

Egan's Skilled Helper Model

This is a model used a lot in counselling or coaching situations where the object is to achieve lasting change and to empower people to manage their own problems more effectively and develop unused opportunities more fully.¹ As much of a personal tutor's role is to help students help themselves, this is a particularly useful framework.

The model has three stages which can be summarised as

- Exploration - What is going on?
- Challenging - What do I want instead?
- How might I achieve what I want?

Stage 1: Exploration

The first task is to find out your mentee's story about what is happening in their own words and then to reflect it back to them, without judgement. This involves:

- attention giving - positive body language, eye contact, etc.
- active listening - learning forward, nodding, focusing on what is being said not what you plan to say in response
- acceptance and empathy - it is vital to detach from your judgement about what you are being told. Keep your views to yourself if want to find out what's really going on. Nobody opens up in a situation where they feel judged
- paraphrasing and summarising - to check your own understanding of what has been said
- focusing - which of the issues discussed seems the most important to the mentee? Reflecting feelings - help mentees to uncover blind spots or gaps in their perceptions and assessment of the situation
- questioning - useful questions are: How did you feel about that? What were you thinking? What was that like? What else is there about that?

For some people, this is enough. Reflecting and clarifying makes the way forward obvious. However, when upset or confronted, it is often difficult to see things clearly and find one's own way out of the mire. The skilled helper can assist in identifying the blind spots, motes in eye, misperceptions.

Stage 2: Challenging

This stage involves challenging existing views - one issue at a time. Encourage the mentee to think about whether there is another way of looking at the issue. Some useful questions to do this are:

- what might this look like from another person's point of view?
- what in particular about this is a problem for you?
- if you were describing someone else in this situation, how would you describe them?
- what does she/he think/feel?
- goal setting - this is where you seek to move the mentee forward from being stuck, by identifying an area in which progress can be made

Stage 3: Action Planning

Useful questions here include:

- what are the possible ways forward in this situation?
- what of these feel best for you?
- what will you achieve if you do this?
- what will you do first and by when?

Your goal is to turn good intentions into actual results, so it is important to help your mentee to set realistic, practical and achievable targets. Make sure the targets are specific and measurable so the student can know they have been achieved. Agree a time period. Always follow up at next meeting - did the mentee do what they said they were going to? Do not judge if they haven't achieved the goal, but remind them why they committed themselves to it when you spoke before.

1. Gerald Egan, *The Skilled Helper: a problem management and opportunity development approach to helping* (7th edition, Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks Cole, 2002) and Gerald Egan, *Essentials of Skilled Helping: managing problems, developing opportunities* (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks Cole, 2006).