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Working With People
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MY COUNSELING EXPERIENCE

It was my first time sitting with my classmates in a counseling triad. We were put into groups of three and were told to take turns in talking, listening and observing. One of my classmates began to talk while I listened. At the beginning, this was difficult for me. I was tempted to speak and give advice during the talk. There were moments while I was listening, I was distracted by my thoughts. When I started practicing using verbal encouragement like tell me more or help me understand, I began to feel more comfortable. There were times when I remained quiet and just nodded my head. What I learnt from being a listener is that listening is the key ingredient in a conversation. I also discovered that all people need is someone to listen to them, not to fix the problem. Before this triad, I did not spend too much time listening when someone was talking to me because I always wanted to try to solve their problems. In this session I was able to practice my listening skills. At the end of the session, I felt like this is a skill that I definitely needed to continue developing.

After being the listener, it was my turn to talk. When I started talking about myself, I felt a little uncomfortable sharing my life with my classmates. The problem for me was I did not know them and was not sure how much information I wanted to divulge. After a few minutes I became less uncomfortable and I began to talk freely. Tommy was a good listener and he helped me to open up more about myself. I was able to talk about things that I did not think I would share with a stranger. Just having someone listening to me and knowing what I said will be kept confidential was very reassuring for me. What surprised me was how quickly I felt comfortable

enough to begin to pour out my soul. I did not realize how much talking helps you to process things. This experience was very helpful for me.

When it was my turn to be the observer, I observed that when Tommy began to talk, he was a little nervous. He too had difficulties opening up to his classmates. There were times when he stopped and paused as though he was wondering about what he should or should not say. When Stacy started encouraging him by nodding and showing him that she was really interested in what he had to say, Tommy began to express himself with more ease. I give Stacy and A for the brilliant way she kept engaging with Tommy. I believe that she helped him to feel free to talk about the things that he will not normally talk about. Tommy got so comfortable that he began sharing things about his family and how he grew up in a Korean culture. As an observer, I saw how important it was to allow someone to talk while you listen. Stacy listened attentively while Tommy was talking and when she asked a question, it was relevant to what Tommy was talking about. I also observe how helpful it was, to just let the person know that you are there to listen to them. Stacy created that safe environment for Tommy to talk freely.

On the second day in our triad, we followed the same pattern. We were all more comfortable with one another. We talked about grief and how it affected us. I was happy to talk since I felt like I did not grieve enough for my father who passed away three years ago. I was comparing how I grieved for my mother. In talking with my classmates, I realize that each grief is different. What helped me understand this is when my other classmate started talking about her grief when she got divorced. I observed, as she began to talk, that she was reliving the pain she felt at that time. I also observed her body language, she began to use more hand gestures as she spoke. I

could have seen the pain in her eyes. Her voice began to get louder as she related the story. I did not

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understand how much grief someone goes through after a divorce until this session. Tommy was a great listener and he encouraged Stacy to continue talking. I observed that he showed her that what she was saying matters. He displayed empathy towards Stacy. He also gave her space to continue letting out her true feelings. I give Tommy an A for being an excellent listener. From this triad I learnt that as a minister/counselor, I have to be patient with people especially when they are processing their loss. I cannot tell them I know what you are feeling because each person grieves differently. I also realized that no grief is bigger or smaller than the other. Every grief is very painful.

On the third and fourth day we discussed some hot topics. One of the topics we talked about was same sex relationship and how it is viewed by the church. I observed as we began to talk, that this was a difficult topic to address. I could see that my classmates were not too eager to say whether they were for or against it. We had to figure out how to get comfortable talking about this. As we took turns speaking, after a while we were all able to open up and talk about how we really felt about the subject. From this session, I observed that when a conversation is too difficult to talk about, people tend to be less engaging. We want to be politically correct while we try not to offend each other. I also realized in our triad this topic was hard to talk about especially when we have family members that are homosexual. What stood out to me as we discuss this topic is how much influence the media had in the way people view things. I learnt a great deal about having difficult talks from these sessions.

What I take away from these triads, is it easy to zone out while someone is talking. We have to be tuned in at all times. When listening to someone talking, we should give them our undivided attention. Working with people, we will always have to talk about difficult subjects. . I also learnt that verbal encouragement can be effective when having a conversation with someone. It helps them to open up a little more about their problems and to discover the source of the pain. It is very important not to be judgmental. My biggest takeaway is learning to listen more and to talk less. This is one point that I believe will be very helpful for me as I continue in my ministry.

