
ON THERAPY SUPERVISION

by
Jacquelyn Holley

"Love and Work are expressions of our need to serve one another from our Being"

So many myths surround the issue of therapy supervision. People assume that it is learning the right way to do therapy according to the experts, and unfortunately this is how it is approached by some professionals. Therapists sometimes take the role (or subpersonality) of the all-knowing father or mother figure, not only in the therapeutic situation but also as teachers and supervisors. This attitude creates limitation and while adopted as a power base, is indicative of a mistrust in one's inner power, which includes vulnerability.

Having been involved in the California growth movement for fifteen years and currently working in private practice, I have come to view the role of the therapist as encompassing many dimensions. Since we are working with the body, emotions, mind and soul, it can seem overwhelming to understand these complex facets, not to mention the political, social and economic influences. But even more important than knowledge and skills are qualities within ourselves that act as healers.

The most important quality for me has been love, and I find it quite remarkable that only a few psychology books even mention the word. This quality of love opens us to others, allows us to listen with our hearts and minds with compassionate understanding, and enables us to receive and give this energy in the healing relationship. Although our personality has its preferences about liking people, it is our basic nature to acknowledge the essence in all life forms as being lovable. As therapists we not only relate to this core being, but we help clients experience it for themselves and teach them to contact it at will. We give them the gift of themselves and remind them of that which they know but have forgotten. When this core Being is reconnected with, they can become the love, peace, creativity wisdom, and power that they truly are. No longer do they need to reject or repress negative feelings or thoughts out of fear because they can safely open to all the energy patterns of physical sensations, emotions and thoughts without being identified with those energies. They have the courage to

go more deeply and trust that their "truth" will remain.

So, too, we as therapists have no fear of this process because we have also experienced it. In this context, we are simply peers serving one another. Coming from love we are able to be completely present, putting our attention on others as conscious Beings. We value the relationship as a teaching for ourselves. Not only does each "problem" contain a gift, but the person bearing it is a gift to us as well. Although the foregoing philosophy may seem to be presented as the "best" way to approach therapy, it is simply offered as a sharing of my own experience. It is through others' sharing that I am continually inspired to expand my vision and awareness.

Dynamics vary in different supervision groups, but I have found certain attitudes contribute to maximize the group experience. The first is one of cooperation. Often cooperation is seen as deferring to the group leader or going along with the group, but it is an active process that involves taking responsibility for being on time, allowing others their time for sharing, contributing relevant feedback and taking charge when necessary to keep the group on course.

Secondly, all group members are valued for their contributions of presenting problems, offering insight, information and support.

The ability to really listen is appreciated by all group members. Many supervisors assume that the group really only wants to hear what they have to say about a presenting case and do not work to equalize the power in the group by asking others to participate in feedback. I have found that by presenting my feedback last, others are more encouraged to speak.

Another attitude is one of engaging hearts as well as our heads. Often-times professionals do not want to go public (even amongst themselves) with their uncertainties or weaknesses for fear of criticism, judgement or worse yet, ridicule. They have bought into the myth of expertise by maintaining an image of competence and wisdom at all times. It is hard to admit that sometimes we may be like the Wizard of Oz, bumbling behind the scenes. Or like the Tin Man, the Scarecrow and Lion, we, too, are lacking in our higher mind, our heart and our courage. When we open to acknowledging that we ourselves have not fully developed nor integrated our body, heart and mind, we can allow and accept it in others with empathy and compassion. This acceptance results in an intimacy within the group. One method I have used to emphasize the heart/mind connection is from an American Indian tradition. When members give feedback, they are asked to hold the "talking stick" which reminds them to speak briefly, honestly and from their heart. It may appear trivial but my experience has been that the stick

has a real impact on the person holding it.

In terms of leadership, my own style is not only to embody the previously mentioned attitudes, but also to provide a format that will enhance the quality of life within the group. Though the first meeting follows a specific agenda, the structure changes as the group develops its own style. A typical first meeting agenda would be: introductions and what members want from the group, a short attunement, cases presented and feedback from the group, a short meditation to elicit another level of sharing, and lastly a teaching segment that provides both the theoretical and experiential facets of the technique. My preference is to work in four weekly meetings and taking a couple of weeks for space between so that there is a change of pace and new energy.

A therapy supervision group can serve as a support group of peers,

providing a broader perspective and inspiration. It is exciting to experience the synergy of a group of people who have made a commitment to learning and growing, all contributing to a vital enrichment both for ourselves and for those we serve.

Jacquelyn Holley recently moved to London from Los Angeles, where she was a psychotherapist in private practice for eleven years. She was also a psychology teacher at Antioch University, meditation teacher, business consultant, therapy trainer, and presenter for radio and television. Currently she is lecturing, giving workshops on Conscious Death and Integrating Spiritual Consciousness in Psychotherapy. She provides therapy supervision in London and is completing a book on The Art of Death and Dying. If interested in her work, please write to her at: 36 Belsize Grove, London NW3 or telephone: 722 4261.
