

# THE POWER OF CO-COUNSELING

Peak Living Network

Co-counseling is a powerful approach to emotional healing, involving two people who work together in pairs. One person is the counselor for the first half of the session, then the two people *switch roles* for the second half. We learn how to take emotional care of each other, and of ourselves, in the way that nature intended. We dare to make a significant difference to another person, and open ourselves to letting them make a similar difference to us, releasing a healing power beyond anything we had imagined.

Here are some of the reasons why co-counseling is uniquely effective:

## 1) Co-counseling a two-way system.

The bedrock of co-counseling is the special kind of relationship that you can build with another person when you make the courageous step of loving each other wholeheartedly, holding out to each other the highest expectations for your healing from the pain that has weighed you down. A two-way counseling approach unleashes the healing power of love in a way that is difficult to make happen in a professional, one-way counseling modality.

A two-way system also makes us equals, rather than setting roles that cast one person as the skilled helper and the other person as the one in need of help. Everyone needs healing, and everyone has loving attention and careful thoughtfulness to offer in return. **Equality is crucial for deep healing because so many of our deepest wounds have their roots in experiences of inequality.** The assistance that we provide while we're in the counseling role contributes to our ability to heal when it's our turn to be the client.

## 2) Co-counseling is rooted in the belief that we can heal deeply and fully.

Most emotional healing approaches, particularly professional ones, assume that our capacity for healing is quite limited. They typically don't truly believe that a truly joyous life is possible. They often send messages such as, "This pain will always be with you, but you'll learn better ways to live with it." They're aiming for small improvements, not for peak living, because that's all they think we can bring about.

In the Peak Living Network, we believe that people are inherently loving, intelligent, and excited to be alive, and are courageous fighters for justics. Anything we see that doesn't fit that image is the result of a way in which the person was severely emotionally harmed, or was systematically trained to behave oppressively, or a combination of the two. The very fact of believing in the essential goodness of the human being, including your own essential goodness, makes a visible contribution making it be true.

### **3) Discharge is the most powerful healing channel we have.**

Laughter, crying, trembling, and storming, *when they get the opportunity to function deeply and at length*, have more healing power than any other known approach to emotional recovery and wellness. Taken together, they form our bodies' inherent plan for keeping us emotionally well; that's what those processes were designed to do, **that's why we have them.**

Yet these inherent emotional releases, which we call "discharge," are absent from virtually all approaches to emotional healing. At best they are viewed as side-effects of healing, rather than being recognized as the actual essence of how healing happens.

### **4) Healing works much better with a wide community of support from other people who are also pursuing their own healing.**

In the Peak Living Network, we integrate co-counseling and support into our daily lives through short phone sessions, participating in weekly or monthly support groups, joining supportive discussions on the PLN Slack space, and attending PLN gatherings. You have a whole network behind you cheering for your life to get better and better.

### **5) In co-counseling, we attend to the reality that many of our deepest emotional injuries are rooted in systems of oppression.**

Many of our deepest wounds come from ways we've been repeatedly and profoundly mistreated because of groups we're part of (or used to be part of) that are targeted for systematic derision, exploitation, and violence in modern society. Unfortunately, most healing approaches avoid talking about oppression, so it becomes the elephant in the room; we can't heal from its devastating effects if we can't talk about it. The mistaken notion that questions of emotional healing can be separated from questions of social justice ("political issues") is a major obstacle to recovery in our times.

Moreover, as we start to recognize the effects that oppression has had on us and on the people we love, and as we begin to heal from both the external and internal tolls it has taken on us, we come to recognize that our individual healing is deeply connected to the need to take those systems of oppression apart in the world.

### **6) Co-counselors use a wide variety of counseling techniques, and are always working on improving those techniques and developing new ones.**

Co-counseling should not be confused with notions of "peer counseling," which assume a low level of both skill and involvement on the part of the counselor, who is expected primarily to just listen. In co-counseling, we strive to become highly skilled counselors for each other, and to keep developing our abilities life-long.

And, ironically, we often use a much wider range of approaches than many professional

therapists do. We take the focus off of analysis, instead emphasizing techniques that help us feel and discharge our painful emotions.

**7) Co-counseling is *free*.**

Co-counseling is accessible to everyone who can listen well to others, because sessions don't cost anything; you exchange counseling time, not money. You may choose to spend a little money on co-counseling training, but you don't have to; you can learn co-counseling from PLN videos on YouTube and from the PLN co-counseling manual, *The Healing Partnership*, which are all free.