

## **WEB FORM E**

### **HELPING SKILLS SYSTEM**

**Introduction:** The Helping Skills System (HSS) includes verbal helping skills, which refer to what helpers say during sessions to help clients. One (and only one) skill is judged as occurring in every grammatical sentence (a unit that includes at least a subject and a verb) of the helper's speech (instructions for dividing speech into grammatical sentences can be found in Web Form F). Note that this judgment is a description of the presence or absence of the helping skill, but it is not an indication of the intensity or quality of the helping skill. In this appendix, I present each skill and its definition followed by examples. Web Form F presents guidelines for using the HSS in research.

- 1. Approval and Reassurance:** Provides emotional support, reassurance, encouragement, and reinforcement. It might indicate that the helper empathizes with or understands the client. It might suggest that what the client is feeling is normal or to be expected. It might imply sympathy or attempt to alleviate anxiety by minimizing the client's problems. It might imply approval of the client's behavior.

**Helper:** "I'm concerned about you."

**Helper:** "That's hard."

**Helper:** "I understand what you're going through."

**Helper:** "I can't believe he said that."

**Helper:** "I think you did the right thing."

**Helper:** "That's really good that you were able to speak up to him."

**Helper:** "You're right."

- 2. Closed Question:** Requests limited or specific information or data, usually a one- or two-word answer, a "yes" or "no," or a confirmation. Closed questions can be used to gain information, to ask a client to repeat, or to ask if the helper's intervention was accurate.

**Client:** "I went away for the weekend."

**Helper:** "Did you like it?"

**Client:** "My husband thinks I'm too fat."

**Helper:** "Do you think you're too fat?"

**Helper:** "What did you say?"

**Helper:** "Right?"

**Helper:** "Does this fit for you?"

3. **Open Question:** Asks the client to clarify or to explore thoughts or feelings. The helper does not ask for specific information and does not purposely limit the nature of the client's response to a "yes" or "no" or a one- or two-word response, even though the client may respond that way. Note that open questions can be phrased as directives as long as the intent is to facilitate clarification or exploration. Open question can be divided into four types:

- a. *Open question about thoughts (these ask the client to clarify or explore thoughts; includes asking for examples)*

**Helper:** "What would you like to talk about today?"

**Client:** "Everything is awful right now."

**Helper:** "What kind of hassles are you experiencing?"

**Client:** "I've had a backache for days."

**Helper:** "Tell me your thoughts about that."

**Client:** "I just keep waking up tense all the time and not feeling good about life."

**Helper:** "Tell me about the last time this happened."

- b. *Open question about feelings (these ask clients to clarify or explore feelings)*

**Client:** "I just can't seem to get my schoolwork done."

**Helper:** "I wonder how you're feeling about that."

**Client:** "My mother keeps yelling at me about everything."

**Helper:** "Tell me more about your feelings."

**Client:** "I get so angry at my boss."

**Helper:** "Tell me about the last time that happened."

**Client:** "I don't know how to respond when my boss criticizes me."

**Helper:** "What is a specific example of what he says, and how you respond?"

**Client:** "My sister got all the attention in the family."

**Helper:** "How does that make you feel?"

**Client:** "What should I talk about?"

**Helper:** "How are you feeling right now?"

- c. *Open questions for insight (these invite the client to think about deeper meanings for their thoughts, feelings, or behaviors)*

**Client:** "I just can't seem to talk to my boyfriend about our racial differences."

**Helper:** "What do you suppose is going on that makes it hard for you to talk with him?"

**Client:** "We've been married for 40 years, and it just seems that we don't have much to do with each other anymore."

**Helper:** "What is your understanding about your lack of connection?"

**Client:** “My boss makes me so angry, and I just don’t have time to deal with him now because I have to spend so much time taking care of my mother who’s dying.”

**Helper:** “What connection do you make between your anger at your boss and your mother dying?”

*d. Open questions for action (these are aimed at helping the client explore action)*

**Client:** “We’ve been married for 40 years, and it just seems that we don’t have much to do with each other anymore.”

**Helper:** “What kinds of things have you tried in the past to change this pattern?”

**Client:** “My boss makes me so angry, and I just don’t have time to deal with him now because I have to spend so much time taking care of my mother who’s dying.”

**Helper:** “What would you like to do to fix the situation with your boss?”

**Client:** “Our house just went into foreclosure, and I lost my job, and I have four kids to feed.”

**Helper:** “What resources have you discovered that might help you?”

- 4. Restatement:** A simple repeating or rephrasing of the content or meaning of the client’s statement(s) that typically contains fewer but similar words and is usually more concrete and clear than the client’s statement. The restatement may be phrased either tentatively or as a direct statement. The restatement may be a paraphrase of either immediately preceding material or material from earlier in session or treatment.

**Client:** “My father thinks I should earn my own money.”

**Helper:** “You’re saying your father doesn’t want to support you anymore.”

**Client:** “Since I got into trouble, no one will talk to me.”

**Helper:** “Everyone seems to be ignoring you.”

**Client:** “I’m finally getting my life in order. I’ve been feeling good most of the time. My job is getting easier.”

**Helper:** “Things are going well for you.”

**Client:** (talks for a long time about his reactions to his parents aging)

**Helper:** “Your parents are not as able to take care of themselves as they get older, and you’re wondering whether you should step in and start making some decisions for them.”

**Helper:** “Last session you talked about your problems with anger and you wondered where it came from.”

- 5. Reflection of Feelings:** A *repeating* or rephrasing of the client’s statements, including an explicit identification of the client’s feelings. The feelings may have been stated by the client (in either exactly the same words or in similar words) or the helper may infer the feelings from the client’s nonverbal behavior, the context, or the content of the client’s message. The reflection may be phrased either tentatively or as a statement.

**Client:** “I did better than I’ve done before.”

**Helper:** “You’re pleased with your performance.”

**Client:** “My best friend went out with my boyfriend.”

**Helper:** “You feel hurt that she did that?”

**Client:** “I don’t know if I could handle this problem by myself. It feels like it’s too much for me right now.”

**Helper:** “You feel uncertain of yourself and overwhelmed by this problem.”

6. **Challenge:** Points out *discrepancies*, contradictions, defenses, or irrational beliefs the client is unaware of, unable to deal with, or unwilling to change. Challenges can be said with either a tentative or confrontational tone.

**Client:** “I know Jannelle really likes me.”

**Helper:** “From what you’ve said, she seems to be hostile to you and maybe even jealous. That doesn’t sound to me like she likes you.”

**Client:** “I feel so worthless. Nothing’s going right. I’d be better off dropping out of school.”

**Helper:** “You did poorly on one test, so you want to drop out of school?”

**Client:** “I don’t have any problems. Everything in my life is going really well right now.”

**Helper:** “You say everything is going well, but you keep getting sick. I wonder if it’s difficult for you to look at your situation?”

**Client:** “If I don’t get into graduate school, I *couldn’t* stand it. It would mean the end of everything.”

**Helper:** “I doubt that you *couldn’t* stand it. I wonder how you might really react?”

7. **Interpretation:** Goes *beyond* what the client has overtly stated or recognized and gives a new meaning, reason, or explanation for behaviors, thoughts, or feelings so the client can see problems in a new way. Makes connections between seemingly isolated statements or events; points out themes or patterns in the client’s behavior or feelings; explicates defenses, resistances, or transferences; gives a new framework to behaviors, thoughts, feelings, or problems.

**Client:** “I’m doing badly in school. I just can’t seem to study. Another problem is that my husband and I have been arguing constantly.”

**Helper:** “Perhaps you’re unable to concentrate in school because you’re preoccupied with the problems with your husband.”

**Client:** “I can’t seem to get close to anyone.”

**Helper:** “Since your father died, you have had a hard time trusting anyone. Maybe you’re afraid that if you get close to someone, she or he will die.”

**Client:** “I have just been incredibly mean and nasty to everyone this week.”

**Helper:** “I wonder if you use your anger as a protection to keep you from getting too close to anyone.”

**Client:** “He never does anything around the house, just goes out drinking with the guys. I get stuck taking care of the kids and all the housework.”

**Helper:** “He seems to be saving you from any decision about what you are going to do with your life and your career.”

**8. Disclosure:** *Reveals* something personal about the helper's nonimmediate experiences or feelings. These statements typically start with an "I." However, not all helper statements that start with an "I" are self-disclosures (e.g., "I can understand that" or "I don't know" are not self-disclosures). There are four types of self-disclosures:

*a. Disclosure of feelings (a statement about a feeling that the helper had in a similar situation as the client)*

**Client:** "I just don't really know how I feel."

**Helper:** "When I have been in your situation, I felt angry when someone stood me up."

**Client:** "I've got to meet his mother tomorrow. I've never met any boyfriend's mother."

**Helper:** "If I were you, I would feel nervous about meeting his mother."

**Client:** "I get so anxious at parties that I just don't want to go to any."

**Helper:** "I have a hard time at parties, too. I never know what to say to strangers."

*b. Disclosure of insight (a statement about an experience in which the helper gained insight)*

**Client:** "I am stuck about why I have so much difficulty speaking in public."

**Helper:** "I have pondered that for myself and discovered that I am most anxious with public speaking when I am feeling down and unsure of myself in general, which makes me worry about what others think of me."

**Client:** "I've got to meet his mother tomorrow. I've never met any boyfriend's mother, and I'm feeling almost paralyzed with anxiety."

**Helper:** "When I was in a similar situation, I realized that I was projecting my negative feelings about my mother onto his mother."

**Client:** "I get so anxious at parties that I just don't want to go to any."

**Helper:** "I have a hard time at parties, too. I just never know what to say to strangers."

*c. Disclosure of strategies (a statement about strategies that have worked for the helper in the past)*

**Client:** "I just don't know how to get a job in the department."

**Helper:** "One strategy that I tried when I was your age was to go and talk to all the professors about their interests, and then if I liked the professor I asked if she or he had any openings for assistants."

**Client:** "I have difficulty figuring out how to eat right."

**Helper:** "One thing that has worked for me was to go to a nutritionist and talk about diets."

9. **Immediacy:** Discloses helper's immediate feelings about self in relation to the client, about the client, or about the therapeutic relationship.

**Client:** "Everything has been going great in helping."

**Helper:** "It's interesting that you say that now because I've been feeling anxious and stressed in our relationship."

**Client:** "Do you like me?"

**Helper:** "I feel very close to you."

**Client:** (cutting helper off) "No, that's not it. You're wrong. I feel fine."

**Helper:** "I am feeling annoyed that you keep interrupting me."

10. **Information:** Supplies information in the form of data, facts, opinions, resources, or answers to questions. There are three types of information:

*a. Information about the process of helping*

**Client:** "Will I be meeting with you weekly?"

**Helper:** "We will meet twice a week."

**Client:** "Should I start?"

**Helper:** "Mmhmm."

*b. Facts, data, or opinions*

**Client:** "What were the results of the test?"

**Helper:** "The test indicates that you share interests with people happily employed in forestry."

**Client:** "I think I want to major in biology."

**Helper:** "Biology requires several additional laboratory courses."

**Client:** "I got really upset but I didn't say anything to her."

**Helper:** "It is my opinion that when people bottle up their anger, they are more prone to blowing up at some point."

**Helper:** "Students tend to do better on tests after they have gotten a full night of sleep."

*c. Feedback About the Client*

**Client:** "Am I depressed?"

**Helper:** "You seem more anxious than depressed."

**Helper:** "You did a great job asserting yourself in that situation. Your voice tone was firm and appropriate. But you didn't have much eye contact."

**11. Direct Guidance:** *Provides* suggestions, directives, instructions, or advice about what the client should do to change (goes beyond directing the client to explore thoughts or feelings in session). There are two types of direct guidance:

*a. Process Advisement*

“Play the part of the firefighter in your fantasy.”

“Try and relax your muscles right now.”

“Rate your level of relaxation now.”

*b. Directives*

“I want you to try to talk to your father during the week and tell him about your feelings about his not calling you.”

“Take the test tomorrow before you forget the material.”

“For homework, I would like you to complete this record of your automatic thoughts.”

“You should take charge of your life.”

**12. Other:** Includes helper statements that are unrelated to the client’s problems, such as small talk, salutations, and comments about the weather or events.

“Excuse me.”

“Goodbye. See you next week.”

“The Redskins game was terrific, wasn’t it?”

“That’s a pretty blouse that you’re wearing.”

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*Note:* The Helping Skills System (HSS) is a substantially revised version of the Hill Counselor Verbal Response Category System (HCV RCS) that was published in the first edition of this book, C. E. Hill & K. M. O’Brien, 1999, *Helping skills: Facilitating exploration, insight, and action*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.