

## **HUMOR AND THERAPY**

The goal of counseling is to help clients feel better and act differently. All models of counseling attempt to reach this goal by creating interventions that focus on one of four areas. Each model intervenes on feelings, behaviors, thinking, and/or biochemistry. Humor can effect changes in all four areas and therefore, a counselor who learns effective uses of humor increases the potency of the counseling.

### **Humor as a Therapeutic Intervention**

To use humor effectively in counseling requires that the counselor 1. have planned humor in his/her repertoire, 2. be willing to risk using the humor, 3. have assessed the client's level of humor and his/her ability to accept humorous interventions, 4. be prepared to respond to the client's reaction to the humor, 5. be capable of taking him/her self lightly and his/her work seriously, and 6. use humor which is genuine and congruent with who the counselor is as a person. As with all therapeutic interventions the counselor must ask him/her self, "How will this humor help my client?" The counselor must avoid gratifying his/her own need to be humorous and focus on how humor will be helpful to the client.

### **Planned Spontaneity**

Many therapists are under the mistaken notion that humor cannot be developed or planned for application in the therapeutic relationship. Their argument is that to be effective humor must be spontaneous. Their vision and understanding of humor is shortsighted. Humor indeed must be spontaneous, however, equally it must be planned. The process is called planned spontaneity.

Effective therapeutic interventions are planned in that the counselor is trained to offer facilitative responses to the client. At any moment during treatment the counselor selects a particular response based on his/her knowledge of the client and what interventions might be effective with a particular client. The same concept applies to the use of therapeutic humor. The counselor, to be effective, must be prepared with "humor tools" such as cartoons, anecdotes, jokes, puns, signs, props, etc. which illustrate a wide range of psychological issues. However, the way in which these tools are utilized to intervene therapeutically with a particular client is based on the counselor's understanding of the client and the timing of the intervention. The humor is planned in that it is part of the counselor's repertoire of skills and like all interventions is used spontaneously to be most effective with the client.