

## Reflection Paper: Self-Disclosure

*“Helper self-disclosure occurs when the helper relates facts about himself or herself. Self-disclosure is not initiated to develop a social relationship or to allow the helper to ventilate feelings. As a strategy in helping, it is high-risk/high-gain. It has great potential, yet it must be used with care.” (Text, p. 61).*

Self-disclosure is a communication tool in which one person shares information about himself or herself to another. It is one technique used by therapists to build a relationship with a client. Self-disclosure has great therapeutic potential while it could be a high risk matter, if employed improperly. It could be used to unburden the therapist of some concerns and does the client no harm (text, p. 62), which I found interesting. However, this becomes an ethical issue regardless of zero harm inflicted on the client, because it pertains to whether the benefits outweigh the burdens.

I agree with this notion because there is no correct amount of what is an appropriate self-disclosure. Therapists are to evaluate the situation and decide how much of it to integrate into one's session. e.g. self-disclosure can be evaluated against whether it can help increase trust in the relationship or instead can increase distrust. Otherwise, self-disclosure may leave the client questioning the therapist's motives. To aid in making a decision, one can also ask whether self-disclosure can reduce the authoritative power between the therapist and client, or instead it can make the client too comfortable, which may jeopardize the professional relationship. In other words, I believe in order to undertake therapeutic intervention to benefit the client, therapists should identify where interests of the client always predominate, taking into account respect and dignity of the person.

In this paper, self-disclosure is assumed to help meet the needs of the client and not the therapist i.e. the therapist knows the client's needs and a better grasp of their reality. However, I believe it is important to consider the therapist's privacy and his/her comfort with sharing some personal information regardless of how the condition of the client is evaluated. Therapists are not obliged to disclose anything to complement a client's mindset. He/she could be empathic toward the client's attempts to pull them into answering some questions but could remain nonporous; it is the therapist's choice whether to disclose or not.

Moreover, some of the questions that occur to me as a result of reflecting on this so far is ***how should the therapist respond to client's questions?*** I believe if the therapist decides to self-disclose then he/she should be clear and brief e.g. if a client is angry over their divorce, then the therapist may say something along the same line that they, too, have survived a divorce and have an understanding of the client's situation. If the therapist chooses not to disclose, it may be prudent to draw firm boundaries especially in the beginning of the relationship.

Another question to pose is *What if the client asks because he/she wants to know whether the therapist is qualified to help them or not?* In this case, I believe the therapist can have the opportunity to address their concern by providing their education and qualifications. The therapist should be able to understand the client's motives though and if the question is not related to their ability to help them then this may be out of professional boundaries.

In fact, I can relate very much to this concept because I have been in similar situations where I had the choice to disclose or not to disclose information about myself. After evaluating the other person's mind state and the current setting, knowing when and when not to disclose becomes intuitive to me. For example, one year ago, I had to go on a trip in the wild to receive some first aid training with new people. We went over some helper-patient scenarios and in each we were open to engage in small conversations with the injured person to comfort them. Some focused on the injured person's story and some like myself was able to laugh and relate to their situation by mentioning something like "yeah, I was bitten by a dog one time and I can understand your pain". I was able to not disclose too; yet the impact on the patient was positive as they felt it was an empathetic step. On another occasion, I had a classmate who I did not know much about and neither did he know much about me. We went to lunch for the first time and he revealed how depressed he was and how he had chronic headaches for long periods of time. I could not relate much and preferred not to disclose anything to him at the time. Instead, I listened and suggested some alternatives out of his trouble which made him uncomfortable and changed the subject. Here, I believe I could have just lied and disclosed a similar situation to comfort the man instead of providing advice or even better showed some empathy.

My personal theory of helping suggests that the main goals of helping a client is to help them confront life obstacles and meet their goals. I am a very good listener and empathetic and this concept connects very well with my set of ideas because self-disclosure is a helping skill too. A little bit of disclosure - although small - can leave huge change on the client. This change was perhaps prevented due to the client's rules of survival/defense or client's culture views that they were brought up in e.g. the things we learn in schools or our home upbringing. Therefore, with my personal theory of helping and the concept of self-disclosure I can address these issues that may arise.

Eventually, knowing that self-disclosure can be a very useful skill, I choose to make wise decisions considering the client and the effect on them. This is because disclosure may foster or impair the relationship. If an unforeseen opportunity arises such as if the client requests disclosure or a prompt answer by the doorway, I should be able to reflect on the matter before giving away any answer. e.g. delaying and saying "That sounds like something we can discuss in our next session". Also, I believe it is beneficial for me as a helper to document any self-disclosure for future reference and to remind oneself to reflect on the appropriateness of a particular disclosure. The reason of documenting here is because I believe things can get a bit unorganized, if the therapist sees an overwhelmingly number of clients.