
Accompanying the Suffering Person in Counselling and Psychotherapy

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The purpose of this special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Counselling* is to understand the essential components of the relationship between a distressed client and the accompanying counsellor. The concept of “suffering” encompasses personal problems and difficulties relating to life events or situations that disrupt emotional balance and adaptation.

In the first article, Palmer and Shepard present a research report on the affective experience of children in chronic pain and the experience of their family members. The authors describe a case study that both illustrates and examines the impact of a counselling approach using art. The reader is able to observe how the participants express and give meaning to their experience. The discussion of the results focusses on the usefulness of art as a component of counselling practice.

The second article by Ratté, Caouette, Dubois, and Lesage discusses fundamental dimensions of the counselling and psychotherapy process of accompanying a person who is suffering. The authors describe a co-operative research process conducted over the course of a little more than one year. First, they describe their method, then the research process, and finally, the principal findings of this exploratory research. Their results highlight the essential nature of the accompanying relationship, relating their findings to the literature on the phenomenon of the psychotherapeutic encounter from a relational viewpoint.

In the third article, Cohen and Bai propose reflection on what position to take with a distressed person during a counselling or psychotherapy intervention. The “ontological” approach, in which the counsellor tries to see the human being *behind* the symptoms, emphasizes, once again, the importance of the relationship. From this perspective, Buddhism and Taoism are seen as Oriental spiritual traditions that can contribute to defining a basic approach to accompanying the suffering person.

The fourth article, by Dubois and Ratté, proposes an existential perspective in understanding a person faced with physical disability. This article, which is both theoretical and based on the authors’ clinical experience, starts with the human desire to live in denial of vulnerability. However, when faced with a traumatic event resulting in the definitive loss of capabilities, the individual abruptly experiences mortality, with the resulting loss of illusion. In light of the work on paradoxicality, the authors suggest that the distress of a person contending with permanent disabilities is both an experience of great suffering and an opportunity for self-development.

The fifth and final text, by Schneider, describes an original conceptualization of spirituality. Similar to the philosophy of humanist psychologist Rollo May, the

author advocates a psychology of joy anchored in receptiveness to an individual's own suffering and a rediscovery of the innate human capacity to adopt a posture of reverence toward both personal existence and the world. According to the author, this posture makes it possible to escape the frantic search for certainty and culturally prescribed happiness. The reader is thus encouraged to rethink education, the work environment, and even what is meant by "democracy," introducing the need to pause and develop an awareness of self and the experience of being.

This special issue takes a particular approach to accompanying a suffering person, drawing on the experience of giving support and the authors' at times heartfelt observations. This leads to an understanding of the fundamental nature of relational conditions, even broader than theoretical approaches and intervention techniques, without denying their importance.