

## The Listening Manual

Four kinds of helping are discussed here, used at different times for different purposes. Be sure to become competent with the first before you try the others. Once you learn them and they become part of your way of dealing with people, you will find yourself using each of them in situations that are appropriate to each.

### THE FIRST KIND OF HELPING: HELPING ANOTHER PERSON FOCUS WHILE TALKING

- A. Absolute listening. If you set aside a period of time when you only listen, and indicate only whether you follow or not, you will discover a surprising fact. People can tell you much more and also find more inside themselves, than can ever happen in ordinary inter-changes.

If you use only expressions such as “Yes,” or “I see,” or “Oh yes, I can sure see how you feel,” or “I lost you, can you say that again, please?” you will see a deep process unfold.

In ordinary social interchange we nearly always stop each other from getting very far inside. Our advice, reactions, encouragements, reassurances, and well-intentioned comments actually prevent people from feeling understood. Try following someone carefully without putting anything of your own in. You will be amazed.

Give the speaker a truthful sense of when you follow, and when not. Immediately you will be a good listener. But you must be truthful and indicate when you fail to follow. (“Can you say that another way? I didn’t get it.”)

However, it helps much more if you the listener will say back the other person’s points, step by step, as you understand them. I call that absolute listening.

Never introduce topics that the other person didn’t express. Never push your own interpretations. Never mix in your own ideas.

There are only two reasons for speaking while listening: to show that you understand exactly by saying back what the other person has said or meant, or to ask for repetition or clarification.

**To show that you understand exactly.** Make a sentence or two that gets at the personal meaning this person wanted to put across. This will usually be in your own words, but use that person’s own words for the touchy main things.

People need to hear you speak. They need to hear that you got each step. Make a sentence or two for every main point they make, for each thing they are trying to get across. (Usually, this will be for about every five or ten sentences of theirs.) Don’t just “let them talk,” but relate to each thing that they feel whether it’s good or bad. Don’t try to fix or change or improve it. Try to get the crux of it exactly the way they mean it and feel it.

Sometimes what people say is complicated. You can’t get what they say, nor what it means to them, all at once. First, make a sentence or two about the crux of what they said. Check that out with them. Let them correct it and add to it if they want to. Take in, and say back, what they

have changed or added, until they agree that you have it just as they feel it. Then make another sentence to say what it means to them, or how they feel it.

Example: Suppose a woman has been telling you about some intricate set of events, what some people did to her and how and when, to “put her down.”

First you would say one or more sentences to state in words the crux of what she said as she sees it. Then she corrects some of how you said it, to get it more exactly. You then say back her corrections: “Oh, so it wasn’t that they all did that, but all of them agreed to it.” Then she might add a few more things, which you again take in and say back more or less as she said them. Then, when you have it just right, you make another sentence for the personal meaning or feeling that whole thing has: “And what’s really bad about it is that it’s made you feel put down.”

**If you don’t understand what the person is saying, or you get mixed up or lost.** There is a way to ask for repetition or clarification. Don’t say, “I didn’t understand any of it.” Rather, take whatever bits you did understand, even if it was very vague, or only the beginning, and use it to ask for more.

“I do get that this is important to you, but I don’t get what it is yet...”

Don’t say a lot of things you aren’t sure the person meant. The person will have to waste lots of time explaining to you why what you said doesn’t fit. Instead, just say what you are sure you heard and ask them to repeat the rest.

Say back bit by bit what the person tells you. Don’t let the person say more than you can take in and say back. Interrupt, say back, and let the person go on.

**How you know when you are doing it right.** You know this when people go further into their problems. For example, the person may say, “No, it’s not like that, it’s more like -uh-“ and then may feel further into it to see how it actually feels. You have done it right. Your words may have been wrong, or may now sound wrong to the person even though they were very close to what the person said a moment before. But what matters is that your words led the person to feel further into the problem so your words had the right result. Whatever the person then says, take that in and say it back. It’s a step further.

Or the person may sit silently, satisfied that you get everything up to now.

Or the person may show you a release, a relaxing a whole-bodied “Yes, that’s what it is,” a deep breath, a sigh. Such moments occur now and then, and after them new or further steps come.

You may also tell that it is going right by more subtle signs of the relaxation that comes from being heard well – the feeling we all get when we have been trying to say something and have finally put it across: the feeling that we don’t have to say that any more. While a person is laying out an idea, or part of one, there is a tension, a holding of breath, which may remain for a several interchanges. When the crux is finally both said and exactly understood and responded to, there is relaxation, like an exhaling of breath. The person doesn’t have to hold the thing in the body any more. Then something further can come in. (It’s important to accept the silence

that can come here for what seems like a long time, even a minute or so. The focuser now has the inner body peace to let another thing come up. Don't destroy the peace by speaking needlessly.)

**How you know when you did it wrong, and what to do about that.** If nearly the same thing is said over again, it means the person feels you haven't got it yet. See how the focuser's words differ from what you said. If nothing feels different, then say it again and add to it, "But that's not all, or that's not right, some way?"

As you respond, the focuser's face may get tight, tense, confused. This shows that the focuser is trying to understand what you are saying. So you must be doing it wrong, adding something or not getting it. Stop and ask the person again to say how it is.

If the focuser changes the subject (especially to something less meaningful or less personal), it means he or she gave up on getting the more personal thing across right. You can interrupt and say something like, "I'm still with what you were just trying to say about ... I know I didn't understand it right, but I want to." Then say only the part of it you're sure of, and ask the person to go on from there.

You will get it right sooner or later. It doesn't matter when. It can be the third or fourth try. People can get further into their feelings best when another person is receiving or trying to receive each bit exactly as they have it, without additions or elaborations. There is a centeredness that is easy to recognize after a while. Like a train on a track. It's easy to know when you're off. Everything stops. If that happens, go back to the last point that was on a solid track inside, and ask the person to go on from there.

If you find it hard to accept someone with unlovely qualities, think of the person as being up against these qualities inside. It is usually easy to accept the person inside who is struggling against these very qualities. As you listen, you will then discover that person.

When you first practise listening, be sure to repeat almost word for word what people say. This helps you see how hard it is to get what a person is trying to say without adding to it, fixing it, putting yourself into it.

When you are able to do that, then feed back only the crux, the point being made, and the feeling words.

To make it easier, stop for a second and sense your own tangle of feelings, tensions, and expectations. Then clear this space. Out of this open space you can listen. You will feel alert and probably slightly excited. What will the other person say into this waiting space that exists for nothing except to be spoken into?

Very rarely is anyone offered such a space by another person. People hardly ever move over in themselves enough to really hear another.

**B.Helping a felt sense form.** It is possible for a person to focus a little between one communication and the next. Having made a point, and being understood, the person can focus before saying the next thing.

Most people don't do that. They run on from point to point, only talking.

How can you help people stop, and get the felt sense of what they have just said?

This is second focusing movement. Finding the felt sense is like saying to oneself, "That, right there, that's what's confused," and then feeling it there.

The focuser must keep quiet, not only outwardly but also inside, so that a felt sense can form. It takes as long as a minute.

Some people talk all the time, either out loud or at themselves inside. Then nothing directly felt can form, and everything stays a painful mass of confusion and tightness.

When a felt sense forms, the focuser feels relief. It's as if all the bad feeling goes into one spot, right there, and the rest of the body feels freer.

Once a felt sense forms, people can relate to it. They can wonder what's in it, can feel around it and into it.

**When to help people let a felt sense form.** When people have said all that they can say clearly, and from there on it is confusing, or a tight unresolved mess, and they don't know how to go on.

When there is a certain spot that you sense could be gone into further.

When people talk round and round a subject and never go down into their feelings of it. They may start to say things that are obviously personal and meaningful, but then go on to something else. They tell you nothing meaningful, but seem to want to. In this very common situation, you can interrupt the focuser and gently point out the way into deeper levels of feeling.

FOCUSER: "I've been doing nothing but taking care of Karen since she's back from the hospital. I haven't been with me at all. And when I do get time now, I just want to run out and do another chore."

LISTENER: "You haven't been able to be with yourself for so long, and even when you can now, you don't."

FOCUSER: "She needs this and she needs that and no matter what I do for her it isn't enough. All her family are like that. It makes me angry. Her father was like that, too, when he was sick, which went on for years. They're always negative and grumpy and down on each other."

LISTENER: "It makes you angry the way she is, the way they are."

FOCUSER: "Yes. I'm angry. Damm right. It's a poor climate. Living in a poor climate. Always gray. Always down on something. The other day, when I-"

LISTENER (interrupts): "Wait. Be a minute with your angry feelings. Just feel it for a minute. See what more is in it. Don't think anything..."

**How to help a felt sense form.** There is a gradation of how much help people need to contact a felt sense. Always do the least amount first, and more only if that doesn't work.

Some people won't need any help except your willingness to be silent. If you don't talk all the time, and if you don't stop them or get them off the track, they will feel into what they need to feel into. Don't interrupt a silence for at least a minute. Once you have responded and checked out what you said and gotten it exactly right, be quiet.

The person may need one sentence or so from you, to make the pause in which a felt sense could form. Such a sentence might simply repeat slowly the last important word or phrase you already said. It might just point again to that spot. For instance, in the previous example you might have said slowly and emphatically: "Really angry." Then you would stay quiet. The person's whole sense of all that goes with being angry should form.

Whatever people say after your attempt to help them find a felt sense, say the crux of it back. Don't worry if you can't immediately create the silent deeper period you feel is needed. You can try it again soon. Go along with whatever comes up, even if the focuser has wandered off the track momentarily.

If after many tries the people still aren't feeling into anything then you can tell them to do so more directly. Say explicitly. "Sit with it a minute and feel into it further." You can also give all or some of the focusing instructions.

You can form a question for people. Tell them to ask this question inwardly, to ask not the head but the gut. "Stay quiet and don't answer the question in words. Just wait with the question till something comes from your feeling."

Questions like that are usually best open-ended. "What really is this?" "What's keeping this the way it is?"

Another type of question applies to the "whole thing." "[Where am I really hung up in this whole thing?" use it when everything is confused or when the focuser doesn't know how to begin.

If the focuser has let a felt sense form but is still stuck, it may help to ask, "How would it be different if it were all OK? What ought it to be like?" Tell the person to feel that ideal state for a while and then ask, "What's in the way of that?" The focuser shouldn't try to answer the question but should get the feel of what's in the way.

All these ways require that the focuser stop talking, both out loud and inside. One lets what is there come instead of doing it oneself.

Just ask, "Where's my life still hung up?" This will give you the felt sense of the problems fast, if you don't answer with words.

Another approach: pick the two or three most important things the focuser has said if you feel they go together into one idea. Then tell the person, "When I say what I'm going to say, don't say anything to me or to yourself. Just feel what comes there." Then say the two or three things each in one or two words.

These ways can also help when a person doesn't want to say some private or painful thing. The focuser can work on it without actually telling you what it is. You can listen and help without knowing what is about, beyond the fact that it hurts or puzzles in some way.

**How you can tell when it isn't working.** When people look you straight in the eyes, then they aren't yet focusing inside themselves. Say, "You can't get into it while you're looking at me. Let me just sit here while you go into yourself."

If people speak immediately after you get through asking them to be quiet, they haven't focused yet. First, say back the crux of what was said and then ask the focuser to contact the felt sense of it. If you've worked hard on it and nothing useful has happened, let it go fifteen minutes or so and try again.

If, after a silence, the person comes up with explanations and speculations, ask how that problem feels. Don't criticize the person for analysing. Pick up on what the person does say and keep pointing into a felt sense of it.

If people say they can't let feeling come because they are too restless or tense, feel empty or discouraged, or are trying too hard, ask them to focus on that. They can ask themselves (and not answer in words), "What is this rattled feeling?" "... or tense feeling?" "...or empty feeling?" "...or trying too hard" thing?"

**How to tell when a person has a felt sense.** One has a felt sense when one can feel more than one understands, when what is there is more than words and thoughts, when something is quite definitely experienced but is not yet clear, hasn't opened up or released yet.

You will know your focuser has a felt sense and is referring to it when that person gropes for words and evidently has something that is not yet in words.

Anything that comes in this way should be welcomed. It is the organism's next step. Take it and say it back just the way the person tells it.

It feels good to have something come directly from one's felt sense. It shifts the feelings releases the body slightly. Even if one doesn't like what has come, it feels good.

It is encouraging when more is happening than just talk. It gives one a sense of process, freeing from stuck places.

This is the key concept in this process of listening, responding, and referring to people's feelings just as they feel them. IT is based on the fact that feelings and troubles are not just concepts or ideas: they are bodily.

Therefore the point of helping is never just to speculate, to explain. There has to be a physical process of steps into where the trouble is felt in the body. Such a process gets going when a good listener responds to the personal, felt side of anything said, just as the person feels it, without adding anything. Felt movement and change happen when a person is given the peace to allow the bodily sense of a trouble to be, to be felt, and to move to its own next step.

A focuser can do this alone, but the presence and response of another person has a powerful helping effect.

**THE SECOND KIND OF HELPING: USING YOUR OWN FEELINGS AND REACTIONS ABOUT THE OTHER PERSON**

There are ways of doing more than listening, but they aren't "more" if you do them without listening!

In this section I will show you how to try out many other things, but in a way that always keeps listening as basic.

Try some of them, one at a time, and then go right back to listening for a while.

**How to say your reaction.** Whatever you say or do, watch the person's face and respond to how your input affects the person. If you can't see that, ask. Even if what you say or do is stupid and hurtful, it will work out well if you then ask about and say back whatever the person's reaction to it is. Switch back to listening right after saying your own reaction.

Make your statements questions, not conclusions. And direct your questions to people's feelings, not just their ideas. Invite people to go into themselves and see whether they feel something like what you say -or something else. You don't ever know what they feel. You only wonder and help them to ask themselves. You might say, "I don't mean that I would know. Feel it out and see. Is it like that, or just how is it?"

Note that the person must feel what is there, to answer your question, if you put it this way.

Let go of your idea easily as soon as you see that it leads into arguments or speculation, or just doesn't get further into anything directly felt. If you think it's good you can say it twice, but after that, abandon it. You can bring it up later. (You could be right but something else might have to come first.)

Make sure that there are stretches of time when you do total listening. If you interrupt with your ideas and reactions constantly, the basic focusing process can't get going. There should be ten or fifteen minutes at a time when you should only listen. If the person is feeling into his or her problem, do less talking; if the person is stuck, do more.

Let the person's process go ahead if it seems to want to move a certain way. Don't insist that it move into what you sense should be next.

If the person tries to teach you to be a certain way, be that way for a while. For instance, some people might express a need to have you more quiet or more talkative, or to work with them in some definite way. Do it. You can always go back to your preferred way later. People often teach us how to help them.

If you find you have gotten things off a good track and into confusion, bring the process back to the last point where the focuser was in touch with feelings. Say, "You were telling me... go on from there."

Watch your person's face and body, and if you see something happening, ask about it. Nonverbal reactions are often good signals to ask people to get them into a felt sense.

For instance, the focuser might say, "That happened but I feel OK about it." You respond, "You feel OK about it in some way. But I see from the way your foot is tapping, and the way you look, that something might not be OK, too. Is that right?"

You don't need to get hung up on whether you're right or not when you sense something. If you sense something, then there is something, but you may not be right about what it is. So ask.

You will often see the focuser's face reacting to whatever you are saying or doing. Ask about that, too.

Feel easy about it if the person doesn't like what you're doing. You can change it, or you might not need to. Give the person room to have negative reactions to you, and listen and say back what they are.

Don't always stay with the words the person is saying. Does the voice sound angry? Discouraged? Insistent? Is there a sudden break in it? What way were the words said? Ask: "You sound angry. Are you?" And if the answer is yes, ask what that is about. If the focuser gets no further ask: "Can you sense what the anger is?"

You can use your own felt reactions to what's going on to help you sense more clearly what is going on with the other person or with both of you. If you feel bored, annoyed, impatient, angry, embarrassed, excited, or any way that stands out, it indicates something. Focus on what it is in you. If you are bored, you might find that it is because the person isn't getting into anything meaningful. Then you ask: "Are you getting into what you really want to get into?" If you are angry, what is the person doing to make you angry? When you find that, you can say it. For instance: "Are you maybe shutting me out because you gave up on my helping you. Did you?"

Let yourself have any feelings at all while working with someone. Let them be as unlovely and as honest as they can be. That way you can be free inside to attend to what's happening in you. That often points to what's happening with the other person or between the two of you.

If you get an idea as to what someone is feeling by putting together a lot of theoretical reasoning or a long set of hints, don't take up time explaining all this to the other person. Just ask whether the person can find the feeling you inferred.

You can express any hunch or idea as a question. Sometimes you might add another possibility to insure that the focuser knows it's not a conclusion but an invitation to look within at the feeling itself. "Is it like you're scared... or maybe ashamed? How does it feel?" Then Listen.

In the rest of this second section on helping I offer many reactions that you might say to help someone. You needn't read and grasp these all right now. You can look these up when you have become competent in listening and want more ideas to try. For now, you should probably move on to the third kind of helping.

**Some questions to create movement.** It is often worthwhile (though not always feasible) to ask if the focuser's sex life is good. If it is not, it may help to see if sexual needs are felt as frightening or bad. It may also help to talk about what's standing in the way of a good sex life, as well as how to change situations or get into new ones. (Some people may find such questions nosy or silly. Don't ask unless you are sure that your focuser will accept your asking.)

"Crazy" conditions are often related to one's life situation. If your rapport with the person is such that a question about private matters doesn't seem shocking or nosy, or if the person



mostly speaks of strange or hallucinatory stuff, try asking if the person has friends, work, places to go, sexuality. The person can focus on these with or without telling you all the details.

Feelings are inside and “relationships” are outside. But inside and outside are always related, and a good listener can help a troubled focuser find steps to change the outside, too.

You can ask people, referring to any bad thing they are fighting or puzzling over inside: “How is this bad thing in some way good or useful, or sensible?” This is a complex, profound question, and you might precede it with something like this: “No bad thing that’s in a person is all bad.

If it’s there, it has or might have some right or useful aspect that we have to listen for. If we find what the thing is good for, then it can let go. So give it a friendly hearing and see what it says, why it’s right.” The point is to help the focuser stop fighting the undesired ways long enough to allow them to open, so the positive aspect in them can come out.

Often a troubled inner state protects us from other painful problems. If we can see what a painful thing protects us from, we can sometimes protect ourselves much better than the thing itself can.

Sometimes a person’s trouble lies in the fighting against the way the body feels. If you let how you feel simply be, a positive next step can then come out of it – one that you couldn’t make up and force.

Sometimes it helps to ask a suicidal person: “Are you thinking about committing suicide at somebody? At whom?” (By this I mean attempting to hurt someone by committing suicide.) The focuser may know right away, and the focus may then shift to where it needs to – that relationship. It may help also to say that the other person in that relationship probably won’t understand the focuser’s suicide attempt any better than the person ever understood anything else.

Sometimes if a person is angry, it pays to ask: “Are you hurt about something.”

Sometimes you can ask: “Do you feel that you can’t ever get what you need?” (If so, let the focuser feel into what that is.) Some people’s most frantic, seemingly destructive reactions are really a life-affirming fight against some part in them that forbids what they need ever to come about. The point then is to shift the focus to this assumption or prohibition, which has to be false in some way. What does it say, and why?

If a feeling keeps being there, over and over you can ask the person to “switch roles” with the feeling. The person stands up, loosens the body, and prepares as if to act a role on stage. The role is to be the feeling.

“Wait... sense it in your body, what would this feeling do to you, how would it act, what would it say, how would it stand or move? Wait and see what comes in your body.”

Sometimes body expressions, crying, or yelling certain words arise spontaneously. When that has finished happening, it is important to find and focus on the felt sense that these expressive “discharges” come out of.

**Some suggestions to point people in a forward direction.** It helps to assure people that it's OK to have their feelings – at least long enough to feel what they are. The same is true of needs, desires, ways of seeing things. There are various reasons people stay clear of their feelings as we've seen. Among the reasons: the fear that bad feeling will lead to destructive actions.

If someone is afraid of feelings, you might say:

"Feelings and actions aren't the same thing. You can let yourself feel whatever you do feel. Then you can still decide what you choose to do.

"It's OK to need. Trying not to have a need that you do in fact have makes a lot of trouble. Even if you can't get it, don't fight needing it."

"Focusing isn't like just wallowing around in what you feel. Don't sink into it, stay next to it. Let yourself feel whatever is there and expect it to open up."

"Weird states are different from feelings. It helps to move out of them toward life and ordinary situations. Weird states may not ease by getting further into them. What is in your life is making things bad? What happens if you lean forward into living, instead of lying back?"

If the person suddenly feels weird or unreal, slow down. Take a short break. Ask the person to look around the room, recall the ordinary to the person's attention. Then continue.

But you shouldn't decide whether the focuser should go into, or out of, anything. The focuser should decide. Your company may be wanted in probing some weird thoughts – or may not.

"To change something or do something that's been too hard, we have to find a small first step you can actually do. What would that be?" suggest small first steps if the focuser has none, but don't settle on anything unless it is received with some elation that, that first step is possible. "Can you make a list of places to go meet new people? As a first step, make a list."

Some people are so concerned with what somebody else thinks that they need help getting to what they themselves think and feel.

"Put away for a minute what they think and what they said, and let's see what you feel about it, how you see it."

**Dealings with very troubled people.** You can talk about yourself, your day – anything you feel like saying. You need not always try to get into the other person's problems. Of course, if the focuser is in the midst of talking about them or seems to want to, you should not then refuse to listen. The person should know you would listen. But there will be times when it will be a relief to a troubled person to find that you can just talk of other things.

Silent, peaceful times are also useful. It is good to lie on the grass, go for a walk, without any tension of waiting for something to be said.

You can even get very troubled people to talk about (ordo) something they happen to be competent in – for example, sewing or music. This helps them feel OK for a while and lets you respond to a competent person – respond positively and for good reason.

It is often after such times, after having been able to just be with you, that a person might feel like taking you into some areas that are disturbing.

If the person talks a lot about strange material you can't understand and then says one or two things that make sense, stick with those and repeat them many times. They are your point of contact. It is all right to keep returning to these phrases, with silence or other topics in between, for as long as an hour.

If the person says things that can't be true, respond to the feeling rather than to the distorted facts or untruths. For example, "The martians took everything I had away from me..." You can get the feeling here. Say, "Somebody took what was yours?"

**Other ways to be helpful.** Let's say a man asks you for something you can't give. You may have to refuse the request itself, but you can tell him you're glad he's in touch with what he needs. Tell him you're glad he felt free to ask. This is especially so if the need is in the direction of life and growth for the person, if for the first time he can allow himself to want or ask for closeness or time with you.

When a person acts toward you in a way that is obviously destructive or self-defeating (and you think, no wonder lots of people dislike this person), there are several things you can do:

1. You can say how it makes you feel.
2. You can point to what the person is doing and ask what that feels like inside. Leave it vague, not defined. If you call it "attacking," "manipulating," "lazy," "whining," "controlling," or any such condemning label, you give only the external view. Inside the focuser it's something more complex. So be puzzled about what this is, even if you can give it a clear disapproving name from your outside perspective.
3. If you sense what a good life-thrust might be in this bad way of acting, then respond to that life-thrust. A lot of bad ways are bad only because the right thing is being half done instead of being done fully and freely. If you respond to the half of it that is happening, that lets it happen more. Responding to the half that's missing isn't as helpful.

Example: Someone is whiningly complaining. It would not be helpful to say, "Why do you always whine and come on so weak? Why don't you stand up for yourself and say what you want?" It is more helpful to respond to the positive half of this that's trying to happen, and say, "You saying what you need from people, and calling a halt to what they've been doing."

Some healthy life-enhancing processes are: taking up for yourself, defending the way you see it, allowing yourself to be free to feel as you do, reaching out for someone, trying to do something that you haven't been able to for some time, exploring wondering about yourself, trying to meet new people, sexuality, a sense of cosmic significance or mystery, seeking peace, letting someone see you trying something new, taking charge of a situation, telling people how you need them to be, being honest, hoping refusing to give up, being able to ask for help. These are all good life-thrusts.

No one should depend on just you alone. Let the person meet other people you know, or call someone else in to help, if the person lacks others.

The person should be present when being discussed by people trying to help. It's hard to be straight in front of someone you're trying to help, but we've already seen why you must.

A person's needs for help with a job, a place to live, and so on, should be part of what help is about. Help is about needs whatever they may be. It's not useful to separate "psychological" problems from the rest. They aren't separate in a person's life.

### **THE THIRD KIND OF HELPING: INTERACTION**

Until now you were either saying back the other person's feelings (the first kind) or giving your feelings and ideas about the other person's feelings (the second). Up to now it was all about helping the other person. Now we come to your feelings. This section is as much for you as for helping the other person. Ideally, both can profit equally.

Our feelings, when we are with others, are often about those others. And yet they are our own feelings. We often feel like blaming the other person for our feelings:

"I feel that you're very defensive."

"I feel that you're manipulating me."

"I feel angry because you always interrupt me."

"I feel disappointed because you don't feel any better."

In these examples we express our feelings by saying that the other person is no good, behaves badly, or is the reason for our feelings. To express our feelings in a more useful way we must focus into them and get in touch with what's in us. These feelings will still relate to what the other person did, but they will be strictly our feelings and not the other person's burden. For example:

"It's always hard for me to keep a train of thought, or keep feeling it's worth saying. So when you interrupt me, it hits my weak spot. I get so I can't make room for myself to say things to you. That's why it makes me angry."

"I have sort of a stake in being a big help to people. I guess I'm disappointed that you're not feeling better. I do care about you too, but I see that my disappointment is my own thing. I need to be Big Helper."

**How to express yourself.** From a given moment of interaction you can move either into the other person or into yourself. For example, let's say you are with a woman who has done something to upset you. You can go from this into what she did and what she is like and why she did it. Or you can go into what you are like and how it upsets you.

Don't do the first. Leave that to the other person. Do the second: move from the bit of interaction into your own feelings. See why it affected you and share this.

It is hard for people to hear you say what's wrong with them.

It is easy to listen to you saying what's wrong with you, or what is at any rate vulnerable or upsettable or shaky in you. Avoid making comments that start, "I feel that you..." You're invading the other's territory and protecting yours.

Sharing what is happening in you makes the interaction more open and personal. The other person can then feel comfortable about sharing inner things with you.

Don't say:

"I have to express my feelings. Can I trust you with it? I feel you bully me."

Do say:

"I get angry and upset when I can't get to finish what I started to say. I lose track. I get insecure about whether I have any real ideas."

It is essential to be specific in expressing yourself. Avoid generalities. It is still a rebuke to a person to be told he or she made you upset. It is not real sharing when you share only a generality. But if you share some of the specifics actually going on in you – your unique felt sense of the situation – you share yourself. You can find these specifics by focusing at that moment.

Be ready to stand it if what you share is ignored. The other person may not be able to meet you immediately, may still be in some private anger or withdrawal, and may lag behind you in being open. The person may have to say angry things once or twice more, or laugh derisively. Your openness will be apparent, but the person may be unable to meet it. SO don't expect immediate warm receptiveness as feedback. If you feel shaky, wait until what you say can stand on its own, whatever the other's reaction.

It is better to say "I'm mad," than to say angry things and let your anger be seen indirectly. Saying your feeling directly lets it be shared.

If the first words that come to you feel hard to say, don't fight with yourself. Wait a few moments and let another string of words form.

Do this till you get words that feel OK to say. Don't give up whatever needs expressing.

Focus directly on what you most fear, or what you find yourself struggling with. If what the other person says makes you uptight, pay attention to what you're afraid is being said and what you're afraid that means.

Then say the crux of what you find inside.

We often work desperately on the surface of what we feel, or how we've just reacted, trying to fix it or make it be something else. But it is easy to let the real feeling speak directly.

Examples:

"That hurts my feelings."

"I'm hurt that you're angry."

"That makes me feel pushed away."

I feel manoeuvred

."

"I'm stuck."

Say explicitly the covert things that go on in interaction, and say how you feel about them. Often things are happening that both of you can feel, but that both hope aren't being noticed.

For example, the other person might be pressuring you, and you might be trying to avoid pushed into something while trying not to let on that you are resisting. Or you might have done something stupid or wrong, and you might be trying to reoup without that error being acknowledged, trying to make it something other than it was.

When things like this have really occurred, saying them gets things unstuck. Not saying them keeps the interaction stuck.

Talk about it if you did something and now wish you hadn't. It may seem too late, but it's never too late to get the interaction unstuck.

Examples:

"I feel stupid about getting mad and yelling."

"Back a while ago, you said... and I said yes. I was too chicken to say no. I was afraid of fighting it out with you."

What feels impossible to face up to often provides a special opportunity to become closer to someone.

If nothing is happening and you wish something would – even if it seems that not much is going on in you-focus. There are always many things going on there, and some of them belong with the interaction with this person. Express them.

When you are being pushed too far, call a halt, set a limit. DO this before you blow up or get mad. Protect the other person from what happens when you don't take care of your needs.

Say what you want or don't want, while you still have the time and concern to stay and hear what it means to the other person.

For example:

"I like it that I'm helpful when you call me up, but now it's happening too often. SO instead of feeling good about it, like I used to, I feel pushed. I'd like to feel good about your calling. If I knew you'd call only twice a week, I know I'd like it again."

You are not trying to get rid of the person. You make the limits firm, so that within those limits you can feel good about the person again.

Having set these limits, you would stay to hear how the other person feels about them.

If you are sitting with a silent person, say something like, "I'll just sit here and keep you company." Relax. Show that you can maintain yourself on your own without needing to be dealt with. In such a silence, if it's long, you will have many chains of feelings, some of which you can express (every few minutes, perhaps).

Do not tell feelings you haven't got and only wish you had. Tell anything valuable you do have. If you find it painful to be honest, realize that other people don't care how good or wise or beautiful you are. Only you care all that much. It is not harmful to the other person if you look stupid or imperfect.

What is true is already so. Owning up to it doesn't make it worse. Not being open about it doesn't make it go away. And because it's true, it is what is there to be interacted with. Anything untrue isn't there to be lived. People can stand what is true, for they are already enduring it.

**When not to express yourself.** Be silent when people are focusing or talking about their concerns, or might if you made room. Delay articulating your side. People can almost always hear you better if they are heard first, and get in touch with where they are first. Also, as the other person does this, it may change what you feel without your saying anything. It might be hard to let the other person go first. But if the other person is full of unclear and upsetting feelings, you might not be heard unless you wait.

If you are very upset, and if the interaction isn't already a trusting one, wait a few moments before expressing yourself. As you calm down you can sift your feelings better. Also they are easier for the other person to experience if it seems clear that you aren't being wiped out by what you feel.

Don't express yourself immediately if you are confused about what you feel, and will only skirt your deepest feelings. Focus to learn what they are.

**When to express yourself.** Express yourself when you want to make a relationship closer. Or when you are being "twisted out of your own shape" in some way. For instance, speak up if

the person is implying that you feel some way you don't really feel. Then listen again. It is all right if the person doesn't believe you if you have been heard. Don't argue.

Also express yourself when the other person needs to hear more from you to feel at ease about you, or has misconstrued one of your reactions. Say openly how it is with you. Don't let the other try to relate to what you really were not feeling. Even though it may be easier for you to remain unseen, misunderstood, and unapproachable, no interaction is possible if you do.

When you are in a group and nothing is happening, express something about yourself. This opens things up for others to express themselves. Give them something personal and meaningful from within you.

When the other person isn't up to relating with you, it may help if you just freely express anything about yourself. This way you don't have to be carried by the other's energy.

Express yourself when you are being idealized. Share some personal trouble or not-so-nice feeling you find in yourself.

Express yourself when the other person worries about having wounded or destroyed you. Give the specifics of how you do feel. Let it be seen that, although hurt or upset, you are not destroyed.

Express yourself when you just feel like it. There are two people here. You have equal rights. You may not always need to know why you feel like expressing yourself.

#### **THE FOURTH KIND OF HELPING: INTERACTING IN A GROUP**

What follows concerns any group. It might be a staff meeting or your family. It might be a social group or a task group. It might be a group set up specifically for focusing –something I will discuss in a later chapter.

We have all heard that groups should “process,” take up openly bad feelings. Usually that doesn't work very well. People hurt each other's feelings and don't really resolve them. Everyone gets a say, but no one can go very many steps. No one is really listened to, or focuses, so that the feelings can change. Yet this is what is needed and can happen. But it usually happens only with listening and focusing.

Focusing can happen in a group, however large. Someone reads the instructions and everyone focuses within the silences between.

Afterwards there should be a time when each person can say something. If the group is large, it can divide into small groups. Divide the available time, and have someone with a watch call time for each person. Say you have half an hour and ten people. Each person gets two and a half minutes (leaving time lost in between). When people ramble, two and a half minutes is nothing, but if they know the time in advance, and have focused, it may be more



time than some people will use. Take a minute or two in silence to let people decide approximately what they will say.

A warm group climate exists when people are free to say only what they wish, and no one criticizes, edits or adds anything whatsoever to it. If people are skilled in listening, or listening is being taught, the person on the right can respond listeningly. If people are not skilled or learning listening, then no one should say anything except the person whose turn it is.

When the group is having trouble with someone, or you are having trouble with someone, set aside a separate time and arrange for a few people to talk with the person. With just a few people meeting, each can be fully heard and be given enough time. Let the purpose be everybody's growth and straightness. Difficulties between people and within people don't impede the work and dynamics of the group. If they're dealt with in this way, they make a group better. When problems get resolved, and any person in the group experiences growth, the others feel the excitement.

If several people talk with someone who is upset or upsetting, at least one should be designated to insure that the person gets really listened to. This helps the person cope with disturbing feedback from other group members.

Credit another person with some good or seemingly good reasons for whatever is psychologically upsetting or harmful, even if you feel angry or find the person unreasonable.

When an interaction is bad and continues to be bad – say you've been talking for ten minutes and it's getting worse – stop. Go to the first and second stages of listening.

Assume the other person is trying to do some good thing. Say that. Try to find what this good thing is and say it. (If you don't like it, you can say that you don't agree but that you do understand.) Then, when the other person's side is cleared or heard, say you now want to do your side, and do it. Even if the person doesn't want to hear it, say your side before it's over, or sometime soon. Perhaps bring in someone who can help you be heard.

Why give your life and work to a group and then not invest the few hours it takes to work things through with a person? People often keep quiet out of consideration for someone until they get so angry they want to throw the person out altogether.

At one time or another you, too, may have felt discouraged about the group, unwilling to do the work, anxious you weren't doing it right. Help hear the person who is having these feelings today, even if today you don't feel that way.

It helps in a group to invite a person to speak who has just made motions or grunts and didn't get a chance to express anything.

If a person says something meaningful and then a lot of trivial things are said by others or irrelevant questions are asked, return to the first person with an invitation to say more.

When all are down on one person, there has to be someone who is more interested in letting that person get heard than in joining the attack. Even if you feel insecure or an outsider in the group, you can always express your wish to hear more from any person, or to have that person repeat something to which the group didn't respond.

There are ways to help with an interaction between two other people. If two or more are having trouble, and you are not too upset yourself, you can help each person get heard. In a bad interaction, usually neither person can hear the other very well. If you respond to one person, as in the first stage of listening, the other can hear you and see the good results of the process. Then turn and respond to the second person's feelings.

That lets the first one listen. (Don't mediate and decide who's right about what. Keep your view for later, or maybe say it fast and get back to them.)

Most of what we've said about listening can help in interactions with the person close to you. The difference is that you aren't trying only to help; you're also trying to live and work; so expect it to be harder and slower. Accept it if you can't do as well when you personally are involved. Don't be surprised if you can't listen well when you're being attacked. Even just trying these approaches – no matter how slow or hard it seems – sometimes gets people out of a stuck atmosphere.

A big difference can be made in a group if you listen, if you focus and say some of what you find and if you ask others sometimes to sense and say more of what they are feeling.