



## On not excluding people

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Submitted by John Talbut on 23 November 2011 - 10:05am

I do not believe that we have any agreement in CCI about any procedures or how we relate to each other outside of sessions apart from being a peer organisation. However, what we do seem to get from co-counselling is that we learn successful ways of being together, particularly, I think, loving ways. Bearing in mind, as I put it, that:

“to love someone is to accept them as they are and to support them to be more of what they would, in enlightenment, choose to be”.

We get better at doing this by working on our own patterns that get in the way.

So what can be done about someone who may be overstepping some boundary in a group?

First of all we need to acknowledge the value of a person in a group that people feel irritated by in providing an opportunity for learning. There is a story told about Gurdjieff in France, one version of which goes like this. Living in his community were many very loving people, but there was one man in the community who was very rude. He didn't do his share of the work. People found themselves very annoyed with his presence. He knew that he wasn't liked and eventually, he got up and left. Gurdjieff went after him and asked him to please come back. He said no. Gurdjieff said “I will pay you to come back.” So the man agreed. The people in the community were aghast. “How could you ask him to come back?” Gurdjieff replied, “He is the yeast for the bread. Without him, how are you going to learn compassion?”

If I feel upset about how someone else behaves, how much of that is my distress? What is this person helping me to learn about me? Even if this person's behaviour may be a direct factor in how I am feeling, e.g. they are being aggressive towards me, crossing my boundaries, and I am feeling angry, is what I am feeling in proportion to what they are doing? Can I respond in an effective, emotionally competent way?

So, I think, first and most important is to use co-counselling to work on what this brings up. Also, to what extent do members of the group feel powerless? How did they learn this? There is probably work to do on internalised oppression.

There are also all the usual patterns that people run in groups to be aware of – rescuing, scapegoating, witch hunting, power struggles etc.

Of course, there is a lifetime's work in these issues, we are not going to be able to get rid of all our

patterns before we deal with present time situations. However, it helps at least to acknowledge that our thoughts and feelings are probably contaminated by past distress. The more open we can be about our own patterns the better.

So, while we get on with doing our own work how do we deal with the current situation? Assertiveness is, put simply, a set of behaviours for communicating to others that have been found by many people over many years to work well. They are, for example, good for handling aggressive behaviour in others.

If the group is not clear about how the situation might be handled assertively then here is an opportunity to learn. If there are people with relevant experience in the group, like teachers of co-counselling who need to be able to lovingly and supportively set and hold clear boundaries, this should help.

The first thing about being assertive is to be clear. What is the boundary? Is it being clearly stated?

Next is to be consistent. My boundaries are my responsibility and I need to prevent them being crossed, consistently. It does not work to let someone get away with crossing your boundaries and then suddenly turning on them. They need to be stopped every time before they get the slightest bit across.

Then there is what I call going up the ladder of assertiveness. What are the things that you can do if someone attempts to cross your boundaries? Repetition of your assertive statement is one of the first things: "I require that you do not co-counsel on zombies when I am your counsellor". Repeating it with anger may come next. Ending a session is another possibility (has everyone practised doing this?).

Respecting confidentiality is important but it should not be applied in a way that prevents issues being addressed. "I have a lot of distress about zombies and I do not want anyone to counsel on them with me" is about me and not about someone else's material. Also, if someone has been told by their counsellor that their material is too restimulating for the counsellor then, if they persist in working on it, I would suggest that the co-counselling contract has been broken from that point and the confidentiality rule does not apply to that material.

There are, then, opportunities to discuss what other steps could be taken to hold the boundary.

Expelling the person from the group should only happen, I think, if all other steps have failed to hold the boundary. In my experience such steps are rarely, if ever, necessary. Being clear, firm and consistent generally works.

Topics

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