
A TRAINING MANUAL
FOR COUNSELORS

**BASIC
PERSONAL**
Counseling

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Geldard is a psychologist by profession and is Director of the Family Therapy Unit at the largest crisis counseling center in Australia, namely, the Lifeline Center in Brisbane. This center employs a team of psychologists and social workers who conduct several thousand counseling sessions each year with emotionally disturbed clients.

Over a period of years at the Lifeline Center, the author has gained considerable practical experience in running training courses for counselors. Participants in these courses have included psychologists, social workers, medical practitioners, nursing staff, welfare workers, and other helping professionals. The author also has experience in training Gestalt Therapists, having been a Faculty member of the Gestalt Institute in Brisbane.

As Director of the Lifeline Family Therapy Unit, the author is responsible for the training and supervision of both professional and volunteer staff. Under his leadership the unit has gained a reputation for achieving very high levels of success in bringing about change in highly dysfunctional family systems through the use of innovative counseling and therapeutic techniques.

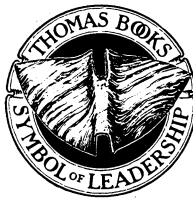
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By

DAVID GELDARD

ILLUSTRATED BY
GARRY ANDERSON



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***D**edicated to my son, Edward,
and daughter, Alison*

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Note to the reader
Use of Gender Related Language

In the interests of sexual equality, half the chapters in this book are written in the female gender (she, her), and half are written in the male gender (he, his). Combined personal pronouns such as s/he have not been used, because they interrupt the flow of sentences, and are not consistent with our spoken language.

SECTION 1

COUNSELING

CHAPTER ONE

BECOMING A COUNSELOR

TO YOU, the reader, I say “Welcome.” I hope you will enjoy this book and find it useful. Because you are reading it, my guess is that you are either intending to train as a counselor, or are concerned with training other people to be counselors. I am writing primarily for the trainee, and as I write I remember how I felt when I first started my training. My feelings and attitudes then were very different from those which I have now. However, it was those feelings and attitudes that motivated me to go ahead. I wonder how you feel as you think about your decision to train as a counselor? What are your motivations? Stop for a minute and think. Ask yourself the question “Why do I want to be a counselor?” Write your answer in the space below:

Your answer is, of course, individually yours, but it is quite probable that it fits into one of two possible molds. It could be that you wrote a statement about your **own** needs. Maybe you have the idea that being a counselor will give you status, power or satisfaction. Perhaps you think that counseling will add a new quality and richness to your life. It may be though that when you wrote your answer you were not thinking about your own needs at all. You may have decided to become a counselor so that you can satisfy the needs of other people. You may have written down something like, “I want to be a counselor because I care

about others and want to help them.” Most counselors are very caring people and helping others is an important part of their motivation. However it’s important for you to remember that even if you become a counselor with the primary goal of satisfying other people’s needs, then you will **also** be satisfying some of your **own** needs too. You will, for example, get satisfaction for yourself out of caring for others. This discussion may not seem important to you right now, but it is, because your motivation for becoming a counselor will, if you are not careful, heavily influence the way in which you will function as a counselor. While it probably doesn’t matter greatly **what** your motivation is, it is important that you are **aware** of your motivation and of what needs of your own you hope to satisfy. With this awareness you will be better able to avoid letting the satisfaction of your own needs interfere with the counseling process, and with your ability to meet the needs of clients.

In order to be able to meet the needs of clients a counselor must have an understanding of the purposes and goals of the counseling process. If I am to become an effective counselor, then I need to have some idea of what it means to be effective. Judging the effectiveness of counseling is usually subjective and there are clearly two different perspectives, that is, the client’s and the counselor’s. It may be that the client will perceive effectiveness in a different way from the counselor, and so I am asking you, the reader, to spend a few minutes looking at, first of all the client’s expectations and then at the counselor’s.

To understand the client’s perspective it is probably useful to look at the reasons why clients seek counseling. For most people it is not easy to make an appointment and then to go to see a counselor. Our society’s value system holds that it’s a sign of weakness if people are unable to handle their problems without outside help. This tends to make it difficult for those with heavy work responsibilities to come for counseling. Such people often believe that their colleagues would think that they were inadequate and not capable of taking responsibility, if they admitted to seeking help from a counselor. Consequently, many people are reluctant to seek counseling unless they are in such a disturbed emotional state that their ability to carry out their normal daily tasks is significantly impaired, and they are no longer able to hide their pain and emotional distress from others.

Often, a client will go to a counselor with very unrealistic expectations of what is likely to happen in the counseling session. Frequently a

client will expect that the counselor will give her direct advice, and tell her exactly what to do, so that at the end of the session she can go away having solved her problems. Most counselors would agree that they are not prepared to meet such client expectations. Moreover, there are real disadvantages to the client if the counselor does try to give advice and provide solutions to problems.

There are several dangers inherent in giving advice. Firstly, human beings are remarkably resistant to advice. In fact some counselors have become so impressed by the way clients resist advice, that in advanced counseling sessions, paradoxical methods are sometimes used where a client is advised to do exactly the reverse of what the counselor really wants her to do! Other counselors do give direct advice but this may be counter-productive even if the client follows the advice. If the advice turns out to be inappropriate, then quite clearly the counselor has done the client a disservice and she will not be impressed. On the other hand, if the advice has positive consequences for the client then unfortunately there may still be negative consequences in the long term. Instead of working things out for herself, the client has accepted the counselor's advice and may now regard the counselor as a superior expert who needs to be consulted whenever major decisions are to be made. This is clearly undesirable, and suggests that an important goal for a counselor may be to teach or encourage the client to become self-reliant and to feel confident about her own ability to make decisions. In the long term it is not helpful for a client to become dependent on a counselor's advice. It is far better for the client to become self-reliant, and capable of making and trusting her own decisions.

If I am to be an effective counselor, I need to have a clear idea of my goals. One of my own primary goals is to help the client to feel better, or at least to feel more comfortable, particularly in the long term. It is also my aim to help a client learn how to become more self-sufficient, and how to deal with ongoing and future life situations in a constructive way without requiring continual help. It is very much in both the client's and counselor's interests to promote enduring long-term change, rather than to engage in short-term problem solving. A counselor is clearly going to feel very frustrated if clients keep returning for counseling each time new problems are encountered. It is important, if the counselor is to feel a sense of satisfaction in her work, that clients change and grow in such a

