SELF-DISCLOSURE OF INSIGHT
INSIGHT STAGE

Suggested assignment: Before completing the exercises, read chapter 15 (“Self-Disclosure of Insight”) in Helping Skills.

Definition: Self-disclosure refers to the helper’s presentation of a personal experience (not in the immediate helping relationship) in which he or she gained some insight.

Intentions: To promote insight, to deal with resistance, to challenge (note that self-disclosure is also used for purposes other than insight and in other stages of the helping process. For example, in the exploration stage, helpers can use self-disclosure to reflect feelings. In the action stage, helpers can use self-disclosure to model and make suggestions for change.)

Helpful hints:

• Think carefully about whose needs the self-disclosure will meet. Although it is natural at times to want to self-reveal, do so only when it will help the client gain insight into her or his own issues.

• Keep self-disclosures brief and turn the focus back to the client as soon as possible.

• Follow self-disclosures with open questions about the client’s reactions and with a reflection of feelings, when appropriate.

• Use self-disclosures infrequently.

Difficulties helpers may experience:

• Projecting their own feelings and reactions onto the client

• Using self-disclosures to gratify their own needs to seem competent or successful

• Focusing more on the details of their experience than on the insight gained from it

• Disclosing too frequently or disclosing more than the client is comfortable with

• Trying to make their disclosures perfect

For class discussion: Discuss the notion that self-disclosure reduces the power imbalance between helpers and clients. What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a power imbalance in a helping relationship?

Practice Exercises for Self-Disclosure

1. CLIENT: My parents are arguing all the time. I feel so badly for my little sister, who is still at home with them. She begs me to come home on the weekends, but I really want to stay here with my friends. I never get anything done when I go home, and I hate being around when my parents argue. I feel upset about it, but I don’t understand why I would be so upset.

   Helper response:

2. CLIENT: All of my friends go to the bars. I don’t have an ID, and I really don’t like borrowing someone else’s license. I always worry that the bouncer is going to take it away from me. Plus, I am over hanging
out in crowded bars. You never meet anyone good, and it can be so boring if you’re not drunk. But there is
nothing else to do around here. I don’t want to sit around at home, but I really don’t want to be shoved
around in some stupid bar. I don’t understand why I get so anxious about this issue, though.

Helper response:

3. CLIENT: I don’t know what is going on with my boyfriend. We used to be so close; we’ve even talked
about getting married. But lately, he is really short with me on the phone and he never wants to come here
for the weekend. We have a long-distance relationship because he doesn’t go to college. I am afraid that he
met someone else and he doesn’t want to tell me. He insists that he still loves me, but I don’t believe him. I
feel so pathetic because I’m always crying when we talk. I wouldn’t be surprised if he doesn’t want to be
with me anymore. I don’t understand why I cry so much about him—I used to be so independent.

Helper response:

4. CLIENT: I have wanted to ask this girl out for months. She finally talked to me in the elevator. She seemed
interested, but I just froze up. It was like I could not think of anything to say. God, I felt so stupid. I’m sure
she thinks that I am such a loser. Why do I mess everything up? It was the perfect opportunity to impress
her, and I acted like an idiot. I might as well forget ever going out with her. I wonder why I do things like
that?

Helper response: