



Straight Talk - men don't cry or do they?"

The following was sent to CPPD by one of the Pakistan students following his first counseling training session.

"Last weekend I attended the first training session of an 18 months program in Humanistic Integrative Counselling skills, organized by my good friend, Abdul Rahman Allana, who besides being a very successful industrialist, is also a world-class international bridge player, who has been described as a "*bridge player with a touch of class*".

AR started courses in counselling after he had set up AAS (*Alleviate Addiction Suffering*), a 20-bed drug rehabilitation centre in Malir, which provides detoxification treatment and counselling to drug addicts and realised the need for counsellors to help the affected families.

He met *Lynne Kaye* and *Jamie Gidlow-Jackson*, both highly qualified, experienced, practicing counsellors at CPPD Counselling School, London, during his frequent visits to UK and discussed the drug problems in our society and invited them to visit his center.

Both Lynne and Jamie were a little apprehensive about visiting Pakistan, because of the negative publicity in the western press, but once they were here, they immediately started relating to our problems and needs and integrated into our culture and society. Since then, they have been visiting Karachi every six weeks, to conduct counselling courses on addiction and Humanistic Integrative Counselling.

I have been meeting them every time they come to Pakistan and they would always ask me as to why I had not joined the course. At the same time, AR has been nudging me to join the program for the last 2 years, especially with the Helpline logo of "*We care*". But realizing the emotional demands and the commitment the program would require, I had been reluctant.

My interest in counselling is because my daughter is a qualified, clinical psychologist with a PhD in Clinical Psychology and I had also set up a Defence Psychiatric Institute, a 20-bed drug rehabilitation centre, with counselling facilities, with the help of Dr. Aijaz Nanji and Dr. Ajmal Kazmi, but had to close it down recently for various reasons.

So, after great deliberations, I decided to take the plunge. But before I joined the course, I attended three counselling sessions with a lady counsellor, who had recently received her diploma from the course, so as to test the waters and found the sessions to be very informative and interesting.

There are usually 16 trainees for each course, which are conducted over weekends, every 6 weeks, stretched over 18 months. The course aims to equip trainees with a broad range of theory and skills, encouraging personal development and places a high degree of emphasis upon *self-awareness* and requires extensive reading and writing papers on the subject.

We all arrived at the Beach Luxury Hotel by 6.00 pm on Friday evening and over a cup of tea and Lynne and Jamie introduced themselves and the basic objectives of the course and then asked us to introduce our selves to each other. Once the basic ice was broken, we moved into the conference room, where the course was to be conducted.

Realizing that 16 strangers, 8 from each sex, but from very different and diverse backgrounds, were entering a highly charged situation, Lynne and Jamie gently led us through an intricate journey of getting to trust, respect and know each other.

It was like when you step into a tub of hot water, you put your feet in first to test the temperature and then gradually lower your body, allowing it to adjust to the hot temperature and then lie back to enjoy its healing and soothing effect.

Lynne and Jamie explained that counselling is needed when the patient, who is referred to as the client, is distressed and is experiencing anger, anxiety, grief, dissatisfaction with life or has lost a sense of direction and purpose. By listening attentively and patiently, the counsellor can begin to perceive the difficulties from the client's point of view and help them to see things more clearly, possibly from a different angle.

Bottled-up feelings such as grief, inadequacy and lack of confidence can become very intense and an opportunity to express and talk about them in a secure place can help reduce the pain, thus making them easier to understand and resolve the issues that are affecting their lives.

They explained that an effective counsellor must respect the client's confidentiality and must be honest and sometimes courageous to help the client to gain self-respect and a sense of well being by hearing

their problems, sharing their feelings and accepting and respecting them as a person in their own right.

This helps in building up the person's confidence in making decisions, coping with crisis, developing personal insight and knowledge, removing inner conflicts and improving relationships with others. However, establishing a sound, trusting counselling relationship is very important and demands the presence of three core conditions.

The first is Empathy, meaning compassion and understanding the client's feelings and emotions from the client's viewpoint and placing yourself in the client's shoes. The second is Congruence, meaning complete genuineness and not just lip service and the third is Unconditional Positive Regard, meaning respect and non-judgmental acknowledgement of the client's emotions or behaviour.

Once the basic principals of counselling were explained, we were thrown into the deep end. Each trainee was asked to write their full name on the board and explain what it meant. It was amazing to watch the surprises this simple exercise produced and how it reflected on the individual's personality.

The explanations from the lady participants were detailed, with emphasis on their relationship with the person who had given the name. Whereas explanations offered by the men were shorter, less personal and some even curt and abrupt, giving an insight of the person's conflict and dissatisfaction with himself.

But the real test came when we were asked to establish a two-minute eye contact with a member of the opposite sex and then with a male trainee and share the experience with each other. We were then divided into groups of threes and asked to play the role of a client, a counsellor and an observer and enact the issues that had been discussed during the day. Then each group was asked to comment and share their observations with the 16 participants.

For forty-five charged minutes, the group shared their anguish and anxieties with each other and related their own concerns and apprehensions. To start with, the men were cautious and guarded in their observations, but it was the women who broke the ice.

When the session ended, there was not a single dry eye in the room, including Lynne, Jamie and myself. And this was the decisive moment, when 16 strangers became a group of caring friends and wondered as to when would each be honest and brave enough to share their fears and apprehensions with each other, especially the men, for we all know that *men don't cry, or do they?*"

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