

**Common Course Outline**  
**PSYC 240**  
**The Helping Relationship**  
**3 Credit Hours**

**The Community College of Baltimore County**

**Description**

PSYC 240 – 3 Credits –

The Helping Relationship  
(Prerequisite: None)

Teaches effective communication, including listening and empathy skills, the verbal and nonverbal symbolic language, effective interpersonal relating, and crisis intervention. Topics include giving death notifications, understanding cultural diversity issues, assisting in conflict resolution and domestic violence situations, working with substance abusing or mentally ill persons, dealing with agitated individuals and distressed adults or children, and helping people (including one's colleagues) who may be grieving, depressed, or suicidal. Emphasis is on the practical application of skill sets for helping professionals such as police officers, mental health counselors, nurses and various medical workers, funeral directors, clergy, social workers, teachers, and others.

**Overall Course Objectives**

Upon completion of this course the student will be able to:

1. Identify the essential elements of the helping relationship, including: accurate empathy, attentiveness, positive regard, genuineness, and providing a climate of safety.
2. Distinguish among the helping “styles” of interpretation, support, evaluation, probing, and understanding, identifying when each approach to helping is/is not appropriate or beneficial.
3. Explore and describe the personal attitudes and beliefs that underlie one’s ethical standards and professional ethical obligations in a helping role with others, including confidentiality issues.
4. Identify and discuss multicultural and diversity issues that are relevant to the helping professions.
5. Discuss the verbal and nonverbal symbolic language including varied communication patterns seen in individuals related to culture, gender, exposure to traumatic events and one’s own coping mechanisms.
6. Discuss the key issues involved when the helper is called upon to deliver death notifications or other “bad news” in crisis or loss situations, often while dealing with his/her own distress.
7. Identify skill sets for communicating with victims of violence, persons under the influence of a substance, mentally ill persons and angry or distressed coworkers.
8. Explore ways to effectively manage boundary issues in the helping professions, and to avoid or manage multiple relationship issues.

9. Identify normal bereavement reactions, symptoms of clinical depression, and suicide risk factors in one's colleagues as well as in persons whom one is in a position to help professionally. Discuss crisis intervention strategies.
10. Discuss strategies for managing one's own emotions, relationships and responsibilities on the job and at home - in the aftermath of handling crisis events and tragedies at work.
11. Explore "burnout" issues and self-care strategies for helping professionals as well as those who as family members or friends are in helping roles.

## **Major Topics**

Major topics include:

1. Professional ethics and values issues in the helping professions, including confidentiality and boundary issues.
2. Listening, verbal and nonverbal attentiveness, accurate empathy, and other essential communication skills such as knowing when evaluative, probing, interpretative, supportive or understanding responses may or may not be helpful.
3. Delivering death notifications or other bad news in a supportive fashion, the importance of "follow up," and dealing with one's own distress or discomfort.
4. Communicating helpfully with people in crisis or loss situations and victims of violence.
5. Issues and skills sets for handling or responding to persons who are intoxicated, mentally ill, angry or agitated (including coworkers).
6. Signs and symptoms of severe depression and techniques for assessing suicide risk. Identifying suicide intervention strategies.
7. Managing one's own emotions in crisis situations on the job and becoming knowledgeable about self-care issues in general of importance to all persons in helping roles.

## **Course Requirements**

Students must participate in instructional activities such as written assignments, group discussions with classmates, listening exercises with the instructor and another student in class, read and present several short articles to classmates in a small group, and complete pre- and post-tests on listening and helping skills.

Grading/exams: Grading procedures will be determined by the individual faculty member but will include the following:

Attendance  
Long and Short Written Assignments  
Quizzes

Writing: College level writing skills form an important part of the grade.

**Other Course Information:** Individual faculty members may include additional course objectives, major topics, and other course requirements to the minimum expectations stated in the Common Course Outline.