-supervision and consultant care



COUNSELLORS HAVE TO WORK IN THE PRESENCE OF DEVastating grief, guilt, bewilderment and confusion. At times they have to face the anger, insecurity and oddness in a bereaved person. Equally they may feel privileged to be working with and for people of great courage and nobility. In all they have to help a person or a family adjust to a new way of living and to advise against premature decisions. The counsellor has to help the bereaved grieve and must be able to listen, comfort and "contain" the emotional burden. The counsellor has to watch for situations where the pain of mourning is so great that more help is needed. Cruse has found that the role of supervisor has been important to help the counsellor to continue the work of bereavement counselling successfully.

THE NATURE OF SUPERVISION: The word 'supervision' has several meanings. For instance, it can refer to inspection of work, or to the surveillance of people at work. It can relate to the directing of a project or of the team associated with it. It can also mean that a supervisor offers support and encouragement. Such a supervisor, by broadening the counsellors' understanding, by increasing individual skills, aims to improve the effectiveness of the counsellors' work. Supervisors often are in the privileged position of overviewing the work of sensitively skilled people. In this sharing, new models can be established, new approaches recognised. As an example of this, when Cruse started to welcome widowers as well as widows, those counsellors who had experience had an important role in feeding back through discussion and through channels of supervision their experiences in this area of service, their successes and where difficulties might be found. On each occasion the supervisor has to develop the right balance of resources to work as an enabler.

Experience has shown that the natural wisdom, goodwill and enterprise of Cruse counsellors need in addition: 1) theoretical understanding; and 2) emotional strength to stay close.

Supervisors must ask themselves 'am I available enough?' and 'am I making the counsellor too dependant?' 'Do I want to teach too much rather than eliciting the learning from the counsellor's actual experiences?' Each counsellor brings strengths and vulnerabilities and varying degrees of experience and resource. It must also be recognised that counsellors have very different notions of what they expect out of supervision, from "it really helps me" to something that is experienced as a restraint or criticism. Some may feel that it is a rewarding opportunity to share difficult experiences, to guard against over-involvement, to plan strategies, and to discuss recent publications. Others may find meeting as a group a great support. However, I don't suppose there is one of us who has not come away from some supervision without a feeling that it did not achieve enough, that the point one wanted to make was not picked up etc. etc. In Cruse one of the hazards all encounter is that by staying close to a bereaved person or family, the counsellors 'become' them. So when talking about their pain and their loss, the counsellor may also feel bereft and useless. It is something that we all begin to spot - that with loss of self esteem there is also the feeling that colleagues cannot help us enough.

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STYLES OF CONSULTANCY

Bearing the foregoing in mind, how shall a supervisor order his or her thinking about styles of supervision? I have found one of the most useful schemes came originally out of the work of a management study group. It seemed to me it could be modified to fit the developing role of the supervisor. You can begin with two possibilities - Counsellor centred activity and Supervisor centred activity. From these two we can develop a scheme showing a continuum of style.

Discusses plans
Prescribes
Recommends
Proposes
Identifies options
Expresses confident understanding
Adds new facts
Hypothesises
Redefines
Assesses data
Probes facts
Seeks understanding
Reflects on problems
Describes experience
Listens
Follows advice
Seeks help

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