



## Egan's Skilled Helper Model

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## Egan's Skilled Helper Model

This is a 3-stage model or framework offered by Egan as useful in helping people solve problems and develop opportunities.

The goals of using the model are to help people

'to manage their problems in living more effectively and develop unused opportunities more fully', and to 'help people become better at helping themselves in their everyday lives.' (Egan G 1998, p7-8).

There is an emphasis on empowerment.

The person's own agenda is central, and the model seeks to move the person towards action leading to outcomes that they choose and value.

This model is not based on a particular theory of personality development, nor on a theory of the ways difficulties develop. It is a framework for conceptualising the helping process, and is best used in working on issues in the recent past and the present.

The model works best if attention is paid to Rogers' (1977) 'core conditions', the helpers approach to the speaker being based on

genuineness, respect, and empathy,

and if

principles of good active listening are remembered throughout.

The Egan model aims to help the speaker address 3 main questions:

1. *'What is going on?'*
2. *'What do I want instead?'*
3. *'How might I get to what I want?'*



## ***STAGE 1 - What's going on?***

Client tells their story in their own way, and to be fully heard and acknowledged. It is about a space where a person can hear and understand their story. It is also about gently helping them lift their head to see the wider picture and other perspectives, and to find a point from which to go forward with hope.

### **1A - AN EXPANSIVE PART**

The helper encourages the speaker to tell their story, and by using good active listening skills and demonstrating the core conditions, helps them to explore and unfold the tale and to reflect. For some, this is enough, for others it is just the beginning. "...as you summarised what I said, all the jumble began to make sense."

### **Skills**

- ✓ active listening
- ✓ reflecting
- ✓ paraphrasing
- ✓ checking understanding
- ✓ open questions
- ✓ summarising.

### **Useful Questions**

- ❶ How do/did you feel about that?
- ❶ What are/were you thinking?
- ❶ What is/was that like for you?

Keep question open, e.g., what else would you like to tell me?; what was that like for you?



### 1B - A CHALLENGING PART

Since they are in the situation, it can be difficult for the person speaking to see it clearly, or from different angles. With the help of empathic reflections and challenges, the speaker uncovers blind spots or gaps in their perceptions and assessment of the situation, of others and of themselves - their patterns, the impact of their behaviour on the situation, their strengths. "I'd never thought about how it might feel from my colleague's point of view."

#### Skills

- ✓ Challenging
  - ✓ different perspectives
  - ✓ patterns and connections
  - ✓ shoulds and oughts
  - ✓ negative self-talk
  - ✓ blind spots (discrepancies, distortions, incomplete awareness, things implied, what's not said)
- ✓ Ownership
  - ✓ Specifics, strengths.

#### Useful Questions

- ❶ How do others see it/you?
- ❶ Is there anything you've overlooked?
- ❶ What does he/she think/feel?
- ❶ What would s/he say about all this?
- ❶ What about all of this is a problem for you?
- ❶ Is there any other way of looking at it?



### 1c -FOCUSSING AND MOVING FORWARD

People often feel stuck; that is why they want to talk. In this stage, the helper seeks to move the speaker from stuckness to hope by helping Them choose an area that they have the energy to move forward on, that would make a difference and benefit them. "I see now the key place to get started is my relationship with K"

#### Skills

- ✓ Facilitating
- ✓ Focussing
- ✓ Prioritising (an area to work on).

#### Useful Questions

- ① What in all of this is the most important?
- ① What would be best to work on now?
- ① What would make the most difference?
- ① What is manageable?

Stage 1 can be 5 minutes or 5 years; it may be all someone needs.



## ***Stage 2 - What do I want instead?***

People often move from problem to action, or problem to solution, without reflecting on what they really want, or in what way their problems might be opportunities. Stage 2 is about this, about helping the speaker to open up a picture of what they really want, and how things could be better. This stage is very important in generating energy and hope.

### **2A - A CREATIVE PART**

The helper helps the speaker to brainstorm their ideal scenario; 'if you could wake up tomorrow with everything just how you want it, like your ideal world, what would it be like?' The speaker is encouraged to broaden their horizon and be imaginative, rather than reflect on practicalities. For some people this is scary, for some liberating. "At first it was really difficult but after a while I let my imagination go and began to get really excited about what we could achieve in the department".

### **Skills**

- ✓ Brainstorming
- ✓ Facilitating imaginative thinking, i.e.,
  - ✓ Quantity vs. Quality
  - ✓ Anything goes - have fun
  - ✓ Write down ideas verbatim
  - ✓ Don't analyse or judge
  - ✓ Keep prompting - 'what else?'
  - ✓ Don't hurry, allow lots of time

### **Useful Questions**

- ① What do you ideally want instead?
- ① What would be happening?
- ① What would you be doing/thinking/feeling?
- ① What would you have that you don't have now?



- ① What would it be like if it were better / a bit better?

## 2B - A REALITY TESTING PART

From the creative and visionary brainstorm, the speaker formulates goals which are specific, measurable, achievable/appropriate (for them, in their circumstances), realistic (with reference to the real world), and have a time frame attached, i.e. SMART goals. Goals which are demanding yet achievable are motivating.

"It feels good to be clear that I want a clear understanding with my colleagues about our respective rules and responsibilities."

### Skills

- ✓ Facilitating
- ✓ Selecting
- ✓ Reality checking (with respect to internal and external landscape)

### Useful Questions

- ① What exactly is your goal?
- ① How would you know when you've got there?
- ① What could you manage/are you likely to achieve?
- ① Which feels best for you?
- ① Out of all that, what would be realistic?
- ① When do you want to achieve it by?

## 2C - MOVING FORWARD

This stage aims to test the realism of the goal before the person moves to action, and to help the speaker check their commitment to the goal by reviewing the costs and benefits to them of achieving it. Is it worth it? "It feels risky but I need to resolve this."



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### Skills

- ✓ Facilitating
- ✓ Exploring costs and benefits
- ✓ Checking commitment to goal.

### Useful Questions

- ① What will be the benefits when you achieve this?
- ① How will it be different for you when you've done this?
- ① What will be the costs of doing this? Any disadvantages/downsides to doing this?





### ***Stage 3 - How will I get there?***

This is the 'how' stage... how will the person move towards the goals they have identified in Stage 2? It is about possible strategies and specific actions, about doing something to get started, whilst considering what/who might help and hinder making the change.

#### **3A - ANOTHER CREATIVE PART!**

The speaker is helped to brainstorm strategies - 101 ways to achieve the goal - again with prompting and encouragement to think widely. What people, places, ideas, organisations could help? The aim is to free up the person to generate new and different ideas for action, breaking out of old mind-sets. "There were gems of possibilities from seemingly crazy ideas".

#### **Skills**

- ✓ Facilitating
- ✓ Brainstorming

#### **Useful Questions**

- ❶ How many different ways are there for you to do this?
- ❶ Who/what might help?
- ❶ What has worked before/for others?
- ❶ What about some wild ideas?

#### **3B - FOCUSING IN ON APPROPRIATE STRATEGIES**

What from the brainstorm might be selected as a strategy that is realistic for the speaker, in their circumstances, consistent with their values? [Forcefield analysis](#) can be used here to look at what internal and external factors (individuals and organisations) are likely to help and hinder action and how these can be strengthened or weakened respectively. "I would feel comfortable trying to have a conversation with him about how he sees things".



### Skills

- ✓ Facilitating
- ✓ Selecting
- ✓ Reality checking.

### Useful Questions

- ❗ Which of these ideas appeals most?
- ❗ Which is most likely to work for you?
- ❗ Which are within your resources/control?

### 3C - MOVING TO ACTION

The aim is to help the speaker plan the next steps. The strategy is broken into bite-size chunks of action. Here the speaker is doing almost all the work, producing their action plan. The helper works with them to turn good intention into specific plans with time scales. Whilst being encouraging, it's also important not to push the speaker into saying they'll do things to please the helper. "I will make sure we have time together before the end of the month. I will book a meeting, so that we can be sure of quiet uninterrupted time. I will organise this before Friday".

### Skills

- ✓ Facilitating
- ✓ Action planning.

### Useful Questions

- ❗ What will you do first? When?
- ❗ What will you do next? When?

If the end point of producing an action plan has been reached, the experience of trying it out could be the starting point for a follow-up mentoring/co-mentoring session. The work



would start in stage I again, telling a new story. If an action plan had not been reached, that's fine too, and the model can be used over a series of sessions.

The key in using the model, as with any theory or model, is to keep the speakers agenda central, the individual in the foreground and theory in the background, and to use the model for the person, rather than vice versa.

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