



1. Background

What Is Co-Counselling?

What is co-counselling?

It helps me fulfil my **potential as a human being**

Its about

- doing it **for myself and to myself**
but not by myself - I get help from others
- understanding my **emotions** and by doing so,
 1. **remove** the effects of past hurts
 2. **deal** effectively with current hurts
 3. **set** realistic future goals

I can then

- **get my light out from under** the bushel
- **live** the whole of my life with all of my ability
- **enjoy** life more and more

Co-counselling is a self-help peer-support counselling system. The methods are taught at a Fundamentals skills training course of about 40 hours. The word co-counselling is applied when two people, who have attended such a course, come together and agree to have a reciprocal session of counselling. It is basically a way of helping ourselves without recourse to experts, and an alternative and effective method of dealing with stress. An important element in the training is the 'education' given for dealing with our emotions, a much ignored part of ourselves. As we grow up we are taught to keep our emotions down and under control; we also learn that it is desirable to have academic prowess, that it is healthy to take exercise and to eat a balanced diet. Nowhere are we taught to deal with our emotions: we are 'stuck' with them so to speak and at their mercy. These vital determinates of how we behave and approach our daily living are ignored. Co-counselling addresses these areas of neglect - recognising 'emotional education' together with methods of dealing with our needs, as important adjuncts to success in living our lives to the full.

The Advantages

Essentially, the first advantage that co-counselling offers to anyone who has the desire to learn the skills, is free therapy for life. Thus, after the initial training, there is a saving in financial terms, as

the cost of therapy can prove to be quite expensive over a period of time.

Secondly, a co-counsellor has many partners to choose from. This ensures that those undergoing any stressful period can readily arrange a session without having to fit in with a therapist's appointment system.

Thirdly, but seen by many co-counsellors as the most important difference to other forms of counselling and psychotherapy, that the client is not dependent on a particular counsellor for his or her own development.

The client, at the outset in co-counselling, states 'how' a session is to run and stays in control of this throughout. In effect there is no dependence/responsibility given to the counsellor for the client to have a 'good' session. The client is thus empowered.

Equality

The point I wish to stress here is that through training the participant learns the skills to be both client and counsellor. When one of the pair has been client and had a timed session whilst the other partner has been the counsellor, there is a switch over of these roles for an equivalent amount of time. There is thus an equality in the sharing of both roles and the taking of self-responsibility. Both parties also take equal care of each other in a mutually supporting way, and this precludes any dependence emerging.

When is it not Co-counselling?

The word co-counselling is inappropriate when only one of the pair is 'helping' another to work through a problem; that is a counselling session given by one person (the counsellor) to another person (the client), and there is no switch over in these roles. It is also not co-counselling when two people come together either regularly or irregularly to discuss and talk through their problems with each other. This is not to imply that these methods are inappropriate in sorting out issues it is only inappropriate to use the word co-counselling.

How does Co-counselling work?

Techniques taught on a fundamentals course in co-counselling teach the participant acting as counsellor, to enable and facilitate the client in a powerful atmosphere of care, support and security. This underlines the basic philosophy of the technique which is that in order to change, a person needs to find a safe environment where s/he can let go of all the feelings usually denied expression in our society. (Heron 1977)

At the end of the training course, as a co-counselling counsellor you are in the position to deal effectively and safely with whatever your client chooses to bring to his or her session. As a client, you direct what and how you wish to proceed, determining your own pace. It is an on-going process that enables co-counsellors to explore and become proficient in dealing with their own distress. There is no rule as to how often a co-counsellor has sessions - that is left to each

individual.

Extra Rewards

One of the rewarding spin-offs is that once a co-counsellor has spent a fair amount of time working on his or her own issues, helping others who are not co-counsellors becomes easier. The learned and familiar skills enable an experienced co-counsellor to counsel in the accepted sense of the word in any situation that humans find themselves in distress over. Learning how to enable distress discharge in others without becoming emotionally involved oneself, is also an important element that is taught on the Fundamentals course, especially for those engaged in the 'helping' professions.

Another spin-off is that in everyday interactions co-counsellors find they become increasingly aware of their own and others' speech and body patterns. This can aid in leading to greater clarity of interaction and allows problem solving and decision making processes to develop in a more meaningful way for all parties concerned.

The basic premise then is that each of us has a potential which goes far beyond that which we normally realise. It is possible to learn for ourselves how to become more responsive, creative and flexible, autonomous and co-operative human beings and how to deal with our own distress in our own way with some help from others.

Heron (1977) states that whilst our society and culture has given degrees of help to us, this has been limited and in many ways restricting. (See also Non-cathartic Society). The simple techniques learned in co-counselling (which are natural to us) are available for us each to use for helping ourselves and others. As adults we each need the support of others to flourish in an interdependent way which can then enable changing conditions in our society, our community, our circle of friends and workmates. Each of us can learn to grow and develop in his/her own most meaningful way, and create for ourselves an increasingly distress free environment.

Co-counselling is for everyone who is interested in their own personal development. You do not necessarily have to be in a distressed state in order to undertake the training or to benefit. People in all walks of life, employed, unemployed, are already finding co-counselling a useful tool with which to enhance their life skills and find fulfilment. As a co-counsellor you can join the growing numbers and be accepted nationally and internationally wherever co-counselling communities exist.

A list of contact persons is available from your co-counselling teacher.

N.B. Co-counselling is not for those too heavily distressed to give attention to another human being, nor is it for those too heavily reliant on anti-depressants, tranquillisers etc., or who are unable in the conventional way to conduct their occupational and personal life in a sufficiently normal and balanced way by the prevailing 'norms' of society.

History of Co-counselling

Extracts from Heron's Articles 1980

Co-counselling is a set of skills which are used in a reciprocal peer counselling setting. They were originally developed in the USA in the late 60's by Harvey Jackins who called it 'Re-evaluation Counselling'. Under his auspice it spread throughout the USA and to Europe, and networks of co-counsellors were organised. In the early 60's and 70's communities were simply networks of people who co-counselled in their own homes regularly and who met from time to time for shorter or longer workshops. Harvey then developed guidelines and the notion of a Key Reference Person. This person, with a small committee, advised on all substantial matters of Theory and Policy for Jackins, the International Reference Person. This Organisation became theoretically rigid and internally authoritarian.

Co-counselling International (CCI) is an alternative approach developed by John Heron who became opposed to the authoritarian style which he believed violated the fundamental concepts of equality advocated in co-counselling. CCI operates on the peer group principle with no hierarchical structure. Communities are free to organise themselves and train their own teachers. Further information is given under CCI Communities. In order to understand the rationale of the techniques offered in co-counselling, it is necessary to understand the concepts behind these techniques. Acceptance of these concepts is thus a prerequisite to trusting and trying out the techniques. The following section is devoted to presenting co-counselling theory as far as it goes, prior to taking the reader through the individual techniques.
