

Counselling

The great need in the church today is for skilled counsellors, full of the Spirit of wisdom, discernment and power. Problems we face today are more complex than were faced twenty years ago. People drug dependent and others sexually abused are common and normally need ongoing specialised care and attention. It is also true that many problems hidden years ago are now brought out into the open and discussed much more easily. This helps. The media, no doubt, has helped bring this trend about.

Pastors of growing churches must avoid a heavy counselling load, which becomes emotionally draining and will in time dampen their vision and the direction of the church. However, they must not completely dissociate themselves from it altogether, otherwise they will lose touch with the people, and their preaching will become irrelevant. The answer therefore in overcoming this problem is to train up and release suitable people to carry this ongoing counselling load.

Issues of confidentiality

Confidentiality is a matter which must not be taken lightly. Pastors in some countries will have a measure of protection on the legal side of confidentiality, while on the other hand ethical issues involved need consideration. For example, if a person confides that they have a problem with child abuse, should this be reported further? It could be mandatory in some countries.

Quite apart from legal requirements there are good reasons for maintaining confidentiality and this must be done rigorously in the pastorate. If the behaviour has already occurred counselling will be more directive towards forgiveness, rehabilitation and restitution. Often a confession is the first step to growth. The person making the confession may not even expect it to be kept fully confidential and may expect that further action will occur. This needs to be fully explored.

Often in pastoral/counselling situations there is a fine distinction between information relevant to the counselling situation being given in confidence, and gossip. As a person involved in helping ministries you are not required to be an ear for confidences such as these. Disclosures must be weighed in the light of their relation to the need of the counselling situation and politely stopped if they start moving into the category of gossip.

Helpful hints in counselling

Do's	Don'ts
1. Live in a way that builds up trust.	1. Be trapped into simply an advice-giving role (either telling the other person what to do, or in telling all about your own experience).
2. Listen to the feelings involved and look at the situation through the other person's eyes as far as possible.	2. Make an ego trip out of your own experience.
3. Look for ways in which you can reduce any threat you may impose because of your position, status and experience, etc.	3. Argue or pressurise.
4. Be in an attitude of constant prayer and dependence upon God for wisdom and help.	4. Confuse helping with false praise and empty assurance.
5. Be prepared to be vulnerable and accept the hurts and setbacks that come.	5. Preach, judge, condemn, deny, belittle, interrogate, threaten or lecture, etc.
6. Clearly define the problem, decide together on appropriate goals and develop a plan which will lead to action, evaluation and further steps.	6. Be afraid to ask for help if you are out of your depth.
7. Stress positive goals and reactions, rather than negative and troublesome ones.	7. Hang on to a person to make yourself feel significant.
8. Accept each person as of worth and accept the fact that their feelings are important.	8. Agree with everything they say and do not be a doormat. Do not also moralise, show shock, ridicule or fill the person with great shame.
9. Help a person to work out the problem themselves rather than do it for them. That way they will own the problem and take responsibility for it.	9. Get sidetracked from the central issue.
10. Have respect for a person, rather than as someone on whom to try counselling techniques out on.	10. Be against Christian counselling skills that have been developed and tried over the years.
11. Remember that there are two sides to most stories.	11. Be fooled by quick answers. Many situations take time.
12. Try to be non-judgemental in your attitudes.	12. Do not have in-depth counselling with a person of the opposite sex, unless someone else is with, or near you.