

TERMINATION OVERVIEW

To terminate, dictionaries tell us, is to bring or come to an end, to conclude, to discontinue the employment of, to stop. Termination is of special significance in professional counseling. Therapists know how critical it is to discontinue the counseling relationship in a proper way. Anger, depression, and misunderstanding can follow the severing of critical relationships that have not been adequately prepared for and explained in advance.

What has been learned in the field of counseling is also of value to business, education, and ministry. Wise managers and supervisors know how important it is to fire a person in the right way; it is best done in a process of evaluation and planning for departure. Teachers who have gotten especially close to a class realize the hurt and confusion of students who do not receive adequate explanation and time for termination.

The pastor or youth worker who is leaving a parish or group in which he or she is loved, must be sure to make the last months and weeks a time of helpful termination. Anyone who has experienced the closeness of a helpful small group also knows the importance of leave-taking, of expressions of sadness and of celebration.

Termination is like death for several reasons. It is, first of all, because the end of a group or ministry is a serious separation and loss. Whenever anyone loses something precious—a treasure, a specially loved pet, a position, one's reputation, or a close relationship—it is a loss which can feel something like death. And in such cases, there is bound to be some grief.

Another reason is this: those who have studied human small group dynamics see a life-cycle of group experiences. Small groups, especially those that come together to support one another or to foster growth, tend to go through a birth period, a struggle to grow, a stage of maturity, and finally, an end or death of that specific group as it has fulfilled its purpose.

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and others have sought to help those who suffer the death of a loved one. They have identified the stages of grieving:

- Denial. Not accepting the news as true.
- Anxiety or pining (anger). Confused emotional responses.
- Bargaining. The subconscious tries to get the loved one back—sometimes in prayer.
- Depression. The reality and finality of separation sinks in.

- Recovery and reorganization. Adequate grief prepares one to move from concentration on the loss to the gift of that relationship-moving from the reality of death to new life.

Knowledge of these natural stages has enabled many counselors and pastors to help people in deep grief. Such understanding can also aid youth workers in the work of termination when forced to leave loved ones, good friends, or significant acquaintances.

Termination affects various persons in different ways. The educational setting tends to institutionalize and therefore minimize the effects of termination. Everyone knows and expects the term to end and graduation to take away those who have found a special place in one's experience. But, in cases of unusual significance or closeness, and in the case of teachers and classes of younger ages, school terminations can still be a serious loss. Teachers and youth leaders may find some unusual dynamics in the class or youth group as an end draws near. It is time to deal with this issue for the good of many.

Termination may be denied or avoided. Especially those who have not worked through the pain of some earlier loss may find themselves avoiding or skipping the necessity of adequate farewells. Or some may find themselves making false promises-commitments to write or visit that may be difficult to keep. Others may go through each termination with an underlying anxiety-never honestly facing the responsibility of proper leave-taking. In some cases, such people may find themselves in a general depression.

Know that inadequate termination may actually lessen the value of a relationship or a group/class experience. The gift of a relationship may be slighted, the knowledge, attitudes, and skills of a class or group experience diminished because of a sense of incompleteness or being cheated.

HOW TO HANDLE TERMINATION

As in other grief situations, the principles of termination can be reduced to simple suggestions:

- Accept the end and loss of the relationships. Of course, this may not be easy. The child in each of us doesn't like to accept the pain and difficulty of life, but would like things to be simple and nice. Tough love demands that we accept hurt for one another's good and when life's exigencies demand it. J.B. Phillips in one place paraphrases St. Paul as saying "Accept life..."; this can be good advice to all. The mature person, after and along with initial grief, can see the gift which is left after the passing of our dearest relationships.

- Talk about the end and loss of relationships. The counselor knows that at least six sessions before the concluding one, he or she must refer to the end of the therapeutic and helpful relationship: "We won't be getting together anymore; you'll be on your own." So the teacher of a class that has come to love her, the pastor being transferred, and the youth leader who is to leave a group, must prepare those who they have taught or served that they are going. It should be done more than once, for some will not want to hear it or will distort the message.
- Celebrate the end and loss of relationships. Funerals of some kind are almost universal, and the lack of such rites is one factor that makes divorce so difficult for the rejected party. There is an appropriate way to terminate each kind of relationship. If stumped when trying to decide what might be appropriate, then, discuss it. Talking about it helps those who are having trouble accepting it, and it prepares everyone for celebrating it.

IMPLICATIONS

1. Termination is of universal interest because it is part of all human experience. One of the prime failures of schools, and sometimes churches, is that they teach the mind and neglect the vital emotions that also need tending and education. Termination deals with feelings! And they are feelings felt, and often feared, by youngsters as well as those of all ages.
2. This topic discussion can best be used in a discussion format-for a group or class. Questions such as the following can get the discussion going:
 - Who have you missed the most in your life? How did they say goodbye to you?
 - Did you ever wish that someone had said goodbye to you a little better than they did?
 - Have you ever found it difficult to say goodbye to someone?
 - Did you know that the expression, "goodbye", originally came from "God be with you."? How might that help?

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