

Jacquelyn small's view on becoming a good counsellor

[Life](#), [Love](#)



“ Small Paper”

In Jacquelyn Small’s book “ Becoming Naturally Therapeutic: A Return to the True Essence of Helping,” She described the skills needed to become a helpful and caring counselor. Small provided the ten important characteristics or skills needed to be an effective counselor while advising the reader on ways to avoid toxic relating which can have a negative impact on the client. The skills and advice she provided to be an effective counselor are a great aid to anyone wanting to pursue a career in the counseling profession or even for “ ordinary people” to offer caring support to others.

In her book, Small described therapy as an art rather than a skill. Aside from the usage of our heart, there are ten characteristics that increase to the effectiveness of being naturally therapeutic. The characteristics she lists are: empathy, genuineness, respect, self-disclosure, warmth, immediacy, concreteness, confrontation, potency, and self-actualization. Small stated “ These qualities are the essence of love in action; they reside at the core of our being. We all already have the potential to use these aspects of our love nature, provided we have removed any barriers to our just being real” (1981, p. 23). These skills are very important assets that can have a powerful impact on the client. These traits guide the clinician in ways to effectively listen to the client, caring about what they are feeling and saying, and providing the aspect of love and understanding.

In the first characteristic, Small discussed the importance of empathy in becoming naturally therapeutic. Small defines empathy as “ the quality that

enables us to perceive another's experience and then to communicate that perception back to the individual" (1981, p. 27). As someone who is a future social worker, I agree that this quality is very important you are able to relate to the client more when you empathize with the client and feel what they feel. I feel that this is a skill that I definitely possess. When I listen to someone, I really try to see where they are coming from. This skill is very important because the client needs to feel safe and feel that the person listening understands what they are experiencing. Without empathy a person may feel misunderstood or even judged which can be a very negative experience.

Genuineness is about truly being ourselves and having our words match our inner emotions. She described genuineness as " the characteristic that allows us to be freely ourselves-it is non-phoniness, non-role playing, and non-defensiveness. The belief that all humans are equal and are the creators of their own destiny underlies the meaning of respect. Our outer words and behavior match our inner feelings" (Small, 1981, p. 39). When I am interviewing or listening to someone, I also incorporate this skill because people know when someone is being phony, making it hard for the person to trust the listener. When listening to someone, I always make sure to be myself. I try to be as genuine as possible to assure the client that I am being real and honest.

According to Small, she defined respect as " communicating to others our sincere belief that they, like everyone, possess the inherent strength and capacity to make it in life; they have the right to choose their own

alternatives and make their own decisions. Behind the quality of respect is the belief that all human beings are equal and all have the right to choose their own destiny” (1981, p. 51). Respect is important because if there is no respect, then there is no relationship with the client. My skill level with respect is proficient because I am always able to show respect to anyone that I listen to, even if I do not always agree with them. Not demonstrating respect for a client can cause a drastic negative impact on them because it can cause the client to believe that they are not worthy of respect and it can lower their self esteem. “ Self-disclosure is the act of sharing our own feelings, attitudes, and experiences with someone in the effort to help that person. Self-disclosure must be meaningful and pertinent both in content and context in order to be therapeutic” (Small, 1981, p. 61). Using self-disclosure when I listen to others is also a very helpful skill. It helps the person I am listening to know that they are not alone. For example, if a client were to tell me that they are stressed with school, work, and family, I would be able to let them know that I understand what they are going through because I have also experienced stress in those areas; With self-disclosure, I can let the client know that they are not alone and provide ease and comfort.

Warmth according to Small is “ mainly through nonverbal communication with the person seeking help. Smiles, touching, and other natural responses to the humanness of the one in pain are evidence of warmth in action. When appropriate it is even therapeutic to shed tears along with someone who is hurting” (1981, p. 71). This skill is helpful in some situations, but I do not

know if it is helpful in all situations. Sometimes I might use nonverbal communication, such as smiling, but touching is something I don't know if I am comfortable enough with as a counselor. It depends on the situation, for example, if a client experienced a death in their family and they are crying and grieving about it and they lean in for a hug, being rejecting of a hug would be impolite. However, if the client shows that they do not want a hug then it is best to respect their boundaries in order to make sure they are comfortable. " Research has shown that the word immediacy is the best way to describe how high-functioning therapists keep their clients in the here and now. The relationship between the counselor and client itself becomes a therapeutic ' tool'" (Small, 1981, p. 83). This skill is very important and I incorporate it when I listen to others because it takes the emphasis off of the clients' problems and helps direct it to the process in the moment between the listener and the person seeking help.

Small described concreteness as " the act of keeping communications specific-getting to the what's, when's, where's, and how's of present concerns" (Small, 1981, 93). My skill level with concreteness is good because I do not talk in abstract ways when I am listening to the client because being concrete helps the client by letting them express their feelings. while also helps clinicians because it gives them the ability to point out avoidant behaviors and gently draw a client back to the relevant issues and feelings in the moment. " Confrontation is used to bring people face-to-face with reality when we perceive an obvious denial or untruth on their part" (Small, 1981, p. 105). This skill is very important. Most people view confrontation as

something negative, but that is not always the case. Confrontation can be a positive experience and can assist the person seeking help to come to realizations. I have not used this skill when listening, but I know that I will in the future because it is an important tool that helps the client to come to terms with denial or untruth, and will help them explore their own thoughts and feelings.

The next skill she described was potency, “ people are in command of themselves communicate a dynamic, expressive, and involved attitude to others” (Small, 1981, p. 125) I use this skill by becoming truly involved in listening to what the client says and empowering the client while encouraging them to make a difference in whatever aspect of their lives they feel they want to change. The last skill Small provided was self actualization. She described this skill as “ the extent to which people are self-actualizing determines how involved they are in the growth process. Self-actualizing counselors learn from their clients as their clients learn from them” (1981, p. 135). I put this skill into practice by letting people know that sometimes I do not have the answers. I do not pretend to always know what I am doing or that I have the solutions. I let them know that I am a human being like them and that I am not perfect. This helps because when the client sees you as human like them, they don't feel like they are inferior or being judged. All the ten skills Small described are helpful in improving my counseling skills and I would like to further improve on each one.

Although Small did talk about what to do to be naturally therapeutic, she also emphasized what you should not do which she labeled as toxic relating.

Occasionally, when we want to help a person, we can actually be a negative impact, even though we have good intentions of helping them. Small explained that when this happens, it is because we use certain roles that can be negative and hurt the client more than help them. These roles are a form of toxic relating. The roles she discussed were the preacher, judge, teacher, or savior. Preachers use a moralist approach in which they become overly concerned with right and wrong. Judges are “less moralistic and more logical” (Small, 1981, p. 13). They sound confident in their knowledge. Teachers lean toward the tendency to want to properly train their patients in order to prevent repetition of the problem. Saviors feel as if they need to quickly fix all of the clients’ problems right away, while also needing to feel needed. (Small, 1981) Despite all the roles, we can only be therapeutic listeners if we are natural, sincere and safe in with our clients. I have to admit that sometimes I can fall into some of these roles unintentionally because of me wanting to help a person so much. At times, I know that I can fall into the role of the “savior” because I try to find a solution very quickly for the person. I want to make it better for them, but this is not the correct way to help. The correct way is to let the client go through the process of talking about their situation or problem and letting them express their thoughts and feelings. This trait is something I am learning to overcome and it is challenging. I am learning the right way to help by making sure to remember that the client wants to express themselves.

Reading this book was a great experience because it gave me a chance to learn what skills I can use to become a better counselor and helper while

also learning what not to do to. My favorite part of the book was the chapter “ Coming from the Heart” because I agree with Small that when you counsel others, you are supposed to do it from the heart. When counseling from the heart, we are truly caring about the clients’ feelings as a person and putting ourselves in their perspective. I must admit that I am only a beginner when it comes to counseling and interviewing but reading this book has opened the door for me to learn more and improve my skills.