Reflection of Feelings
Exploration Stage

Suggested assignment: Before completing the exercises, read chapter 9 (“Reflection of Feelings”) in Helping Skills. Review the “Emotion Word Checklist.”

Definition: A reflection of feelings is a repeating or rephrasing of a client’s statements, including an explicit identification of the client’s feelings. The client may have stated the feelings or they may need to be inferred from the client’s nonverbal behavior, tone of voice, the context, or the content of a client’s message.

Intentions: To identify and intensify feelings, to encourage catharsis, to clarify, to instill hope, to promote self-control

Helpful hints:
- Try using the format “You feel _____ because _____” to capture the feeling word and the possible reasons for the feeling. Phrase this tentatively so that clients can reject or modify your reflection if it is not correct.
- Reflect present feelings rather than past feelings so that the client remains presently involved.
- Use an empathic tone, convey concern, and show that you are trying to understand.
- If you make an inaccurate reflection, rather than apologizing, ask the client to explain more about how she or he feels so that you can better understand.

Difficulties that helpers may experience:
- Having trouble separating their own feelings from the experience of the clients
- Deciding on which of several feelings the client is experiencing to reflect
- Stating client’s feelings too definitely (e.g., “you obviously feel angry”)
- Feeling uncomfortable when clients express intense feelings (e.g., when clients cry, helpers may want to “take away” their sadness and pain rather than accepting the feeling and being with the client in a difficult moment)

For class discussion: How do you choose which feeling to reflect if a client has communicated several different feelings?

Practice Exercises for Reflection of Feelings

1. CLIENT: I thought everything would be so much better when I came to college. But it hasn’t been. I’ve been really down. I stay in my room by myself all the time, and I can’t stop crying. I just, I don’t know, it’s hard to even describe how I feel. I don’t know.

   Helper response:

2. CLIENT: I’m here because the judge told me I had to come for counseling. I don’t think I have any problem, and I certainly don’t think you can help me. You’re so young. What could you possibly know about helping anyone like me?

   Helper response:

3. CLIENT: I just had a baby, and I should feel happy. I’ve wanted a baby for so long. But I don’t know, all of a sudden, I just don’t know who I am or what I want.

   Helper response:

4. CLIENT: I am so excited because I just had a date with this wonderful woman. She’s everything I have been looking for in a woman. She’s beautiful, smart, and kind.

   Helper response: