



The Four Processes of Counseling

Rosalin Brueck, LMHC

At Redeemer Counseling, we meet each person in their individual needs as well as in their past and present experiences. As we do, we help them heal from the wounds of their past and transform their unconscious beliefs by internalizing the truths of the gospel. Our unique approach, the GIFT (Gospel-centered Integrative Framework for Therapy), is contextualized to each person we work with.

We recognize that solutions cannot come only from inside ourselves because we need God's help for heart change. As we counsel people, we work through four processes with individuals and help them experience the love and grace of God, internalizing the gospel. We do so implicitly by incarnating the love of Christ to them and explicitly by helping them experience God anew. These processes are not linear and may occur simultaneously.

This Toolkit will give an overview of The Four Processes before we delve deeply into each one throughout the series.

THE FOUR PROCESSES

1. *Building Alliance*
2. *Reducing Symptoms*
3. *Grieving and Accepting*
4. *Facilitating Heart Change*

1

BUILDING ALLIANCE

A therapeutic alliance is a trusting, safe relationship that we build with the people we serve in which they feel seen, heard, and cared for. Both trust and safety are necessary because we are asking people to be vulnerable and share their stories with us, to wrestle with suffering, and to search for hope and healing. We build an alliance by being fully present, actively listening, and pacing the conversation according to each person's needs.

It is well-researched that the quality of the relationship is the most important factor that contributes to a favorable outcome in counseling. We may not share the gospel with individuals directly in this process. However, as we incarnate Christ through being present with people, showing them compassion and curiosity as He does, they can begin to experience and internalize a more accurate view of God and experience His love more fully.

2

REDUCING SYMPTOMS

As caregivers, we seek to address people's felt needs and reduce their physical, emotional, mental, social, and spiritual suffering. Distressing symptoms are often what initially bring people into counseling, and we cannot ignore them.

For example, if someone's insomnia is affecting their work, they will be looking for relief early on. We cannot only offer them solutions that meet their spiritual needs without addressing and caring for their physical needs. God created human beings as embodied souls, which means what happens in our souls impacts our bodies, and what happens in our bodies affects our souls. Therefore, caring for people's symptoms is an important part of the counseling process.

Jesus himself came to earth in bodily form, and God's common grace and compassion cover all types of pain. We model Jesus when we care for the physical needs of those we walk with, as well as their spiritual needs. God gives human beings, regardless of their relationship with Him, rain and sunshine, the ability to produce food, the restorative effects of medicine, and the gift of rest. When we help clients acknowledge and reduce their symptoms, we are extending God's grace to alleviate suffering. This process does not necessitate caregivers share about God directly—though we can—but models Christ's love and compassion.

3

GRIEVING AND ACCEPTING

Grieving helps those we serve to tell their stories and to name and express their pain. People often do not want to face their hurts and losses so they create coping mechanisms to bypass their painful emotions or their need to go to God for help. Caregivers

help people learn to face their pain and bring it directly to God. And as individuals grieve their wounds, painful experiences, and sins, they can move toward a greater acceptance of their losses. Grieving allows people to let go of coping mechanisms, which keep them stuck, as they face the painful reality directly with God's compassion.

Redeemer Counseling's research shows that the process of grieving and accepting is often the turning point toward lasting change as people reconnect with God honestly and make meaning of the suffering they have experienced. As caregivers witness their pain with compassion, we model a loving God who cares for the broken, who is not indifferent to their suffering, and who sees them in their pain. As people bring their sorrows to Him, they receive God's grace and comfort and can see Him as both compassionate and trustworthy. The process of grieving and accepting moves people toward a deeper understanding of how Christ suffered and a deeper experience of how He walks beside them in their pain.

4

FACILITATING HEART CHANGE

Focusing only on changed behavior often does not lead to lasting change because the underlying beliefs and fears that motivate someone's emotions and behaviors have not changed. To facilitate a heart change, caregivers need to help people address their deeply ingrained and often unconscious beliefs about themselves, others, and God and work to replace them through an experience of the gospel that is new and meets the needs of the individual.

Heart change is only possible through God. Because we were designed to receive our identity from God, we cannot find solutions from within ourselves alone. In the process of facilitating heart change, caregivers are invited to explicitly bring the gospel into the counseling room. As facilitators, we help people engage directly with God and deeply experience Christ's gifts of salvation, love and acceptance. As people's views of self, others, and God are transformed, they can turn away from their self-reliance and trust God more, freeing them to respond more appropriately to their circumstances.

As we begin this journey to understand the four processes of counseling, remember:

1. *The goals of these processes are tailored to each individual's particular needs.*
2. *These processes are not linear and may occur simultaneously.*

Counselors and caregivers will continuously work to maintain the therapeutic alliance throughout our time with an individual. While we are addressing someone's symptoms, we may also help them grieve losses and wrestle with trusting God. The remaining Toolkits in this series will explore in depth each of *The Four Processes* that lead to lasting change.