

Peer Counseling Basics

Level 1 TAKE-HOME USER GUIDE

Written by Rythea Lee and Patrick Crowley

Edited by Dana Wilde

The essential practice of this version of Peer Counseling is that **it's a peer support structure**. People meet regularly to give each other peer to peer counseling, in turn playing the role of counselor and client with equal amounts of time allocated to each.

The basic premise for Peer Counseling (based on Harvey Jackins work with Re-evaluation Counseling) is that ***all people are good; and that all people get hurt in some way as children and accumulate unresolved distress.***

Distress, when unresolved, builds-up in the nervous system and eventually creates a backup of feelings, lack of creativity in general, and the inability to think clearly in the present moment. Many people are functioning from old distress (i.e. unresolved pain) and yet do not realize it, and so they get stuck.

Peer Counseling offers the chance to release old distress from the source, what we call "working early" (having feelings from the past) so that the present moment can be revealed. So if you cry, shake, or rage about your Father leaving the family when you were young, it helps clear-up any abandonment issues you have in your present life.

This practice has proven to work for many, many people.

It's **the release of old feelings** that is the crucial practice AND doing it in the presence of someone who holds a space of positive regard and encouragement of your emotions...

TERMS

“Listening”

Listening without an agenda -- without trying to get the other person to feel or do anything different -- is a powerful tool in Peer Counseling. It is the base of support that all other tools come from. If you can listen and be open, people almost immediately feel safe to share.

“Releasing Distress”

There are many ways that people release distress (pain). First let's name some of the basic feelings people have: MAD SAD SCARED ASHAMED HAPPY

Obviously, there are lots of other feelings too, but often they can be traced back to one of these 5 main feelings. The ways that people release these feelings are: **-Crying -Raging -Sweating -Shaking -Yawning -Laughing -Burping -Insightful Sharing**

*It's your job as the counselor to help your partner stay with their feelings and release them. It's very common for most people to start TALKING and therefore get away from their feelings, so counselors can lovingly direct partners **back into the emotion.***

“Working Early”

Working early is helping your partner to focus on an old event or experience that the present situation is reminding them of. Even if the client says, “I feel scared” the counselor can ask, “**When is the earliest time you remember feeling this way?**” or “**What does this remind you of?**” Then they support clients to talk and feel about an old situation. ***Many clients will try to distract their counselors from working early as a natural way to avoid painful old emotions. As counselors get more experienced, they get more adept at lovingly encouraging clients to stay with the old experience. We find that as the client works early, present time situations clear up or are re-evaluated much more easily.*

“Rehearsing Distress”

People often rehearse distress in their regular lives. They replay hurts from childhood either by feeling the same feelings from childhood over and over again (for example: feeling left out, feeling misunderstood, feeling incompetent, etc) or they replay hurts by unconsciously creating events that look the same as childhood (partnering with an addict, working for a boss who is mean, befriending people who are distant, etc). In this way, people rehearse the distress from the past. People can also “rehearse distress” in their sessions by talking about something that is very upsetting BUT NOT actually having/releasing the upset feelings about it as they talk about it. **It's important as the counselor to start to be able to recognize this.** *There's a world of difference between rehearsing distress (replaying hurts) --VS-- actually discharging feelings **about the hurts**, which is what helps people heal and is what you're going for in sessions. The difference becomes more clear and familiar the more you practice.*

“Free Attention”

Free Attention is what happens when you have released a bunch of distress and now you are just in the moment, able to enjoy, express, and have awareness of now... **It's the benefit of doing this practice** and it's good to notice when you feel this way, and what it actually feels like to have open, free attention for others and for life in general!

BASIC ELEMENTS of a session:

beginners can benefit from sessions where you just focus on ONE of these. With practice, you learn to naturally mix & match any or all of these elements in a session, as needed.

JUST GOOD LISTENING

Counselor → Focus on listening and seeing the goodness in your client. Just be interested and notice your impulses to fix, help, give advice, feel responsible for, etc -- but don't actually DO any of that. Just listen with love.

Client → Talk about something, anything, and notice that your counselor is really listening to you. Allow yourself to be listened to, and notice how that feels as you go. Feel free to talk about the exercise/session itself, and if it's challenging or exciting... but you can share about anything at all. You might even notice an emotion coming up too.

LISTENING + EMOTIONS

Counselor → The prompts you offer your client are "**What are you feeling right now?**" or "**Why don't you stay with that feeling.**" Hold a positive space of support and attention. Notice that no matter how much distress the person is releasing (or not releasing), you can still see the goodness and intactness of who they are. In other words: **The distress is not who they are.**

Client → Start by **noticing and naming** what you are feeling (mad, sad, scared, happy, etc) and see if you can release some of this feeling by staying with it. You can even **practice exaggerating** a feeling and going for the release like hitting pillow to release anger, or throwing a tantrum, or shaking with fear while your partner holds you. *REMEMBER: You are in charge, and you can ask for anything you need. You can ask to be held, to push on your counselor's hands if you are mad, to curl up and be sad, whatever you need to help you feel your feelings. You can also talk about whatever you want to talk about while noticing your feelings at the same time. Don't think about it too much just go for releasing emotions. Your counselor will help you.*

WORKING EARLY

Counselor → Assist your client in getting to old material. Whatever they bring up, acknowledge fully and then ask them either "**What does this remind you of?**" or "**When is the first time you remember feeling this way?**" Then help them stay with their feelings while they talk about the old incident or experience.

Client → Bring up a charged current issue. Then work early on it and notice what feelings that brings up for you. See if you can stay with the feelings that are old.

OFFERING TOUCH

As a counselor, it's often very helpful to create closeness by holding your client's hand while counseling them, or touching their knee while they are sharing. *It is VERY IMPORTANT to ask if this is OK, with a question such as "Do you want to hold my hand?" or "Would it feel supportive if I touched your knee while you shared?"* or "Would you like to be held?" Often, even if people seem like they want to isolate or pull back, they really want the offering and benefit from it in many ways. Some clients will easily ask for supportive touch, while others are more hesitant, so get used to OFFERING if you sense they might benefit from some form of touch.

HOLDINGS

Counselor → Get in a very comfortable position where you can stay for a while to support your partner. When you are holding your partner, try to imagine opening-up the top of your head (your 7th chakra) and inviting in Spirit / Nature / Wisdom / Love / Guidance -- or whatever “higher power” or “something bigger” makes sense to you -- to come in through that opening in your head, and help you to bring love to your client. Imagine surrounding your client in love and compassion. Gently remind them to imagine holding the little girl or little boy inside of them (i.e. the part of them that’s having feelings and/or needing comfort).

Client → Allow yourself to get in a position that feels like you can be completely held, wrapped up, lovingly contained. While you are being held, imagine you are also holding the child within you, the little girl or boy inside who needs comfort and safety. Allow the love coming in from your partner to help you learn more about loving yourself -- all aspects. See if you can allow some of the session time to be just receiving the holding, without talking.

If being held is challenging for you, then try asking your counselor to >>just put his or her arm around you >>just sit next to you for you to lean on >>just hold your hand **Respect your own needs around this.**

CONTRADICTIONS

Giving your client a “contradiction” is a way of using a particular statement in response to their distress that helps them find MORE access to (and discharge of) their underlying FEELINGS. For example, if someone says, “I just feel so bad about myself” you might contradict them by saying “You are so lovable” OR by having *them* say “I’m so lovable,” and see if that makes them laugh or shake or cry. Maybe repeat it several times. Or if someone is showing a pattern of feeling scared to get close, you might say a contradiction like “Let’s get a lot closer” which might make them get angry and discharge anger and say “No, get away from me” and then you can work on their early (childhood) material around getting close. Alternately, they might say “Yes, let’s get closer” and allow you to hold their hand or look in their eyes. This could then make them feel happy or sad or any number of feelings.

Contradictions are tricky and creative! Some people like them, some people don’t.

Sometimes you’ll get a good one, other times you won’t. Recently, a person was doing a session about her mother and she kept saying how “nice” her mother was and I had this inclination to say “Your mother is a bitch” (because I could feel her underlying anger). So I tried it, and it made the client laugh and laugh so hard until she was crying, and THEN she ended up punching pillows calling her Mother a bitch. It was a risk, but it worked.

IF THE CLIENT IS DISCHARGING A FEELING, DON’T INTERRUPT THEM. JUST LISTEN AND SUPPORT AND DON’T ADD ANYTHING IN. This could mean someone could just yawn for 10 minutes without stopping -- and that’s great! Or someone could cry for a long time, or shake but as long as they are discharging feelings, don’t say anything more.