



Cultures at Co-Counselling Events

Submitted by John Talbut on 9 May 2011 - 10:14pm

Co-counselling events are more than places where I can do "work" on myself. They are also occasions where I meet good friends and where I can experience for a while living in a culture of care and acceptance that is so different from the world I am normally surrounded by.

The events may not be at all cosy and indeed much of their value stems from this. Because the atmosphere is so counter cultural, and because co-counsellors are not perfect (hooray!) there are lots of opportunities for restimulation. People get angry, they feel sad they get frightened (they "feel unsafe") - as well as feeling ecstasy or loving. But what better place could there be to be restimulated? The chances are (not guaranteed, though) that there will be good quality support to hand. And then there are workshop sessions and co-counselling sessions available to work on what is coming up.

There are three different types of situation at workshops and they each have a different "culture":

1. Co-counselling sessions
2. Workshop sessions
3. The rest of the event (socialising, mealtimes etc.)

Co-counselling sessions

The rules for co-counselling sessions are those that we all know. These rules, though, only apply automatically to co-counselling sessions. In other situations the rules differ and it is easy to get in a mess by making assumptions. If I assume, for instance, that I am going to get non judgemental attention at the dinner table I might say something that I feel sensitive about only to have someone give me their opinion about it.

Workshop sessions

In workshop sessions it is up to the facilitators or the participants to be clear about what the culture is, or to accept responsibility if they are not clear. These are some possibilities:

- A co-counselling workshop: this is effectively a co-counselling session using the rules for a co-counselling session apart, possibly, for an opening circle to agree on the structure for the workshop. Time is shared equally. Each person may take time to work in the whole group for some or all of the workshop or for some of the time work may be in small groups or pairs. There may be a topic for the workshop but, of course, the client is in charge and can work on

whatever they want.

- Use **training group ground rules**. These are similar to the rules used on co-counselling fundamentals courses but they are also used in non co-counselling personal development training. Facilitators may suggest, or the participants may agree on, variations to these suggested rules. It will often be desirable to agree on confidentiality boundaries.
- **Special cultures**: activities such as “hear and now” sessions or facilitated sessions using non co-counselling approaches have rules of their own. Even non-competitive games sessions need some sort of culture setting for example it is all right not to participate in a game or to do so in ways that allow for any physical limitations.

Often it seems that the culture is not spelled out and somehow it does not seem to be much of a problem. Maybe this is because we tend to assume the training group culture that was used on our fundamentals. However, this can go wrong. For instance in a peer workshop session the atmosphere could be very messy and challenging. Individual participants would need to take responsibility for themselves to quite a different degree from on their fundamentals.

In general participants should remember that if they do not know what the culture is then they do not know what the culture is, in other words they should not make any assumptions.

Social time

Unless something has been explicitly agreed to the contrary the assumption is that there are no rules outside of co-counselling and workshop sessions.

There are sometimes agreements on issues like smoking and noise at night. There might also be agreements about other issues such as alcohol, food or the presence of non-co-counsellors such as children, staff or other groups using a venue, these would normally be proposed by organisers in the publicity for the event.

People need to be aware of what they want and take responsibility for doing something about it. If, for instance, anyone wants to say something to someone in confidence then they need to seek that person's agreement first. On the other hand anybody can ask for anything. Mud wrestling, jam roly-poly pudding, a workshop at 2 a.m.

What it adds up to is a marvellous opportunity to experiment with being together in an ordinary human way with other co-counsellors. It is usually a very good experience, and it can throw up some powerful stuff to work on!

Topics

CoCoInfo Tags:

Literature tag: [Organising co-counselling events](#) > [Workshop facilitation and organisation](#)

