

# The Six Principles of Partnership

## 1. Everyone desires respect.

All people have worth and a right to self-determination; to make their own decisions about their lives. Acceptance of this principle leads one to treat clients with respect and to honor their opinions and worldview. True partnership is impossible without mutual respect.

## 2. Everyone needs to be heard.

This principle asks us to “seek first to understand” and is accomplished primarily through *empathic listening*. While empathic listening looks very much like active or reflective listening, what differentiates it is the listener’s motivation. Active and reflective listening are often used to manage or manipulate someone’s behavior so that the listener can advance his own agenda. Empathic listening is motivated by the listener’s desire to truly understand someone’s point of view—to enter someone’s frame of reference—without a personal agenda. When one feels heard and understood, defensiveness and resistance are unnecessary and solutions can be sought.

## 3. Everyone has strengths.

All people have many resources, past successes, abilities, talents, dreams, etc., that provide the raw material for solutions and future success. As helpers, we become involved with people because of their problems; these problems then become a filter that obscures our ability to see strengths. Acceptance of this principle doesn’t mean that one ignores or minimizes problems; it means that one works hard to identify strengths as well as problems so that the helper and the client have a more balanced, accurate, and hopeful picture of the present and the future.

#### **4. Judgments can wait.**

Once a judgment is made, one's tendency is to stop gathering new information or to interpret new information in light of the prior judgment. Since a helper's judgments can have an immense impact on a client's life, it is only fair to delay judgment as long as possible, then to hold it lightly, while remaining open to new information and willing to change one's mind. Acceptance of this principle does not mean that decisions regarding safety cannot be made quickly; it simply requires that ultimate judgments be very well considered.

#### **5. Partners share power.**

Power differentials create obstacles to partnership. Since society confers power upon the helper, it is the helper's responsibility to initiate a relationship that supports partnership, especially those who appear hostile and resistant. Clients make a choice to cooperate or not, but that choice is greatly influenced by our skillful use of power.

#### **6. Partnership is a process.**

Each of the six principles is part of a greater whole. While each has merit on its own, all are necessary for partnership. Each principle supports and strengthens the others. In addition, this principle acknowledges that putting the principles into practice consistently is *hard*. Acceptance of the principles is not enough; applying the principles consistently requires our *intention* and *attention*.