

time in co-counselling sessions after discharge for these activities as well as at other times.

- Richard Horobin and Rose Evison call this strategy **TARGET PRACTICE**. They define it as "exploring what it is like to be the person we want to be, using creative thinking and acting within a co-counselling session. They would include future roleplay activities along with the areas mentioned under John Heron.

Where this strategy is pursued within co-counselling sessions, it can provide vital links with changes people wish to make in their lives. The learning of alternative responses can start in sessions, under optimum conditions and is then easier to continue in the rest of life.

Finding Myself Through Co-Counselling

Anni Townend

Over the past two years I have been using the methods of Co-Counselling to increase my self-awareness. More and more I realise that I am in control of my own life; I am able to recognise my feelings and most importantly, own them.

For example, when someone tells me to "go away", I check myself from saying "you make me angry, you are hurting me when you tell me to "go away" and I say "I feel angry and hurt when you say "go away".

Sometimes I have no idea why I feel so upset when something happens and it is only either during or after a co-counselling session that I can understand the connections. I enjoy learning about where my feelings come from.

In the above example, I know, now, that "go away" is connected with 'going away' to school. Once I know why I feel so strongly about something and have freed myself from the past connections, I can deal with the present in a much more clear and creative way.

Sometimes co-counselling has been for me like a journey into the past where experiences which I had forgotten (because of the hurt or pain) have become clear to me. Using various techniques such as talking about an event in the present tense and breathing deep into my belly - allowing my feelings to flow - I have re-experienced feelings which at the time I suppressed.

For example, the hurt and anger I felt at going away to school stayed with me all the time I was at school. However, after the first two years I learnt **not** to cry and to put a brave face on - in other words I was encouraged to hide (suppress) my true feelings.

In co-counselling I have re-experienced these feelings and I know that it is okay for me to be ten years old and to cry and be angry. After any co-counselling session I always attention-switch and appreciate myself as I am now; I am not ten years old any more, I am twenty-four, a strong and powerful woman.

I see these experiences as healing and I think one of the most radical aspects of co-counselling is that it is about healing yourself. I do not need someone else to tell me who I am and I can find out for myself.

When I was introduced to co-counselling I was looking for myself. I had lost myself in a relationship trying to help the other person from his nervous breakdown. When I ended the relationship I realised that I had blocked out a lot of my own feelings and that it was time for me to look after and to find myself. Starting to co-counsel was the beginning of my growing love and care for myself. Healing myself of past and present hurts enables me to be a more creative and alive woman.

Now, I have an ongoing co-counselling relationship with a woman I am not involved with day to day. We meet each week and I use my time to either work on something that I have noticed and put on one side during the week, or to work on whatever is on top.

Knowing that I am in control of my feelings is liberating, knowing that I can put on one side bad feelings and enjoy myself is powerful.

Six months ago a friend asked me to lead a 'women's celebration sexuality workshop' locally. Since then I have been leading and co-leading co-counselling workshops for women and men, and women only. I am learning a lot about myself and my creative ability to share with others skills that I find useful.