

EMPATHY

(Some notes based on 'The Skilled helper' by Gerard Egan)

1. The fruit of attending, observing and listening lies in the way the helper responds.
2. Empathy is a responding skill.
3. "Empathy, as a form of human communication, involves both listening and understanding and communicating understanding to the client. Empathy that remains locked up in the helper contributes little to the helping process." (Egan)
4. Empathy is a way of being, but it is also a communication skill.
5. A helper cannot communicate an understanding of a client's world without getting in contact with that world. Much discussion of empathy centres on what kind of attending, observing and listening is needed to develop an understanding of someone's world.
6. Empathy has been defined as:
"Entering the private, perceptual world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it. It involves being sensitive, moment by moment, to the changing, felt meanings which flow in this other person, to the fear, or rage, or tenderness, or confusion, or whatever (s)he is experiencing. It means temporarily living in the other's life, moving about in it delicately without making judgements"
(Rogers)
7. The ability to enter another's world exacts a price of helpers. They must put themselves and their concerns aside as they listen to and are with their clients.
8. A person's empathic understanding of another needs to be communicated, but not necessarily in words.
9. Empathic understanding of another person admits of degrees. If the understanding is valid, but superficial, one might miss the central issues of a person's life.
10. Helpers need both depth of human contact and understanding and the ability to communicate the understanding in verbal and non-verbal ways.