



Suggested Guidelines for Peer Counselling

Hand out from John Spinetta, ICCCPPO Workshop, Geneva. Sept 2006

John gave a workshop on peer counselling, ie where parents are talking to parents. These are some guidelines he suggested should be used for such sessions.

1. Talking with another person about their problem(s) does not mean that you have to “solve” their problem for them. Talking it out with someone who cares and who understands is important, and may be enough.
2. Listen carefully, and listen to another person’s music as well as their words, to their heart as well as to their mind.
3. Speak your own truth truthfully, from your own experience, your own knowledge, and your own heart. Stay within your own knowledge and do not try to be all-wise.
4. Remember that this is mostly about caring, about understanding, about giving someone the opportunity to share their feelings and questions with “someone like themselves”. It is not primarily about your wisdom or your giving advice.
5. Do NOT give medical advice.
6. At the end of the conversation ask if it was useful, and how. This can help you do your job better and can help the other person clarify their continuing needs for assistance.
7. Also at the end of the conversation think about what you, yourself, thought about, felt, and learned about yourself in the situation. Helping is a two-way street, and if you pay attention you may find that “the helper” benefits as much as “the person being helped”.
8. If appropriate, consider referring someone to a medical or psychosocial professional. Also consider suggesting the person makes use of other lay resources such as a parent discussion or support group or good books that you have read.
9. Follow-up. A few days after a peer counselling event call or write to the person asking how they are doing and whether another meeting or other kind of help would be useful