Suggested assignment: Before completing the exercises, read chapter 16 (“Immediacy”) in Helping Skills. Pay particular attention to the five steps on how to use immediacy.

Definition: Immediacy refers to the helper’s disclosing immediate feelings about her- or himself in relation to the client or about the therapeutic situation.

Intentions: To promote insight, to deal with issues that might disrupt the helping process or relationship, to challenge, to identify maladaptive behaviors in interpersonal situations, and to identify and intensify feelings

Helpful hints:
- Immediacy is an advanced and demanding skill, so before using it with a client, review the situation with a supervisor to ensure that your intentions are appropriate and that your timing is right.
- Use your inner reactions (e.g., how you are “feeling hooked”) to the client as a guide. But be sure to “step back” from these reactions to understand the situation more objectively (e.g., What defensive need might the client’s behavior be serving? What, if anything, might you be doing or failing to do that contributes to the situation?).
- Use “I” statements to express and take responsibility for your feelings. Be gentle and tentative (but not apologetic) in using immediacy.
- Observe the client’s verbal and nonverbal reactions to your intervention. Leave enough time to thoroughly discuss the effect of immediacy on your client.
- Follow immediacy interventions with open questions, restatements, and reflection of feelings.

Difficulties helpers may experience:
- Avoiding immediacy because of fears of intruding, making the client angry, or making conflict overt; fearing they won’t have the skills to handle such situations constructively
- Feeling self-critical for having negative emotions and feeling unable to trust their feelings as a guide
- Neglecting to consider whether their personal issues may be contributing to the feelings they are having with a client
- Using immediacy prematurely, before a solid helping relationship has been established
- Failing to use empathy and care in wording their immediacy intervention

For class discussion: Discuss the idea that immediacy can be an enactment of a deep level of empathy.

Practice Exercises for Immediacy

1. CLIENT: I don’t get very involved with people. I pretty much keep to myself. I read a lot. That’s the way my family was too—everybody was kind of in their own corner doing their own thing. And that’s fine with me.
   
   Helper response:

2. CLIENT: I am really angry with you for being so late all the time. I thought I told you about how crunched my schedule is. And it doesn’t help that you say we can go overtime, because I have to get back to the office—my boss doesn’t like it that I’m away even this long. But this hour was the only hour that you said you had.
   
   Helper response:

3. CLIENT: I don’t feel real or genuine most of the time. I don’t even know how I feel. I guess I feel kind of empty and at a loss about what to do or say. What do you think is going on with me? You always seem to know more about me than I do about myself.
   
   Helper response:

4. CLIENT: I think I’m really getting a lot better. You’ve really just been the best helper that I could ever have had. I just think you’re terrific. I really wish that you could keep on seeing me because I can’t stand the idea of starting over with someone else.
   
   Helper response: