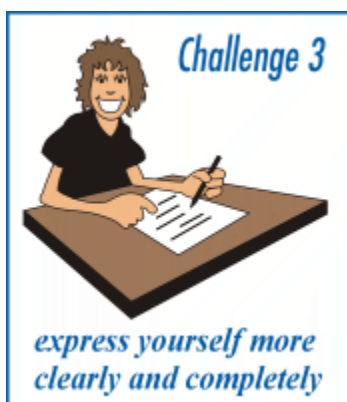


Challenge Three

EXPRESSING YOURSELF MORE CLEARLY, COMPLETELY AND EFFECTIVELY WITH THE FIVE “I-MESSAGES”

SUMMARY(repeated from Introduction) Slow down and give your listeners more information about what you are experiencing by using a wide range of “I-statements.” You are likely to get more of your listener’s empathy if you express more of what you are seeing and hearing, feeling, interpreting, wanting, and envisioning. In the pages that follow we will explore each of these aspects of experience and how to express them more clearly.



Anytime one person sincerely listens to another, a very creative process is going on in which the listener mentally reconstructs the speaker’s experience. The more facets or dimensions of your experience you

share with easy-to-grasp “I statements,” the easier it will be for your conversation partner to reconstruct your experience accurately and understand what you are thinking, feeling and wanting. This is equally worthwhile whether you are trying to solve a problem with someone or trying to express appreciation for them. Expressing yourself this carefully might appear to take longer than your usual quick style of communication. But if you include all the time it takes to unscramble everyday misunderstandings, and to work through the feelings that usually accompany not being understood, expressing yourself more completely can actually take a lot less time.

Filling in the missing information. If you observe people in conversation carefully, you will begin to notice that human communication works by leaving many things unsaid and depending on the listener to fill in the missing-but-implied information. For example, a receptionist may say to a counselor, “**Your two o’clock is here,**” a sentence which, on the face of it, makes no sense at all. She means “**Your client who made an appointment for two o’clock has arrived in the waiting room,**” and the counselor knows that. It’s amazing how much of the time this abbreviating and implying process works just fine. But, in situations of change, ambiguity, conflict, or great emotional need, our “shorthand” way of speaking may not work at all for at least three possible reasons. First, our listeners may fill in a completely different set of details than the one we intended. Second, our listeners may not understand the significance of what we are saying (they get only some of the details, so miss the big picture). And finally, without actually intending to mislead anyone, we may leave out important parts of our experience that we find embarrassing or imagine will evoke a hostile reaction. *The more serious the consequences of misunderstanding would be, the more we need to both understand our own experience better and help our listeners by giving them a more complete picture of our experience in language that does not attack them.*

According to various communication researchers, there are five main dimensions of experience that your conversation partners can use to recreate your experience inside their minds. The more elements you provide, the higher the probability that your listener’s re-creation will match your experience. In this Workbook I will refer to these elements or dimensions of experience as “The Five I-Messages.”

Examples in table format. The example in the table below outlines a five-part way of saying more of what we are experiencing. The shorthand version of the message below would be something like, “Stop that racing!” Here are the details of the five messages that are left out in the shorthand version: (Please read down the columns)

The Five I Messages	express:	Example (in a hospital, nurse to young patient):
<i>seeing, hearing...</i>	1. What are you seeing, hearing or otherwise sensing? (facts only)	“John, when I see you racing your wheelchair down the hall...
<i>and feeling...</i>	2. What emotions are you feeling?	...I feel really upset...
<i>because I...</i>	3. What interpretations, wants, needs, memories or anticipations of yours support those feelings?	...because I imagine that you are going to hurt yourself and someone else, too...
<i>and now I want...</i>	4. What action, information or commitment do you want now?	...so I want you to promise me right now that you will slow down...
<i>so that...</i>	5. What positive results will that action, information or commitment lead to in the future? (no threats)	...so that you can get out of here in one piece and I can stop worrying about a collision.”

Note: My deep appreciation goes to the work of Marshall Rosenberg¹² for helping me to understand Messages 1 through 4, to the work of Sharon and Gordon Bower¹³ for helping me understand Message 5, and to the work of John Grinder and Richard Bandler for helping my understand how people “delete” various aspects of their experience from their communication.¹⁴ For interesting variations on the theme of complete messages, see their books noted below.

In the table that starts below and continues on the next page you will find eight examples of statements that would give your listener a full range of information about your experience. Notice how a person’s feelings can change according to the needs and interpretations they bring to a situation. (Please read across the rows)

1. When I saw/heard...	2. I felt...	3. because I... (need, want, interpret, associate, etc.)	4. and now I want (then I wanted)...	5. so that (in order to)...
When I saw the bear in the woods with her three cubs...	...I felt overjoyed!...	...because I needed a picture of bears for my wildlife class...	...and I wanted the bear to stand perfectly still...	so I could focus my camera.
When I saw the bear in the woods with her three cubs...	...I felt terrified!...	...because I remembered that bears with cubs are very aggressive...	...and I wanted to get out of there fast...	so that the bear would not pick up my scent.

¹² Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Compassion*. Del Mar, CA: PuddleDancer Press. 1999.

¹³ Sharon Anthony Bower and Gordon H. Bower, *Asserting Yourself: A Practical Guide for Positive Change*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley. 1976.

¹⁴ Richard Bandler and John Grinder, *The Structure of Magic*, Vol. 1. Palo Alto: Science and Behavior Books. 1975.

MORE EXAMPLES OF “THE FIVE I-MESSAGES” IN ACTION:

1. <i>When I saw/heard...</i>	2. <i>I felt...</i>	3. <i>because I...(need, want, interpret, associate, etc.)</i>	4. <i>and now I want (then I wanted)...</i>	5. <i>so that (in order to)...</i>
When I saw the dishes in the sink...	...I felt happy...	...because I guessed that you had come back from your trip to Mexico...	...and I want you to tell me all about the Aztec ruins you saw...	...so that I can liven up some scenes in the short story I'm writing.
When I saw the dishes in the sink...	...I felt irritated...	...because I want to start cooking dinner right away...	...and I want to ask you to help me do the dishes right now...	...so that dinner will be ready by the time our guests arrive.
When I saw the flying saucer on your roof...	... felt more excited than I have ever been in my life...	...because I imagined the saucer people would give you the anti-gravity formula...	...and I wanted you to promise that you would share it with me...	...so that we would both get rich and famous.
When I saw the flying saucer on your roof...	...I felt more afraid than I have ever been in my life...	...because I imagined the saucer people were going to kidnap you...	...and I wanted you to run for your life...	...so that you would not get abducted and maybe turned into a zombie.
When I saw the grant application in the office mail...	...I felt delighted...	...because I think our program is good enough to win a large grant...	...and I want to ask you to help me with the budget pages...	...so that we can get the application in before the deadline.
When I saw the grant application in the office mail...	...I felt depressed...	...because I can't see clients when I'm filling out forms...	...and I want you to help me with the budget pages...	...so that I can keep up my case work over the next three weeks.

Exercise for Challenge 3: Exploring the Five I Messages. Re-tell the story of some of your conflicts, frustrations and delights using the five-message format. Write one Five Messages statement a day in a journal or notebook. Here are some suggestions for expressing each of the Five Messages more clearly:

The Five I Messages:	Suggestions for expressing more clearly:
<p>1. What are you seeing, hearing or otherwise sensing? (facts only)</p>	<p>A. Begin by stating what you actually see or hear rather than how you feel about it or what you think of it.</p> <p>B. Describe specific actions observed, avoid generalizing such as “you always...” or “you never...”</p> <p>C. Be specific about place, time, color, texture, position and how often.</p> <p>D. Describe rather than diagnose. Avoid words that label or judge the actions you observe such as “slimy,” “lousy,” “neurotic,” etc..</p> <p>E. Avoid descriptions of a situation that imply emotions without actually stating them, such as “totally disgusting” and “horrible.” State your feelings explicitly in Message 2 (described next).</p> <p>For example:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">“When I saw the big coffee stain on the rug...” is easier to hear and understand than</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">“When you ruined my day, as always, with your slimy, stinking, totally disgusting, rotten antics...”</p>
<p>2. What emotions are you feeling?</p>	<p>A. Use specific emotion describers such as “I feel...”: glad, angry, delighted, sad, afraid, resentful, embarrassed, calm, enthusiastic, fearful, manic, depressed, happy, etc.</p> <p>B. Avoid feeling words that <u>imply</u> the action of another person: “I feel.., ignored, manipulated, mistreated, neglected, rejected, dominated, abandoned, used, cheated (etc.)”</p> <p>Notice how these words indirectly blame the listener for the speaker’s emotions. In order to help your listener understand what you are feeling, translate these “implied blame” words into an explicitly named emotion (see Suggestion A, above) and an interpretation or unmet want (Message 3).</p> <p>For example: “I am feeling totally ignored by you” probably means</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">“I am feeling really sad (or angry) <u>because</u> I want you to pay more attention to me, (spend more time with me, etc.)...”</p>

Exercise for Challenge 3 (continued):

The Five I Messages:	Suggestions for expressing more clearly:
<p>3. What interpretations, wants, needs, memories or anticipations of <u>yours</u> support those feelings?</p>	<p>A. Express the interpretations, wants, hopes, understandings and associations that support your feelings: ... because I imagine that... ... because I see that as... ... because I remember how... ... because I take that to mean ... instead of ... because YOU ... (did, said, did not, etc.)</p> <p>B. Under our interpretations there are often unmet wants, hopes and needs. Explore and express the unmet wants that also support your feelings: ... because I wanted because I would have liked because I was hoping that... ... because I needed ... instead of ... because YOU ... (did, said, did not, etc.)</p>
<p>4. What action, information or commitment do you want now?</p>	<p>A. Ask for action or information, or for a present commitment to future action or information giving. Since most people cannot produce emotions on request, it is generally not productive to ask a person for an emotion (“I want you to cheer up.” “I want you to be angry about this issue.” Etc.)</p> <p>B. If your want is general, ask for a specific step toward it. Translate .open-ended requests, such as for “consideration, respect, help, understanding, support” etc., into specific action verbs such as please “listen, sit, lift, carry, tell me, hold me,” etc.</p> <p>C. State your want in <u>positive</u> terms: “Please arrive at eight...” rather than “Don’t be late...”</p> <p>D. Include when, where, how. Including the details can help you to avoid big misunderstandings.</p>
<p>5. What <u>positive</u> results will that action, information or commitment lead to in the future? (no threats)</p>	<p>In describing the specific positive results of receiving your request, you allow the other person to become motivated by feeling capable of giving something worthwhile. This prepares the ground for later expressions of appreciation, and points your relationship toward mutual appreciation and the exercise of competence (more enjoyable to live with), rather than guilt, duty, obedience or resentment (much less enjoyable to live with).</p>

Exercise for Challenge 3 (continued): Re-tell the story of some of your conflicts, frustrations and delights using the five-message format. Photocopy this page to do more exercises and also to use as part of a personal journal about your communication-related learning. One of the greatest challenges in life is to connect the past to the present and future in ways that are more productive and nurturing.

<i>Elements of my experiencing:</i>	<i>Helping people understand me better by expressing the various elements of my experience – past or present -- using five different “I-messages”</i>	<i>Time</i>
1. What actions, events and/ or sensations am I seeing, hearing, doing, remembering or otherwise sensing? (the facts without evaluation)	As I (or when I) see (hear, remember, take action about) ...	
2. What basic emotions am I feeling (glad, sad, mad, delighted, frustrated, proud, sorry, ashamed, grateful, etc.) about those actions/events?	... I feel (or felt) ...	
3. What interpretations, evaluations, wants, hopes, needs and/or dreams of mine help to evoke and support my feelings?	... because I ...	
4. What action, information, discussion, help or commitment do I want, would I like, and/or do I want to request, now?	... and now I want (want to request)... [Something doable]	
5. What positive results or personal fulfillment do I envision that action, discussion, information or commitment leading to?	...so that I can... so that we can... in order for me/us to...	

Exercise for Challenge 3 (continued): Re-tell the story of some of your conflicts, frustrations and delights using the five-message format. PDF copies of this form are available at:

<https://communication-skills.net/resource-library/resources-for-classes-and-groups/>

<i>Elements of my experiencing:</i>	<i>Helping people understand me better by expressing the various elements of my experience – past or present -- using five different “I-messages”</i>	<i>Time</i>
1. What actions, events and/ or sensations am I seeing, hearing, doing, remembering or otherwise sensing? (the facts without evaluation)	As I (or when I) see (hear, remember, take action about) ...	
2. What basic emotions am I feeling (glad, sad, mad, delighted, frustrated, proud, sorry, ashamed, grateful, etc.) about those actions/events?	... I feel (or felt) ...	
3. What interpretations, evaluations, wants, hopes, needs and/or dreams of mine help to evoke and support my feelings?	... because I ...	
4. What action, information, discussion, help or commitment do I want, would I like, and/or do I want to request, now?	... and now I want (want to request)... [Something doable]	
5. What positive results or personal fulfillment do I envision that action, discussion, information or commitment leading to?	...so that I can... so that we can... in order for me/us to...	

Reading 3-1: SAYING WHAT'S IN OUR HEARTS

Honest conversations viewed as counseling
and counseling viewed as conversations that
allow for honesty

by Dennis Rivers, MA

I wrote this essay for my students during a time when I was teaching a class on peer counseling. I was trying to describe in everyday language some of the good things that happen in counseling, that ALSO happen in friendship, good parenting, mentoring and ministering.

According to the psychotherapists Carl Rogers¹⁵ (in the 1960's), Margaret and Jordan Paul¹⁶ (in the 1980s) and Brad Blanton¹⁷ (in the 1990's), there is one main reason people suffer in their relationships with one another. And it's not best understood as some jargon about ids and egos and superegos. It's that we need to face more of the truth and tell more of the truth about what's happening in our lives, about how we feel, and about what we ourselves are doing.

Many people, probably most of us at some time or other, struggle to deal with troubling feelings and problem situations in life by using a whole range of avoidance maneuvers: we may pretend nothing is happening, focus on blaming others, or try to find ways of avoiding embarrassment, distracting ourselves and/or minimizing conflict. The problem with these ways of dealing with inner and outer conflicts is that they don't work well in the long run. If we try to deal with our problems by pretending that nothing is wrong, we run the risk of becoming numb or getting deeply confused about what we actually want and how we actually feel. And from tooth decay to auto repair to marriage, avoidance maneuvers won't protect us from the practical consequences of our difficulties.

¹⁵ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. 1995.

¹⁶ Margaret and Jordan Paul, *Do I Have To Give Up Me To Be Loved By You*. Minneapolis: CompCare Publishers. 1983.

¹⁷ Brad Blanton, *How to Transform Your Life By Telling the Truth*. New York: Dell. 1996.

Now what, you may ask, does this have to do with counseling? Well, a counselor is someone to whom you can tell the truth. And as you start to tell more of the truth to the counselor, you can start to admit the more of the truth to yourself, and rehearse compassionate ways of talking about it with others.

This is not an easy task. Early in life, according to Rogers, most of us discovered that if we said what we really felt and wanted, the big important people in our lives would get unhappy with us, (and, I would add, perhaps even slap us across the face). And since we needed their love and approval, we started being good little boys and good little girls and saying whatever would get us hugs, birthday presents, and chocolate cake. If we are lucky in life, our parents and teachers help us to learn how to recognize our own feelings and tell the truth about them in conciliatory ways. But this is a complex process, and more often, our parents and teachers didn't get much help on these issues themselves, so they may not have been able to give us much help. As a result of this, many people arrive in adult life with a giant gap between what they actually feel and what the role they play says they are supposed to feel, and with no skills for closing that gap.

For example, as a child you were supposed to love your parents, right? But what if your dad came home drunk every night and hit your mom? How do you handle the gap between the fact that you're supposed to love your dad and the fact that you don't like him? These are the kinds of situations that bring people to counseling (or to the nightly six-pack of beer). And life is full of them.

It all boils down to this: Life is tough and complex, ready or not. It is always tempting to try to get what you want (or to escape what you fear) by saying or doing whatever will avoid conflict, even if that means saying things you don't really mean, doing things you don't feel good about, or just blanking out. After you've been around for a while you start to realize that the cost of this kind of maneuvering is a heavy heart.

From what I've seen, there is no secret magic wand of psychotherapy that can instantly lighten a heart thus burdened. Psychotherapists are in the same human boat as the rest of us; they get depressed and divorced and commit suicide just like

ordinary folks. You and the person you are trying to help are in the same human boat. There is no life without troubles. Roofs leak. The people you love get sick and die. Our needs turn out to be in conflict with the needs of people we care about. The best made agreements come unglued. People fall out of love. And it is always tempting to pretend that everything is just fine. But I believe very strongly that we will all like ourselves a lot more if we choose the troubles that come from being more honest and more engaged, rather than the troubles that come from various forms of conflict avoidance and self-deception, such as “I’ll feel better if I have another drink.” or “What she doesn’t know won’t hurt her.” etc.

Our truthful lives will probably not get any easier, but they will get a lot more satisfying. Good counselors, psychotherapists, mentors and friends, whatever their degree (or not), hold that knowledge for us, as we struggle to learn it and earn it. As adults there are many new possibilities open to us that were not available to us when we were children. We can learn to negotiate more of our conflicts, to confront more of our difficulties and to be honest about our feelings without being mean. So the fact is that we don’t need to run away from our problems any more. What we need is to get in touch with ourselves and to learn new skills.

A counselor is someone who does not condemn you for your evasions, mistakes or lack of skill, and believes in your worth as a person, your capacity to tell the truth and your strength to bear the truth, no matter what you’ve done up to now. That’s what makes counseling similar to being a priest, a rabbi, a minister or a really good friend. When we started pretending in order to please others at age three or four, that was the only way we could figure out how to get what we wanted. Now that we are adults we are capable of learning to tell the truth in conciliatory ways and we are capable of getting a lot more of what we want just by being courageous enough to ask for it. A good counselor, whether that person is a peer-counselor or a psychiatrist, is someone who invites us out of the role of maneuvering child and into the role of straightforward adult.

A counselor won’t force you to tell the truth. It wouldn’t be your truth if it were forced, it would

just be one more thing you were saying to keep someone off your back. But a counselor is willing to hear how you actually feel. In this approach there are no bad feelings, there are only bad actions. It’s OK to hate your drunken father; it’s not OK to pick up a gun and shoot him. A big part of counseling is teaching people to make that distinction. In fact, the more people can acknowledge their feelings, the less they need to blindly act them out.

It’s not the counselor’s job to pull that stuff out of people; it’s the counselor’s job to be there to receive it and acknowledge it when it comes out in its own time. And to encourage the new skills and all the little moments of honesty that help a person toward a deeper truthfulness. There’s a direct link between skill and awareness at work here. People are reluctant to acknowledge problems they feel they can’t do anything about. As counseling conversations help a person to feel more confident about being able to talk things over and talk things out, a person may become more willing to face and confront conflicts and problems.

As we realize that the counselor accepts us warts and all, clumsy coping maneuvers and all, we start to accept ourselves more. We are not angels and we are not devils. We are just ordinary human beings trying to figure how to get through life. There is a lot of trial and error along the way and that is nothing to be ashamed of. No one, absolutely no one, can learn to be human without making mistakes. But it is easy to imagine, when I am alone with my mistakes, that I am the stupidest, crummiest person in the world. A good counselor, (...friend, minister, parent, support group member) is someone who helps us develop a more realistic and forgiving picture of ourselves.

These relationships based on deep acceptance help to free us from the fantasy of being all-good or all-bad, help to free us from the need to keep up appearances. Thus, we can start to acknowledge and learn from whatever is going on inside us. Freed from the need to defend our mistakes, we can actually look at them, and get beyond the need to repeat them. But these are hard things to learn alone. It really helps if someone accompanies us along that road.

Sometimes you will be the receiver of that acceptance and sometimes the giver. Whichever role you happen to play at a given moment, it's helpful to understand that honest, caring, empathic conversations (Carl Rogers' big three), just by themselves, set in motion a kind of deep learning that has come to be known as "healing." "Healing" is a beautiful word and a powerful metaphor for positive change. But "healing" can also be a misleading word because of the way it de-emphasizes learning and everyone's capacity to learn new ways of relating to people and navigating through life.

Here are five of the "deep learnings" that I see going on in almost all supportive and empathic conversations.

- In paying attention to someone in a calm, accepting way, you teach that person to pay attention to themselves in just that way.
- In caring for others, you teach them to care for themselves and you help them to feel more like caring about others.
- The more you have faced and accepted your own feelings, the more you can be a supportive

witness for another person who is struggling to face and accept his or her feelings.

- In forgiving people for being human and making mistakes and having limits, you teach people to forgive themselves and start over, and you help them to have a more forgiving attitude toward others.
- By having conversations that include the honest sharing and recognition of feelings, and the exploration of alternative possibilities of action, you help a person to see that, by gradual degrees, they can start to have more honest and fruitful conversations with the important people in their lives.

These experiences belong to everyone, since they are part of being human. They are ours to learn and, through the depth of our caring, honesty and empathy, ours to give. I believe they are the heart of counseling.

What do you think of these ideas?

Reading 3-2: Peer Counseling With the Five Messages

*A three-point analysis of using the Five Messages
to help people face their problems in more satisfying ways.*

by Dennis Rivers. MA

Point 1. Life includes conflicts and difficult situations. People who are in need of emotional support and/or who show up for counseling are usually feeling some combination of fear, confusion, “stuckness”, frustration and loss. These are usually healthy distresses, signals from the person’s body-mind and life that something needs attention. (As psychology professor Lawrence Brammer points out in his book, *The Helping Relationship*, most people who need counseling and emotional support are not “mentally ill.”) From a humanistic, existential or Rogerian perspective, the point of counseling is not simply to make these distressing feelings go away, it is to encourage a person to find their own way of changing what needs to be changed, learning what needs to be learned and accepting what needs to be accepted. Here is a list of the typical kinds of life stresses that cause people to reach out for emotional support and guidance.

Afraid: (examples)

to face the feelings I’m having, (don’t know any safe way to “let off steam”)

to tell people I don’t like what they are doing

to face the mistakes I’ve made because I’ll feel ashamed,

(so I keep on making the same mistakes)

to confront people with a mistake I think they have made / are making

to admit that my needs are in conflict with the needs of important people in my life

of losing people’s love, respect and acceptance if I say what I really feel or want

Confused by changes in life, and need to develop new sense of competence and inner strength: (examples)

kids grow up and leave home -- the struggle to stay connected with them

new boss at work -- lose job -- change job -- no job

go to college or move to a new community -- no emotional support

start or end a relationship -- have to reorganize my life -- who am I now?

get pregnant -- have to make big decisions and reorganize life -- who am I now?

parents get old, need me to take care of them, feels like I’m *their* parent now

my body is changing without asking my permission, and I don’t know what to
expect next (truest for young teens & elders)

Stuck/frustrated: (examples)

in a family that I both love and hate, always colliding with other people

in a job that I don’t like, or stuck in jail -- don’t know where to go next

in a relationship that seems to have gone flat -- don’t know how to

restart some good feelings between me and my partner

Feeling a sense of loss: (examples)

my best friend moved to another town

my child died -- one of my parents died

in order to have a place of my own, I have to leave home

one of my parents became an alcoholic and I don’t like being around him/her

Point 2. People often don't know how to negotiate and how to work their way through difficult situations like the ones just listed, so they cope by using a variety of avoidance maneuvers or they act out their distress in ways that hurt themselves or others. The problem with the responses listed below is that they don't work well past the first moment.

- Deleting -- I just don't mention that I took that money out of your wallet.
- Distorting -- I say "it broke" when what happened was that I broke it.
- Generalizing -- I get mad and say "you never" or "you always" in order to avoid having to say "I'm frustrated" or "I need your help/love/time..."¹⁸
- Distracting -- I start a fight, get drunk, watch lots of TV, start a new romance, move to a new town -- all these can be done with the unconscious intention of running away from my feelings
- Pretending -- I act out feelings that I don't have in order to avoid the ones I do have. (Anger is frequently substituted for sorrow.)
- Denying -- Blanking out -- I don't feel anything and I don't know what you're talking about -- often accompanied by alcohol
- Spacing out -- I'm not really here -- I'm somewhere else -- often accompanied by drugs or alcohol. Extreme forms include going crazy to extricate oneself from what seems like an impossible situation.
- "Acting out" -- I express my distress by breaking things, hitting people, running away or doing something that will get me arrested (and out of the original problem situation).

What people actually need is consciously to express more of their feelings and more of the significance of their situation, usually in words and conversations (but it could be in drawing or clay, etc.), in order to be able to think about what is happening in their lives and feel their way to their next step. Feelings of embarrassment ("I'm no good if I've got a problem.") and lack of skill make it harder for a person to face their difficulties.

By adopting an attitude of deep acceptance, a counselor reassures a person of their fundamental worth, and thus makes it easier for people to admit their feelings and get actively engaged in changing what needs to be changed, learning what needs to be learned and accepting what needs to be accepted.

Point 3. Encouraging people to listen and express themselves with the Five Messages is one way of helping people become more directly engaged with their life challenges. Those processes of changing, learning and accepting mentioned in Point 2 require intense involvement. Working with the Five Messages is one way of overcoming one's own avoidance maneuvers -- by systematically exploring the questions, "What am I experiencing?" and "What are you experiencing?"

¹⁸ According to John Grinder and Richard Bandler in their landmark book on language and psychotherapy, deletion, distortion and generalization are the main ways that people tie themselves in knots. See Richard Bandler and John Grinder, *The Structure of Magic*, Vol. 1. Palo Alto: Science and Behavior Books. 1975.

From the Five Messages' point of view there are five different activities going on inside a person, whether that person is you or I. It would help our self-understanding if we would pay more attention to all five. And it would help our communication in conflict situations if we would express all five and listen for all five:

1. observing -- what I am seeing, hearing, touching
(a simple description of "just the facts")
2. emoting -- the emotions I am experiencing, such as joy, sorrow, frustration, fear, delight, anger, regret, etc., acknowledged in an "I statement"
3. interpreting, evaluating, associating and past wants -- a large part of my emotional response (sometimes all) to a situation can be caused by my own wants and my interpretation and evaluation of other people's actions.
4. wanting, hoping, ready to request -- what I want now in terms of action, information, conversation or promise
5. envisioning, anticipating results -- what good situation will come about if I get what I'm asking for. It helps people understand and empathize with requests when the "happy ending" is expressed as part of the request itself.

Here is an example of a person understanding and communicating her or his own feelings and wants, in a situation where it would be easy to be bossy or condescending:

The Five Messages:	Example (social worker to runaway teen):
1. What are you seeing, hearing or otherwise sensing? (facts only)	"Hi there! I'd like to talk to you for a second... is that OK? When I see you sitting out here on the street in the cold..."
2. What emotions are you feeling?	...I feel really concerned about you...
3. What interpretations, wants, needs, memories or anticipation's <u>of yours</u> support those feelings?	...because I imagine that you are going to get sick...
4. What action, information or commitment do you want now?	...and I want to ask you to come with me to our city's teen shelter...
5. What <u>positive</u> results will that action, information or commitment lead to in the future? (no threats)	...so that you can get some food to eat and have a safe place to stay tonight"

Working with the Five Messages can be a powerful and creative way of:

- becoming aware of more of what I am experiencing
- telling the truth about what I am experiencing
- listening for the truth of your experience (“listening with five ears”)
- encouraging you to say more about what you are experiencing
(by sounding you out with open-ended questions about each message)
- reflecting back elements of what another person is experiencing
(especially feelings, so that a person knows they’ve been understood)
- summarizing a big chunk of my own or your experience
- taking responsibility for my emotional responses and encouraging you, by my example, do the same

Suggested exercise: Make a list of emotional-support situations in your life in which you could use the Five Messages to deepen the quality of the emotional support you give.
