



# Coaching Skills

A Handbook

Second Edition

Jenny Rogers

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*Jenny Rogers*



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# Introduction

Like many others who now earn their living as coaches, coaching found me. More than a decade ago, I was newly back in the BBC, running its management development programmes. Soon, I began to get tentative phone calls: 'I've done all the courses, but now I'm in a new job and I need to get to grips with this or that issue – can you help?' Or, 'I've got this editor in my team. He's too senior for a course but he urgently needs help with his leadership style. Anything you could do?' Some of these queries had the air of 'Psst! I need help – but don't tell anyone!' Others just assumed that it was only right and proper that tailored and time-effective help was going to be available for some of the most senior people in the organization. Significantly, there was no accepted word then for the process that people were requesting. I believe we referred to it as 'one-to-one sessions', in a fuzzy fumbling for a word or phrase that would accurately describe what would happen.

This book represents the material I wish had been available to me then. Knowing then what I know now would have saved so much time and spared clients so many of my well-intentioned but clumsy early attempts at coaching.

I have written the book with a number of different readerships in mind, but they are all united by one thing: a wish to understand what coaching is, how it works and how to do it. This could mean that you are in a different job or role but are wondering what this coaching stuff is and whether you could make a living at it. You could be working in a professional role, such as training, that looks a little like coaching, and may even think you already do it informally. You could be a trainee coach, resolutely committed to the idea of improving your practice. You might be a therapist or counsellor, considering turning your existing skills to a different kind of clientele and wondering what that would mean for you in practice. You could be a much more experienced coaching practitioner looking for an affirming benchmark.

Reading a book is no substitute for training as a coach, though my sincere hope is that it will support and boost the training that you do undertake. Only through training will you get to identify your own quirks, habits, strengths and weaknesses because the only real way to discover how to practise as a coach is to do it and then to get feedback on how you do it. We reckon in our firm that it takes about 1000 hours of working with clients to become reasonably adept as a coach – about the same as it takes to learn the basics of a foreign language or a musical instrument. To be able to work with

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more or less any client probably needs at least another 2000 hours obtained over a number of years of practice: a certain amount of real time needs to pass. This is why coaching is more than just learning techniques, essential though these are, especially in your earliest days of practice.

Writing this book has emerged from a number of strands of experience. First, I have now had eighteen years of working as a coach and many thousands of hours at it with many hundreds of clients from a wide variety of sectors. My experience has been as an executive coach – that is, I work more or less exclusively with senior people from organizations. However, the basic principles I look at here will apply whatever type of coaching interests you.

This experience has been hugely enriched by working over the last nine years in training other coaches and working as a supervisor with people who are studying for their Diploma in Coaching. Seeing and hearing at first hand what newer coaches struggle with has been enormously valuable. It's so easy sitting placidly in your chair, listening to the recording of a coaching session, blithely free of the need to make those split second decisions that the coach had to make. The wrong turnings are so much more obvious than when you are in that hot seat yourself. It is also humbling – sometimes hearing wonderful coaching from naturally gifted coaches who need little in the way of direction. However, mostly this experience has shown me what the common difficulties are and has given me useful insight into how to guide people towards the approaches that will work.

I am often asked what it takes to be a great coach. There is a quick answer and a slower, more thoughtful one. The quick answer is that as a great coach you have a self-confident fascination with how people achieve their potential and a wish to go with them on that journey; unbounded curiosity about people; intuition into what makes them tick; a high degree of self-knowledge; the self-discipline to keep yourself out of the way, and the ability to resist giving advice or wanting to be right.

The slower answer is that you can't become a great coach by wishing to become a great coach. You will be trying too hard, an understandable and common trap for newer coaches. Coaching well means managing a constant state of ambiguity. You have to have everything I described in the previous paragraph, yet in practice there is so much more. For instance, you have to have curiosity about people, yet know when that curiosity is coming from your agenda and not the client's. You have to have intuition and yet know when to hold it back. You have to be able to resist giving advice and yet know when it is the one time in a hundred when it is not only appropriate but also vital to do so. You have to keep yourself out of the way and yet you have to be fully there and a real presence for your client – you are not a coaching cypher, self-restrained to the point of disappearing. You have to like people and yet be able to control much of your need to have them like you because you will often have to challenge and be tough. Coaching is a serious business, and yet,

as one of my colleagues once pointed out, you will continually hear boisterous laughter emanating from our coaching rooms.

This is the territory I have covered in this book. I assume little or no coaching experience but I also assume your own curiosity and commitment. I discuss and describe coaching techniques but I also put forward some ways of transcending the techniques so that your coaching can attain the seamless and flowing quality that the best coaching has. Listening to or watching wonderful coaching sounds like hearing the only conversation that could ever have happened on that topic – and yet another equally excellent coach could have had another quite different and equally effective conversation.

Anyone writing this kind of book hits the problem of how to represent client experience. I want to bring the experience of coaching to life – for both coach and client – and the best way to do this is through real case studies. Yet, as a coach, I promise my clients confidentiality. I have resolved this problem through a rigorous and wholehearted process of disguise, often blending more than one client's story while staying true to the real-life themes. When in doubt, I have checked the disguise with the original client.

I do not believe that anyone writing a book on coaching can approach it as a blank sheet. Many of the influences which have gone into writing this one have probably disappeared into an internalized set of assumptions about human behaviour, going right back to my good fortune as a postgraduate student in encountering thinkers such as Henri Tajfel, Michael Argyle and other social psychologists of the 1960s. The great Kurt Lewin, with his insistence on turning theory into action-centred research, has been a constant source of thought-provoking ideas.

My thinking has also been profoundly affected by the work of Carl Jung and Isabel Myers; by the humanistic-existentialist writers and practitioners such as Viktor Frankl and Irvin Yalom; by the Gestalt school; by Carl Rogers and his Person Centred Therapy; by Transactional Analysis; and by Gerard Egan's Skilled Helper model. Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), which itself developed from therapy, has been an influence. All of us in the coaching field also owe a debt to the Coaches Training Institute in California for beginning the process of synthesizing coaching practice into a workable and elegant model. I have acknowledged these and other specific sources throughout the book wherever I am aware of them, which may not be in every case. My own blend of these and other ideas is eclectic, opinionated and personal. This is not a textbook.

I have also been profoundly affected by my luck in working with excellent colleagues and associates in our firm, Management Futures, and our sister company, Coaching Futures. Together we have produced an approach of which I am tremendously proud. I particularly acknowledge the superb standards set by Phil Hayes, Jan Campbell Young, Sandra Grealy and Julia Vaughan Smith, all of whose ideas and commitment to coaching have been a

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constant inspiration to me, and the support, professional and personal, of my husband, Alan Rogers.

In this second edition I have added a new chapter on coaching and change and have extended the original material on goal-setting. This is in response to training and supervising many hundreds more beginner coaches and realizing how critical both these areas are in coaching successfully. I have also updated and extended material in other chapters, particularly Chapter 9, as my own understanding about what constitutes good coaching has matured.

As in the first edition I have tried to convey the real life flavour of coaching with all its typical ups and downs. Many books on coaching, perhaps unwittingly, give the impression that coaching is a kind of fairytale. The client is puzzled or miserable, the coach waves a magic wand, the client lives happily ever after. Beginner coaches who read these books are often secretly dismayed by the stubborn refusal of their actual clients to behave like the ones in the fairytales. The reality is that however experienced the coach and however willing the client, sometimes there are semi-successes but no discernible happy ending, sometimes there are florid failures, or even worse in some ways, there is no proper ending at all. The same is surely true of every other profession so why should coaching be any different? It is also true that there can be much learning from a flop, as long as you know why it has occurred. I hope this book will help you identify the likely reasons for noble failures as well as for glorious successes.

In the four years between the first edition and this one, coaching has grown exponentially as a profession but it is still the case that to be a coach is to have a wonderfully privileged job. It is never less than demanding and never dull. Clients ask you to walk with them at key moments in their lives and careers, sharing their triumphs and disappointments, their vulnerabilities, their hopes, their dreams. Coach and client work on making the substantial changes that will bring about the ideal world that the client wants. Major changes can prove to be possible in a relatively short time. The discussions have an openness, candour and directness that few other conversations are likely to have. The Chinese sage who pronounced that 'What we teach is what we most want to learn' was completely correct. As a self-development process *for the coach*, you can't beat coaching and yet you will never get to the end of it. There will never be a point where you can stand back and say, 'Well, I made it – I'm now the complete and perfect coach.' That is one of many factors which will make your likely learning lifelong.

I invite you through this book to learn how utterly stretching, fascinating and enjoyable this process is.

# 1 What is coaching?

This question can puzzle both coaches and clients. It's the question I get asked most frequently when new organizations approach my company about potential work and it's the one that we find we must get out of the way early on our training courses for would-be coaches. There seem to be a number of reasons, many of them arising because the word *coach* is used to mean so many different things.

'Coach' may suggest a teacher earning extra money by helping your reluctant children through a loathed maths or French exam. Or it may suggest the pushy parent figure in tennis who also acts as coach and manager to a prodigiously talented child. More attractive images may be from other kinds of sports coaching, especially perhaps in its more modern manifestations. Here a coach may be a clever, sophisticated and highly paid guru figure whose tantalizing and competitively sought coaching secrets are eventually revealed in books and newspaper articles.

This idea is still clearly alive and well, as I discovered to my dismay when I rang one client's office to hear his colleague shout, 'John! It's your guru on the phone!'

If not guru, there are also associations with management consulting which may not help. For instance, I often heard it alleged as a proven fact (needless to say it was no such thing) that one former Director-General of the BBC was merely the puppet of the McKinsey consultants who had a permanent office a few doors down the corridor. 'X [one McKinsey man] works his arms and legs and another works his mouth' was how it was described. I admit to having wondered if there was truth in this scurrilous rumour when, the only time I appeared before the great man and his Board, I was surprised to find X sitting smugly at his right hand.

In some organizations, having a coach is still unusual and is reserved for very senior people with performance problems. The underlying and unflattering association is with children who have been insufficiently socialized. The intention can therefore be frank corrective training and to need coaching is then understandably seen as being a sign of shameful failure. These clients will not want others to know that they are having coaching. One client of mine invented a convoluted and entirely fictional dental problem to explain his absences from the office while he had his sessions with me because he was the first person in his company to have a coach and felt that he could not risk the assumption being made that he was therefore a weakling.

'Is this outplacement in advance?' another client asked me suspiciously. This was at a time some years ago when I was relatively new to the field. Alas, I came to see that in her case it probably was outplacement in advance, and that her company was seeking to show that it had done everything it reasonably could before sacking her. In this case I had been manipulated by the organization as much as she.

While these are recurrent concerns and confusions, it is probably much more common to be troubled by an underlying comparison with psychotherapy and counselling. Many potential and actual clients ask worriedly about this. When coaching is described to them, they may say, with visible suspicion, 'This sounds like counselling!', implying that if coaching is just counselling in disguise, then it's not for them, thank you. In spite of much more enlightenment in the way we view mental health, there are still many hugely unhelpful clusters of associations with needing help in this area of our lives.

It's clear, for instance, that even the most apparently macho men are likely to be affected by post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after being directly involved in wars, disasters and their aftermath. Maybe it's especially the most macho men who are affected by PTSD. Yet there is still shame associated with owning up to needing help. The thrum of underlying belief is that we 'should' be able to deal with these things on our own. These are not rational concerns. They have to do with fearing the power of our own emotions, of losing control, of the veneer of grownup-ness being ripped away and, even worse, the fear of florid insanity.

Some of the older traditions of the psychotherapy trade could also be unhelpful. In the earliest years of therapy, it was common for the therapist or analyst to insist on multiple sessions every week over several years. Those were, of course, more leisured days for the typically privileged clientele of the pioneers, but this practice has also been open to the charge of creating dependency. The racy way the early protagonists wrote about their work can also easily provoke scoffing and incredulity. Both Freud and Jung, for instance, wrote case studies which are really fabulously baroque mystery stories in which the analyst is the detective-hero, the puzzle of the patient's misery solved by finding a diagnostic label such as *neuroticism* or *narcissism*.

The themes that unite all of these concerns are basic to understanding what coaching is. Take it as axiomatic that all clients, whoever they are and however grand, successful and important they are, fear two things: vulnerability and loss of control. They are right in these fears because coaching is about change and to change you do make yourself vulnerable and you may indeed not appear to have the degree of control you want over your life while the changes are happening.

## A definition of coaching: the six principles

My definition is a simple one that conceals complexity.

The coach works with clients to achieve speedy, increased and sustainable effectiveness in their lives and careers through focused learning. The coach's sole aim is to work with the client to achieve all of the client's potential – as defined by the client.

Behind this definition there are six important principles which help differentiate coaching from some other apparently similar disciplines.

### Principle 1: The client is resourceful

The client has the resources to resolve his or her problems. The client has not come to be *fixed*, though there may be others in the client's world (e.g. a more senior manager paying the bill) who believe that this is the purpose of the coaching. Clients may share this belief sometimes: 'If you were me, what would you do?' Only the client can really know what to do because only the client knows the full story and only the client can actually implement the action and live with the results.

This does not preclude the coach from offering useful information, but it is the client's choice whether or not to use it.

### Principle 2: The coach's role is to develop the client's resourcefulness through skilful questioning, challenge and support.

It follows from the first principle that the role of the coach is not advice-giving. When you give advice you imply that you know best and that the client is a lesser person. When you do this you will most probably get sucked into the 'Why don't you?' ... 'Yes, but' game:

Why don't you lose a bit of weight?  
Yes, I agree I should but I can't do it yet ...

Advice-giving also leads to dependency – the opposite of what you are trying to achieve as a coach. There is more about this in Chapter 2. The coach's role is to ask the penetrating questions which take clients into territory they have never previously considered. In doing this, clients will build on their own resourcefulness.

**Principle 3: Coaching addresses the whole person – past, present and future**

Coaches working in the corporate field sometimes see their role as strictly being about work. I believe that this is a mistake. My experience is that difficulties in the professional lives of clients are usually paralleled by difficulties in their personal lives. Also, relationship patterns formed in early life always have a bearing. Coaching is not psychoanalysis, but unless you know a little about early life and issues in current life beyond work, you are unlikely to be able to work with the client as fully as is possible when you and the client take a more rounded view.

**Principle 4: The client sets the agenda**

This is where there is a difference with teaching. There is no set agenda with coaching. The coach may indeed have a mental model of, for instance, effective leadership, but if this is not a concern for the client, then it should not appear on the agenda of the sessions. The agenda is set by the client. When the client agenda is exhausted, then the coaching must stop, even if only temporarily.

**Principle 5: The coach and the client are equals**

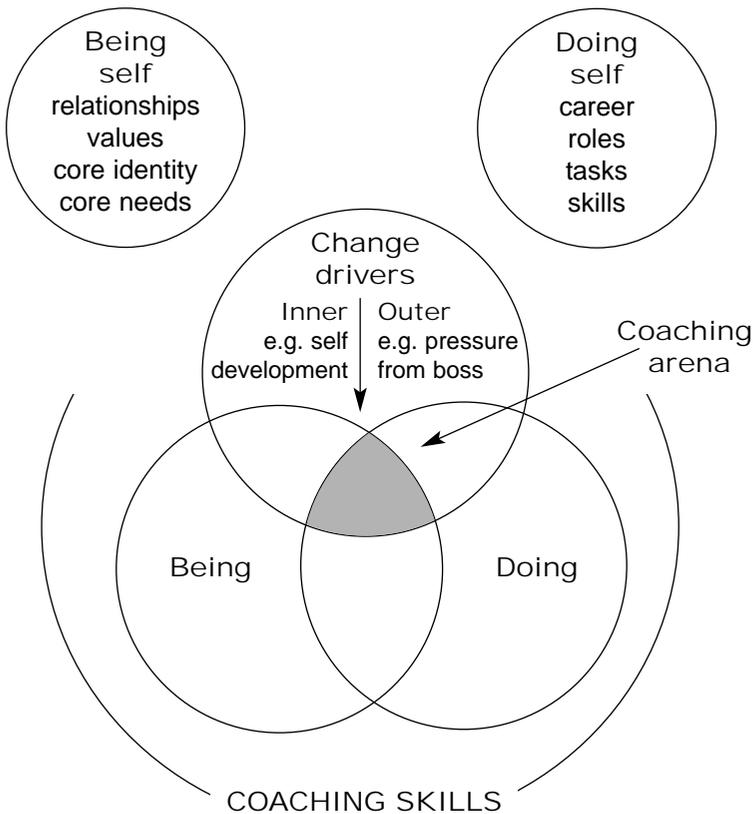
The coach and the client work together in a partnership of equals. The model is colleague–colleague, adult–adult, because it is based on total respect. Suspending judgement is essential. Where you cannot respect a client for some reason, or where the client does not respect you, it is unlikely that your coaching can be effective and you must end or not start it.

**Principle 6: Coaching is about change and action**

Clients come to coaching because they want something to change. Essentially they want to be more effective and the core purpose of coaching is to close the gap between potential and performance. The role of the coach is to help them achieve this increased effectiveness. It follows therefore that you cannot coach a client who does not want to change – so third party referrals should always be regarded with initial caution. Equally, if a client says they want to change, but seems to be unable or unwilling to do so in practice, then the coaching may have to stop – or you could consider referring the client to another coach.

My assumption is that as coaches we are dealing with both the being self and the doing self. In our practice, we represent this whole approach to coaching in diagrammatic form, as in Figure 1.1.

The being self is the inner personality and the sum total of the



**Figure 1.1** A model of coaching

experiences, attitudes and roles that we play or have played in our lives. It is about core values, who we are rather than what we do.

The doing self is the externally focused person with tasks to accomplish and skills with which to do them. It is usually the doing self which initially presents for coaching. For instance, 'Please help me become more effective in my work'; 'Show me how to run a meeting better'; 'Help me write a proper CV', and so on.

The request for coaching is always triggered by change. If there is no change then it is unlikely that you have a genuine client. The change could be internally triggered – a being self area. Birthdays with a nought or a five on the end may well be cause for reappraisal of life and direction. So may a serious illness or a major change in personal status such as marriage, having children, the death of a parent or a divorce. Alternatively, or often in addition, there is externally imposed change. The organization may be losing or

gaining staff, the client's role may have changed through promotion or restructuring. Skills that seemed perfectly adequate before may not look so impressive now. There may be a new boss who demands a different kind of performance with consequent pressure for change in individuals. The client may have actually lost their job or be threatened with doing so. The crossover area in the middle creates the agenda for coaching.

This is why it is essential to take a whole-life perspective and to accept the client's initial agenda as merely the starting point for the coaching. The inexperienced coach often fails to act on the instinct which tells him or her that this is the correct way to go. As a new coach myself I was sometimes far too overawed by the seniority of my clients to ask them what felt then like impertinent questions about their backgrounds and childhoods. I quickly discovered what a mistake this was. One example will do.

**Peter**

Peter was referred to me by his HR Director. She had grave doubts about whether his promotion had been the right decision. Her description of him was that he was 'a very clever but shouty bully' and would not last long in his new senior role if he continued to use the tactics that were all too familiar to his previous staff.

We had two sessions before I realized that his conversation was full of 'musts' and 'shoulds'. Curiosity aroused, I did at last ask the questions about childhood and about his current personal life. Peter then readily told me that he was the elder son of famous and overpowering parents. Growing up, he had the impression that nothing he could do would ever be good enough but you had to keep on trying because one day you might get it right. You must never admit to a mistake because that showed your soft side. The only way you could get people to do things was fighting constantly, keeping them up to the mark through pressure – the way his own outstanding scholastic and early work career had been managed by his parents and teachers. He had a happy though occasionally turbulent marriage.

I did not believe my role was to be his psychotherapist – there was no exploration of the all-too-evident damage his childhood had done to him. However, Peter himself quickly made the connections between this experience and his current behaviour. Previously he had assumed that shouting and putting people right was the only way you could get them to do things. Uncovering, naming and challenging those core assumptions created the turning point. My work with him was about linking the tender and patient behaviour he was able to show at home with some high-quality observation of how other managers at work got better results with less effort. I will not claim, and nor would he, that he is a reformed character, but he now operates with a great deal more subtlety and a great deal less negative energy.

## What happens in a coaching session: an overview

Typically coach and client will meet on the coach's premises for a series of hour-and-a-half or two-hour sessions over a period of a few months. The most common pattern for me is six two-hour sessions over a four-month period. In the United States, most coaching seems to be delivered in hour-long or half-hour sessions by telephone and at more frequent intervals.

The coach prepares the client for the first session with some introductory paperwork and 'exercises', including the client's draft of their goals for the whole coaching programme. Typically goals take two forms:

- *Dilemmas*: which of two or three paths should I follow?
- *Puzzles*: how can I make something or someone more comfortable, work better, be more focused, get past a block?

Examples might be:

- improve an important relationship;
- manage my time better;
- make more money;
- decide what I want to do as the next step in my career;
- tackle performance problems in my team;
- restructure my organization;
- learn how to make more convincing presentations;
- acquire the skills I need in a new role;
- launch myself into a freelance career;
- tackle the stress in my life;
- get a better balance between work and home;
- leave full-time work and decide whether retirement is something I want.

Normally there will be two or three topics in each session. The client will leave with a plan of action around each of their goals. The first part of the next session reviews how the 'homework' has gone. This is an obvious point, but easy to miss: the changes themselves happen outside and between sessions.

As coaching grows in popularity and familiarity, it is developing a number of distinct branches.

*Life coaches* concentrate on whole-life dilemmas: personal relationships, life balance, planning for the future. Life coaching is now developing its own distinct branches, and we can expect this to continue as more coaches enter the market. For instance, I know life coaches who specialize in relationship

coaching; relationship coaches who only deal with widowed or divorced women. There are coaches whose client niche is women returning to work after having had children and others whose niche is health and fitness. Some life coaches have also successfully blurred boundaries with executive coaching, specializing, for instance, in coaching small business owners or professional service firms such as solicitors or architects. An advertisement to attract new coaches into training mentions *wealth coaching*, but I am not sure I understand what that is. It is also increasingly the case that people who offer all kinds of familiar advisory services are now describing what they do as coaching, so debt counsellors are now *debt coaches*, acting tutors offer *audition coaching* and marriage guidance has been repackaged as *relationship coaching*.

*Sports coaches* increasingly work from the core coaching principles I describe in this book, an approach often described, confusingly, in the popular press as 'sports psychology'. They may work with individuals or with teams to improve sporting performance.

*Executive coaches'* work is generally concentrated on the most senior executives in large or medium-sized organizations. Clients expect familiarity with and track record in management. Potential topics for coaching include everything in the life-coaching agenda plus any and every aspect of running organizations. As with life coaching, executive coaching is also developing its own niches – new leaders, managing the first 100 days in a new job, retirement planning for older leaders, stress and burnout, finance, careers, finding a new job after redundancy, interview preparation, presentation skills, voice, image, strategy, and many others. Fees for executive coaching are generally many times higher than fees for life coaching.

## **Differences between coaching and other disciplines**

### **Coaching and psychiatry**

A psychiatrist is a doctor trained in treating severe mental illnesses. Entry to the profession is strictly controlled by licensing after lengthy training, and practice is monitored and audited. If your licence is withdrawn, you cannot practise. Continuous updating is mandatory.

You might see a psychiatrist if your GP believes you could benefit from stabilizing medication prescribed by a specialist or if for some reason you feel you have temporarily lost your way in some form that feels serious. Psychiatrists also deal with disabling forms of mental illness such as schizophrenia, severe post-natal depression, drug and alcohol dependency or a chronic depression. Forensic psychiatrists specialize in people whose illnesses or personality disorders involve danger to themselves or others.

Successful therapy often involves drugs as well as a 'talking cure' where the patient would typically be referred to a psychotherapist. However

respectfully psychiatrists treat their patients, and the best ones do, there is little doubt about who has the power. Even when psychiatrists refer to their patients as *clients*, and increasingly they do, the model is overtly medical. The patient – a telling word – is sick and the helper is a doctor whose role is to cure sickness. The doctor has the power of superior knowledge, the power to make a diagnosis, the power to prescribe drugs, and, in some cases, the legal power to restrain and lock up the patient.

As a distantly related discipline, psychiatry is about as far from coaching as it is possible to be.

### Coaching and psychotherapy

The borderline with psychotherapy is probably the one that worries coaches most.

In Colin Feltham and Ian Horton's excellent *Handbook of Counselling and Psychotherapy* (2000: 2) the activity is defined as

addressing psychological and psychosomatic problems and change, including deep and prolonged human suffering, situational dilemmas and crises and developmental needs, and aspirations towards the realization of human potential.

Where there are persistent issues of self-esteem, unresolved grief, anxiety, depression, anger or severely dysfunctional behaviour and beliefs, then a psychotherapist may be able to help.

There is a huge spectrum of approaches to psychotherapy and a number of rival 'schools' using different models. Some people in the field claim that there are as many as 400 different schools and approaches. This probably accounts for the widely varying effectiveness reported.

My own experience reflects this in a small way. A few years ago a personal crisis left me needing psychotherapeutic help. I could not shake off the feelings of overwhelming anxiety which haunted me for months afterwards. My world seemed to be dissolving. In seeking psychotherapeutic help, I experienced first a very poor and then a profoundly helpful experience of therapy.

My doctor referred me first to 'Dr X' who operated out of an elegant private medical practice in the City. I probably alienated him from the start by asking if his doctorate was a medical one. This was a bit naughty as I already knew it wasn't but I was by now annoyed by the grandiosity of the way I had been kept waiting and treated as a petitioner. He sat at a world domination desk, sideways on, while I sat on a very much lower sofa on what felt like the very far side of the large room. It was a smart, black leather sofa, but in sitting so much lower I couldn't help but feel that I was meant to be