field instructor's crediting the student for her/his progress.

REACHING FOR POSITIVES AND NEGATIVES. The skills involved in helping staff to avoid an overly positive evaluation which ignores the negatives or an overly negative evaluation which disregards the positives.

IDENTIFYING NEXT STEPS. The skills involved in helping students to identify the next steps they need to follow (e.g., where a student will get ongoing support; how the student may best make use of the help of the next field instructor).

BOOKS


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