

## Termination of Case Work-Relationship : Some Reflections

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The effective termination of casework relationship is as important for the success of casework as is the establishment of rapport with the client. How neatly the case worker "settles his dust" or "ties up his package" determines the ease with which the client can assume complete responsibility for himself and the extent to which his progress can be consolidated. But, unfortunately, complexities involved in the termination of case work relationship do not receive much attention either from social work practitioners or in the literature.

The relationship is never 'ended.' Effective case work opens up possibilities of client-growth which are never finished. Yet, there comes a time in the process where either the client or the worker feels that the client should be placed completely on his own resources.

According to Frank Itzin (1975) two elements need to be considered in terminating a case: the relationship between the client and worker and accountability of the worker to the client and to the agency.

Generally, the case work process tends to terminate spontaneously. The client-responses tend to become more positive and self-directive towards the end of the therapeutic process. There are other cues which the case worker can use to effect closure. He can terminate the relationship when he feels that the goals of case work have been achieved, or when lack of progress does not warrant, in his opinion, continuation of the relationship. In many cases once the problem is delimited the time limit of the process is structured in such a way that when this limit is reached, closure proceedings are begun.\*\*

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\*\* Some feel that this type of arbitrary termination has many drawbacks. For instance, the client may not be ready to terminate, or may be ready long before the structured limit. However, it is also felt that the client's anxiety, which often accompanies lengthy case work, is alleviated when he can anticipate the approximate time of closure.

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Often the case worker's skill and patience are tried by the dependant client who resists assuming personal responsibility for his life situation. As Berger (1969) says "the case worker who encounters such client is more in the position of the mother of the handicapped-child than of the mother of the normal child. Sometimes the mother could free the child only by a radical severing of ties, with the result that separateness and growth become equated with separation and abandonment. Such a client uses continued illness as a means of holding on to the therapist as he makes a desperate attempt to recreate the only satisfactory environment he has ever known". This can be handled by explaining the underlying anxieties and feelings of desertion, to the client. A useful procedure with this type of client is to space interviews at increasingly longer intervals prior to final closure.

Regardless of how eagerly the client looks forward to termination, at the verge of termination, he may sometimes, hesitate to sever the final cord of dependency. Understanding this ambivalence, the worker usually has to assume the initiative in discussing termination after he concludes that he has clear-cut indications of the client's basic readiness for it. According to Holland, G. A. (1965) in doing so, two objectives are accomplished. First, the worker indicates his confidence in the client's competence to make his own adjustments without the worker's assistance. Second, he relieves the client of his concern that he might interpret his (client's) desire for independence as a kind of personal rejection.

In some cases, the case worker who

experiences the satisfaction of being important in the life of another person also may be reluctant to end the relationship. Such a situation may lead to the failure of the case work process itself, for the worker attempting to satisfy his own emotional need in such a way that his behaviour interferes with the growth of the client. Self-awareness on the part of the worker is essential to avoid this pitfall. As Gardon Hamilton (1964) pointed out "insight and self-awareness are pre-requisite in an ethical use of relationship". Only if the worker understands to some extent his own motivation can he leave the client free to establish himself securely, first with the case worker and then later with others. Again to quote Hamilton (1964). "The more a worker moves in the direction of therapeutically-oriented case work, the greater are the demands upon him for self knowledge and for the more complete use of the self."

Brammer and Shostrom (1968) put forward four steps in the closure of the relationship which can be of use to the case worker in the termination of the case.

The first step in the process is verbal preparation. The client is reminded of the time limits agreed upon in the initial interview. The worker should then work at a final summary statement with the client. This may be a general review of accomplishments, arrangements for referrals, or follow-up or preparation of a written summary. It is important that the client knows what he is going to do next and that he leaves with clear notion about the goals, results, possible courses of action, and limitations of the interviews.\*

\* A loose type of relationship over an extended period may have a prophylactic effect which would prevent further deterioration of the client's problem-solving ability.

Another step the case worker may take is to leave the door open for possible follow-up.

A variation on the third step is possible referral. If the worker has gone as far as he feels capable of going or if another type of therapist or agency is going to take responsibility for the relationship, referral technique can be used. Here, it is important that the worker structures the nature of the referral in order to pave the way for easy transition to the new relationship without revealing the nature of that new relationship in advance.

The fourth step is the formal leave taking. Here the emphasis should be on parting with a cordial and confident tone.

Thus, the case work relationship is only a training ground, and a relationship pro-tempore. It exists so that it may cease to exist.

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