

COUNSELLING SKILLS AND
BODYWORK THERAPISTS
by Delcia McNeil

In my sixteen years experience in the world of bodywork I have met many excellent therapists whose knowledge, techniques, abilities, spiritual presence, and hands-on or off energywork skills are extremely beneficial, effective and of great value.

In my own work what I have realised over the years is that behind the physical symptoms and stress that people bring, there is often much emotional pain, confusion, fear, anger or grief. In my own healer training I did not feel prepared for handling my client's emotions. Fortunately I had had a previous career in social work, had been taught counselling and interviewing skills and had experience of dealing with all sorts of trauma. So, although I would have welcomed it, the scarcity of training in this area was not too much of a problem. I would like to add that my massage training, although it led to the ITEC qualification, also did not include information or support around handling clients' emotions.

Since training in healing and massage I have also trained in psychotherapy and so am in the fortunate position of bringing the knowledge and experience gained from this, and my own personal therapy, to the healing situation. This learning is an ongoing process - I don't believe it will ever end.

What I would like to see within bodywork training generally is an inclusion of basic counselling skills as a matter of course. Why I believe learning some skills and if possible receiving our own counselling or psychotherapy is important is because the level of our own self awareness is crucial to the healing relationship. We need to be emotionally able to deal with whatever our clients bring to us, to recognise and be sensitive to where the clients may be in themselves, to communicate in a level way, and to know enough about our own inner conflicts and neurotic patterns so that we don't unwittingly project them on to our clients.

I believe we are all what I call 'normal neurotics' and we can't be fully 'sorted' before we do our healing work, but we do need to know that we have blind spots that others see and we do not. These blind spots show up in the way we behave and can really get in the way of our healing work and our own personal and spiritual development. I also believe we need mentoring, supervision,

and/or continued personal therapy in order to 'keep ourselves clear and clean' - psychologically speaking. Energy centering techniques, meditation, prayer and even communication with spirit guides and angels are invaluable. However, these activities do not give us the feedback we need from other human beings about what it can feel like being on the receiving end of what we say and what we do.

Back to counselling skills and the bodywork therapist. There are several questions that I believe we need to ask ourselves. Here are a just a few:

- * If we agree that the way we speak to and listen to our clients is a very important part of their treatment, then how do we know that we are listening effectively?
- * How do we gather and give information?
- * What influences the impressions we make?
- * How do we ask questions?
- * Do we know when to interrupt?
- * How do we deal with learning difficult information or deep secrets, such as our clients having been sexually or physically abused, or that they are taking illegal drugs or abuse their own children?
- * A fear that many of us face is what do we do when someone opens up or lets go emotionally?
- * How do we handle our own feelings?
- * And what about when we feel hurt, confused

by, frightened by or angry with a client?

I feel that learning some basic counselling skills can help to answer some of these questions. It is also very important to know when it is appropriate to refer somebody on to a trained counsellor or psychotherapist. The role of the bodywork therapist is not the same as that of the counsellor or psychotherapist. However, there is some overlap and expanding awareness means greater confidence and effectiveness. As the public become more and more aware of how their emotions and thoughts affect their physical health so bodywork therapists need to be prepared to meet this effectively.

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