

The Healing Relationship - The Compassion Space That Heals

Last Update to this Document was made in
February 2003*

(Title and Introduction edited November, 2009)

**This is one document in a five part series describing
the compassion space which promotes well being**

Healing Relationship Introduction

***All readers should know that this document is an open document published on the Internet and it will be updated when new information is made available, including contributions by readers.**

All information within this electronic publication is copywrite protected. No electronic or paper copies of this material may be reproduced without written permission from the author.

Healing Relationship Introduction

Acknowledgements

Much of this document is based upon the material contained within a Ph.D. dissertation by this author entitled “An Initial Investigation into the Possibility of Advanced Empathy”. This research was completed at Syracuse University in Syracuse, NY and acknowledgements are given to all those who assisted (see this original Ph.D. document or the acknowledgements given in the reference list). The following text is updated from the early dissertation work and includes subject matter not found within the dissertation.

A deep gratitude goes out to every person who has contributed to this document, the informants, the people in the various vignettes, and the hundreds of practitioners who have paved the road before me.

This work would not have been completed without the daily support of my life long partner and wife and an extra thanks to her for help with editing and with the Internet.

I am humbly grateful to God for the sacred path I have been graced to walk.

Healing Relationship Introduction

Table of Contents

Title page

Acknowledgments

Table of contents

Introduction: Learning to help others on the sacred path to wellness

Introduction to the healing relationship

Chapter 1: Empathy and the healing relationship

Empathy, advanced empathy and halopathy

The development of empathy

Predisposition

Instinctual empathy

Basic empathy

Subtle empathy

Skilled empathy

Advanced empathy

Halopathy

Five dimensions of empathy

Chapter summary

References cited for chapter one

Chapter 2: The practitioner's view

The first characteristic: a personal description of healing

The second characteristic: a focus on holism

The third characteristic: characteristics at the onset

The fourth characteristic: advanced empathy and oneness

The fifth characteristic: catharsis, movement through suffering

The sixth characteristic: a shift in perception

The seventh characteristic: translation loss

Chapter summary

Credibility of practitioner's descriptions

References for chapter two

Healing Relationship Introduction

Table of Contents (continued)

Chapter 3: The pilot study – describing the healing relationship and halopathy from the participants view

- The first characteristic: the agreement

- The second characteristic: empathy perception

- The third characteristic: letting go

- The fourth characteristic: well being experienced

- The fifth characteristic: translation loss

- Another look

- Reports of the healing therapeutic relationship

- Chapter summary

- Credibility of participants' reported observations

 - Authority, suggestibility, and willingness

 - Bias and the therapist's agenda

- References for chapter three

Chapter 4: Seeking explanation and interpretation

- A natural extension of the therapeutic relationship

- The interpretation is culturally influenced

- Communication about the experience is imbued with ritual

- The observation of not doing yet moving

- Insight was acquired through the search for meaning

- The healing relationship was compared to other relationships

- The often used Western researcher's interpretation – placebo

- The healing relationship viewed as sacred

- “Just accept it” – no explanation needed

- The insider's versus the outsider's interpretation

 - The hermeneutic circle as it applies to halopathy

 - Hermeneutics and the concept of halopathy

 - The author's use of the insider's view

- Chapter summary

- References for chapter four

Healing Relationship Introduction

Table of Contents (continued)

Chapter 5: Implications and thoughts about training

- Core concepts important to healing relationship training

 - Seeking a definition for halopathy

 - Getting at the roots of the healing relationship

- Some possible applications of halopathy

 - Understanding halopathy defined as a relationship

 - The application to improving relationships

 - Halopathy and the practitioner's concept of self

 - Seeking the boundaries of fraud within alternative medicine

 - Spirituality as part of the healing relationship

- Training using the healing relationship model

 - The risks and side effects of applying halopathy

 - Unethical multicultural empathy as a risk?

 - Practitioner training – what do we know?

 - Healing relationship facilitator training

 - Who do we train?

 - References cited in chapter five

Chapter 6: Implications for medical and other helping professionals

- Implications for the medical community

 - Improving bedside manner

 - Understanding the importance of empathy

 - Training to become facilitators

- Application to other human service professions

- References for chapter 6

Chapter 7: Summary, conclusions, limitations and recommendations

Appendix

References

Introduction: Learning to Help Others on the Sacred Path to Wellness

Walking the sacred path to wellness is not the same as finding a cure for disease, although healing may be a part of the process. Wellness is a journey of discovering balance, wholeness, and relationship harmony in our lives. Wellness is linked to our perceptions of illness, which is more than disease, and includes those things that prevent/enhance balance, wholeness, and relationship harmony. In some manner, we are all on a journey of wellness and, during this wellness journey, we encounter people who help us and people who hinder us. This document is the introduction to one text in a series on understanding the sacred path of facilitating the compassion space. The series offers descriptions of relationships that help people with their journey toward wellness. This text does not provide the reader with specific treatment techniques, but rather offers description of the relationship behind the techniques that can be beneficial to peoples search for well being. The goal of this series of texts is to build a consensus of opinion, an agreement, on a definition of the terms **compassion, healing relationship** and **support relationship**.

Whether professionally in the role of human service practitioner, providing peer support, or providing family support, we may be asked to help someone on his or her journey of discovering wellness. This is an act of compassion in that we use our abilities to “understand” the person’s suffering and then act to relieve that suffering. This compassion occurs within the compassion space, a relational space between the participants and the nature of compassion. The compassion space is held as a possibility during the wellness journey.

There are four components of the wellness journey: discovering wellness possibilities, finding healthy ways of seeking wellness, enhancing wellness duration, and, promoting the types of relationships needed to support wellness duration. When using the

Healing Relationship Introduction

helping relationship to assist with these four wellness components there are two helping approaches that need to be balanced with each other: 1) support for wellness remembering, and, 2) offering the opportunity of experiencing wellness. Throughout this text this author will refer to these six parts (the four components of the wellness journey and the two helping approaches) as the six foundational components of the helping relationship. The six foundational components of the helping relationship serve as overarching concepts guiding both practitioner intent and practitioner development while learning to apply the guidelines presented.

The Six Foundational Components of the Helping Relationship

The four components of wellness:

accepting possibility, healthy seeking,
expanding duration, and finding support.

The two approaches for teaching these four components:

education, and experience.

The journey starts with the awareness of wellness possibility. This is also the same as accepting the possibility that the compassion space is possible. Many people, both practitioners and consumers, are not aware that wellness, and the compassion space, are obtainable. Becoming aware of the possibility and exploring issues around this awareness is the initial step in the discovery of a personal wellness path. As indicated above, there are two approaches a practitioner can use to assist with developing the awareness of wellness possibility: 1) providing information about the possibility, and, 2) providing an experience that illustrates the possibility. Providing information about wellness possibility can be assisted through the sharing of healing stories, through a careful examination of personally-remembered

Healing Relationship Introduction

wellness, or through an introspective look at the mindset, or attitude, that inhibits the possibility from being accepted. In addition to teaching information, the practitioner can provide the opportunity for wellness to be experienced. This would be a shared experience that clearly illustrates the possibility of wellness. Such an experience can only happen if the conditions for the “healing relationship” are properly established. When these conditions are established, then both practitioner and consumer can experience an experiential shift in perception accompanied by a sense of wellness. Once this perceptual shift has been experienced, it serves as the reflective point of wellness possibility -- a part of the individual’s personal experience that can be used for remembered wellness. From this point forward the person can begin to seek his/her own path to wellness.

The journey involves seeking the experience of wellness. Once wellness is accepted as a possibility, then the participant (client, patient, consumer) can search for his/her own definition of “wellness” and a new healthy style of seeking wellness. There are two approaches used when helping someone who is seeking wellness: 1) providing information on what others have said about seeking, while also personally reflecting, or 2) providing opportunities for additional wellness experiences that more clearly illuminate the path as part of the seeking process. Information can be provided to the individual about the path others have taken, about relapse, and about habits and techniques. Seeking is a deeply personal process and there are no techniques, rituals, medications, or platitudes that can be universally applied to all. It is more about finding the right pairing of teacher and student, and using the right technique for that pairing at that moment. The participant can learn to document and reflect upon how they engage in seeking while on their wellness journey. This is an educational process that requires healthy introspection, a process that often needs to be taught. Some of this introspection into one’s patterns of seeking can be taught through information, but some of it can also be learned through shared experiences with the practitioner.

Healing Relationship Introduction

A skilled practitioner can offer the opportunity to practice seeking of wellness as an experiential process. This journey of seeking “wellness” has many paths. The skilled practitioner/facilitator learns to walk the path with the other, acting as a guide, reflecting on the journey without interference. The role of support persons for the person learning about seeking wellness is linked to an understanding of the individual’s quest for wellness, of understanding how they seek, and then assisting with his/her natural process of improving his/her personal seeking process. It is not so much a question of a given technique, but rather of finding the right approach for that individual within the mindset of seeking wellness.

The journey shifts to enhancing wellness duration. Once wellness has been experienced as a possibility, and healthy wellness-seeking avenues have been established, then one can experience wellness with increased duration. As with the other components of the wellness journey, there are two approaches to helping someone who is looking to enhance wellness duration: 1) provide information about the wellness duration that can then be a part of personal reflection, or, 2) provide opportunities for wellness experiences with extended duration. Once healthy seeking has been established as a part of the person’s way of life, then the person may experience moments in his/her life where the sense of wellness has greater duration. There are many different situations in life that can contribute to increased wellness duration. Initially, the person may not recognize this. They will need help in clarifying that such improvement is occurring. It is important that the individual find ways to constructively reflect upon these moments of increased wellness duration. Many techniques can be applied to help with this process (e.g., journaling, group discussion, insight based therapy). Knowledge about one’s personal experience of what works to contribute to that specific person’s wellness duration is an important part of the wellness journey. In addition to education, information and reflection, it is also possible that the skilled practitioner can offer to the person the possibility of experiencing expanded wellness duration. This process of facilitated wellness duration can be quite

Healing Relationship Introduction

difficult. These difficulties are linked to the training of the practitioner and the expectations of the participant. Perhaps the most important point to emphasize is that the journey of wellness must involve increasing the duration of wellness moments in one's life and that this can be facilitated through both an educational (support) and an experiential (facilitated) process.

Community support is essential for wellness duration. The community needs to provide the individual with the overall systemic and personal support needed to develop wellness duration. It is important for the consumer to feel supported in their struggle to maintain, or expand, his/her experience of wellness. Within the helping relationship one can provide information about the nature of healthy support relationships, ones that facilitate wellness duration. Relationship support for wellness includes people at work, peers, family, and both health or education paraprofessional and professional staff. This relationship support involves three types of relationships: the healing relationship, the support relationship, and the habitual relationship. Training can be provided that describes each of these relationships and how they fit with helping a person on their wellness journey. It is possible for practitioners to offer opportunities where the person may experience a healthy relationship, one that facilitates wellness duration.

Community support requires that those people who are to provide the support for wellness duration also should have support. The environment, the language used, the work culture, should all reflect the approach of promoting wellness duration. In addition, systemic factors (e.g., curricula of training programs, and design of progress documentation) need to be re-designed to assist people in their wellness journey.

It is hard to shift from the mindset of matching cure to disease, of being the “fixer”, to the approach of being the guide on a wellness journey. This “fixer” mindset is very much a part of how we seek and deliver health care services in this country. The skilled helper

Healing Relationship Introduction

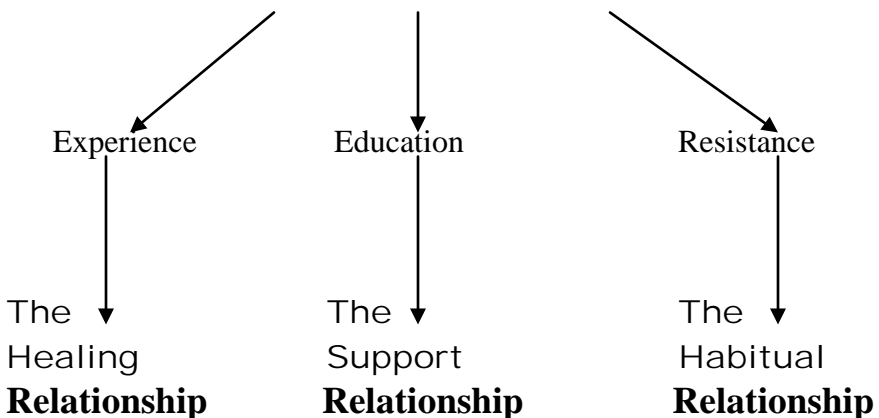
learns that diagnosis and treatment are useful, but also that treatment success is enhanced through the healing relationship. The skilled practitioner of the healing relationship does not try to “fix”, but rather offers to take the journey with the person toward well being, and for a short while offer the opportunity to discover wellness.

Helping people to experience wellness involves 1) accepting wellness as a possibility, 2) developing healthy ways of seeking wellness, 3) enhancing wellness duration, and 4) developing the types of relationships needed to support wellness duration. Helping a person with each of these four components of the wellness journey involves a balance of education and experiential processes. These are the six founding components of the helping relationship that promote wellness. Training in these six core components includes understanding the characteristics of the three types of relationships encountered during the process of wellness development: the healing relationship, the support relationship, and the habitual relationship.

Figure One:

The Helping Relationship Flow Chart

The Six Core Components of the Helping Relationship



Healing Relationship Introduction

The information needed to present a helping relationship that promotes wellness is contained within three documents. This is an introduction to the first of the three texts. These three texts present different aspects of the helping relationship with an emphasis on describing general guiding principles rather than specific techniques.

The Principle of Offering a Helping Relationship

Whenever a helping relationship is offered so is offered the opportunity to enter the compassion space and engage in the healing, the support, and the habitual relationships.

Document one, entitled “The Healing Relationship” describes the characteristics of a relationship that offers to the participant the possibility of experiencing facilitated wellness. Document two, entitled “The Support Relationship”, describes the rules and principles one may use to direct the development of high quality support relationships. Document three (not yet available) describes the habitual relationship and barriers that inhibit wellness. These three documents are to be used as three parts of one whole, each interfacing with the other. The information included herein is based on decades of research, including Ph.D. research at Syracuse University (in progress) and many years of practicing the healing relationship. The information also includes personal reflections by this author (and other practitioners and participants) on the process of offering help that heals.

The focus of these documents is not to provide a set of methods or techniques, but rather to provide a set of guidelines for learning to use the helping relationship. The techniques, rituals, methods, explanations that a practitioner used to help another vary depending on training, the culture, the situation presented and the expectations of the person seeking help. The practitioner, in every helping possibility, is always entering into a relationship with the person seeking help.

Healing Relationship Introduction

The goal of these documents is to clarify the fundamental aspects of those relationships that foster another's development of wellness. Understanding the fundamental aspects of helping relationships that promote wellness will include understanding the different types of relationships encountered by practitioners (healing, support, habitual) so that practitioners can begin to improve their own helping relationships. As the practitioner becomes deeply familiar with the rules and guidelines presented herein, s/he will develop a flexible, and eclectic, set of principles to use when providing help to another. This flexible set of principles will assist the practitioner when s/he is attempting to find the best approach for the person's needs.

Any person who is asked by another person to help them toward wellness and/or to help him/her cope with suffering can use the information contained within this text. This includes the following:

- Family members, peers and co-workers.
- Paraprofessionals: support staff, aides, and direct care workers.
- Professional staff: counselors, therapists, teachers, nurses, clinicians, social workers, case managers, practitioners of alternative medicine, pastoral counselors, and psychologists.

The various guidelines contained herein are presented so that a broad audience can understand them. In places where the text presents difficult concepts examples are provided and the basic components of every important concept are highlighted. In addition, for those who wish to pursue more detailed information, a reference list is provided.

Introduction to the Healing Relationship

The six core components of the helping relationship include not only being exposed to information about wellness, and learning about

Healing Relationship Introduction

personal wellness, but also having the opportunity to experience facilitated wellness. It is proposed here that the helping relationship that promotes wellness has two parts. First, the person offering help can provide a support relationship for people to understand wellness within their own worldview. Second, the person offering help can provide a relationship that helps to facilitate the experience of wellness, which later becomes the focus of understanding using the support relationship. A practitioner skilled in the healing arts can offer this experience of facilitated wellness. It is proposed here that this experience of facilitated wellness occurs across cultures, helping domains and across techniques. However, there is little published on how such an experience might be described, so it is not often presented as a possibility for thoughtful consideration or study. Without a readily available description, it is difficult to encourage practitioners in the helping professions to present a relationship that will promote wellness.

Suppose we ask the question, “what is it like being in a healing relationship with a gifted practitioner?” The answer to this question might help to reduce some of the confusion surrounding the practical application of the healing relationship in today’s increasingly technical health care profession. An answer might also decrease some of the tension people experience when entering into a helping relationship (including people who visit alternative medicine practitioners). Additionally, an answer would help us to better understand the characteristics of a healthy relationship so that we could promote this with all those seeking relief from suffering. We can search for an answer to the question of what it is like to be in a healing relationship and what this means for all of us.

Hopefully, the details discovered during this author’s search for these answers will provide readers with helpful information. Knowledge about the healing relationship can be used by anyone in the business of helping another toward wellness. It is information useful to anyone who is getting helping services from people in the helping profession as they can come to a better understanding of the

Healing Relationship Introduction

characteristics associated with a relationship that promotes growth and well being. It is also a text that can be used by anyone seeking happiness within their personal relationships with others as it speaks to the fundamental characteristics that need to be present within human relationships in order for them to foster health and personal development.

The search for answers about the healing relationship started with this author's personal experiences. These experiences started with a childhood of misunderstanding and disconnection. Early in my experiences as a human service worker, there were relationships with others involving nearly indescribable phenomena connected to a dramatic shift in well being. These experiences continue to this day and seemed to extend beyond the boundaries of our health care culture. I could not explain why the phenomena happened, or whether others had experienced anything similar. Yet, I had this urgency to make some meaning of this healing relationship and to find a connection to our health care culture. I focused my Ph.D. research at Syracuse University (degree in progress) on the describing the link between empathy and the healing relationship, including describing the effects associated with the healing relationship.

I started my quest into describing the healing relationship with only three ideas. First, I believed, that within the helping relationship I offered to people, there sometimes occurred a healing connection. It seemed like an empathic connection. Second, there was a link between this empathic connection and the healing relationship. Third, it seemed that sometimes people were afraid of this empathic connection. With these three ideas in hand I began a journey not only to clarify the nature of these healing phenomena for myself, but also to present a document that might decrease the misinterpretations that were behind the failure to discover personal well being. Both the ideas I had about the phenomena linked to empathy, and my personal experiences, shaped the interpretive process that is described in this text.

Healing Relationship Introduction

What I have presented herein is not only research, but also my personal journey as a practitioner. It is a story underlain by decades of healing experiences. Using this experience, and my belief that empathy is critical to healing, I completed a review of the literature on empathy, therapy and the practices of healing. This literature review is described in chapters one and two. Incorporated within this review is a model of therapeutic empathy offering a hypothesis of a link between empathy and the healing relationship. This hypothesis proposes that empathy may, in a few individuals, become heightened beyond advanced empathy. It is also proposed that this state of heightened empathy accompanies facilitated well being (the healing relationship). New terms to describe empathy are offered in an effort to provide a more complete description of this common construct and its relation to relationships that promote well being.

Although there is little in the literature that directly outlines the characteristics of a helping relationship that promotes well being, it is mentioned in the writings of healer/practitioners across many cultures. Chapter Two presents the language of practitioners who describe their understanding of this special healing relationship. Included within this chapter are this author's perceptions. The synthesis of these cross cultural practitioner perspectives with this author's experiences leads to an initial list of healing relationship descriptors. This is the first step toward offering a universal description of the term **healing relationship**.

A description of the healing relationship needs not only the views of the practitioner, but also the views of the participant (client, patient, student, consumer). Chapter Three presents the language of participant/informants who have experienced this healing relationship and who were willing to honestly describe their experiences to the investigator. This information presents characteristics of the healer's relationship, which, as a sequential collection of effects, have not yet been published. The descriptors given by participants closely match the descriptors given by practitioners, and together provide a general

Healing Relationship Introduction

set of healing relationship characteristics. This is a second step toward offering a universal definition of the term healing relationship.

Revealed in both the text analyses of practitioner's writings about the healing relationship and in the participant interviews were frequent references to interpretation. In many instances, an entire explanatory system was developed by a culture to explain the journey toward well being. Seeking an interpretation for this shift into well being appears to be a part of the process of, or journey toward, discovering well being. Chapter Four attempts the difficult task of synthesizing the wide diversity of interpretive attempts applied to healing relationship phenomena. The struggle to make meaning of these transformative phenomena is also described by this author. It is hoped that the presentation of multiple interpretations will help readers with their own interpretations. There are many aspects of this interpretive process that become part of the proposed universal definition for the term healing relationship.

Chapter Five offers to the reader some research implications for persons in the business of providing mental health services. There is a special emphasis on the ramifications this research might have on training psychotherapy (counseling, social work, psychology) professionals. Chapter Six presents implications of this research for the medical community. This chapter remains open to contributions from practitioners. Chapter Seven presents a summary with recommendations.

Chapters One through Seven contain a mixture of research, supportive documentation, and personal reflection. As a practitioner who offers to others the healing relationship, I present this work not only as research, but also as testimony of a personal nature. The path of the healer is filled with many adventures. Sharing personal stories that describe the healer's journey is as important as sharing research that seeks to do the same. The interweaving of the personal and the scientific is offered as a way to present different views. Hopefully the

Healing Relationship Introduction

reader will seek to integrate aspects of these views into his/her own worldview.

The information contained within offers the reader a generalized description of the special relationship that a few gifted practitioners in the healing arts have shared with those whom they have helped. These practitioners are represented across many cultures and many professions. The commonalities found in the descriptions of the healing relationship are offered as a path returning us to the lost art of being a healer. We have greatly improved our healing technology; now it is time to improve our healing skills. Hopefully, we can learn to use the information contained within this document (and the ones describing the support relationship and the habitual relationship) to move from being technology-smart practitioners to being skilled artists. It is hoped that the information contained within will encourage practitioners to reach further forward in their professional development striving to become facilitators of the healing relationship.

A description of the healing relationship is contained within the book entitled “**The Healing Relationship**”. The description is offered as a model that can be used by any person who enters into conversation with another person for the purpose of promoting well being. It is a model that presents the artistry of what gifted practitioners share with those who come to them for help. It is a model that can be held as a goal in one’s personal and professional development. The healing relationship is not limited by time spent with the person seeking help, but rather by the amnesia of both practitioners (and person in the role of providing human service) and participants (patients, clients, students, consumers) when trying to remember what it means to be well and stay well. It is possible to return to a way of sharing well being that has been lost, but it will require training and a community effort. These efforts need to start with an understanding of the term **healing relationship**.

Healing Relationship Introduction

The “healing relationship” document is one part of a series describing the helping relationship that promotes well being. The book “**The Healers Journey**” is designed for use along with the book “The Healing Relationship”. “The Healer’s Journey” presents a non-technical presentation of the healing relationship. Together these two books are offered to the public as an initial universal description of the relationship that promotes the healing experience.

The helping relationship that promotes well being includes not only the experience of well being but also a support relationship that nurtures understanding of that experience. The principles governing the development of quality support relationships are described within the book “**The Support Relationship**”.

Whether offering the helping relationship or the support relationship, the practitioner (helper) will encounter resistance. This resistance can occur due to the practitioner, due to the participant, or due to both people. The fundamental nature of this resistance to healing is described within the book entitled “**The Habitual Relationship**”.

There is also a sacred element to the healing process. This is only briefly described in “The Healing Relationship” and in “**The Journey**”. The book called “**Calling God Collect: The Mystic’s Relationship – The Sacred Qualities of the Compassion Space**” specifically addresses the sacred elements of the healing relationship.

There is considerable confusion surrounding the topics and terms presented in these books. The first goal of these books is to reduce this confusion by offering a universal definition of the fundamental components of the compassion space.

These documents, describing components of the helping relationship, should be considered as **works-in-progress**. Each reader should make a contribution to the document (through use of the web site). This is the main reason that the documents are posted on

Healing Relationship Introduction

the Internet. As a **community document** it becomes the responsibility of all readers to contribute to improving the document's quality with the aim of offering the wisdom of well being, through the compassion space, to more people. As more people understand the nature of the helping relationship that promotes wellness, there is the possibility that greater community support will evolve. As community support evolves this increases that likelihood that more people will find well being and that the needed systemic changes will also occur.