6. Encourage clients to place themselves in situations in which they have opportunities to discover and develop their abilities and to reevaluate their beliefs and assumptions about self. This may relate to taking a job, changing jobs, returning to school, joining an organization, building a friendship, and so on. Needless to say, persons with low self-esteem will be fearful of such changes; they tend to avoid the experiences they need the most for self-development.

7. Encourage clients to participate in a support group, personal growth group, or church group where they will be accepted and respected by others, learn they have much in common with others, and learn that everyone has both strengths and limitations. Such group experiences are usually more effective than individual counseling but both may be necessary for some clients.

8. Help clients to examine their tendency to see the negative rather than the positive and how they are overly influenced by what others say and do. Also help clients understand that their value as individuals is not dependent on the approval or actions of others and that they, not others, control how they think and feel about life.

9. For some clients, low self-esteem is tied to one or more significant separation and loss experiences (e.g., separation from bio-family, loss of one’s childhood through sexual abuse, loss of respect from valued others, etc.). Help these clients recognize and grieve for what they have lost (see Item 15.16).

10. Encourage and assist clients to develop a vision—a sense of purpose and meaning in life. Self-worth grows from knowing that you are living in accord with a set of ideals and values. For this reason, clients should be encouraged to do what they know is the right thing to do.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

13.10 The Empty Chair

PURPOSE: To help the client understand his or her feelings toward self or a significant other.

DISCUSSION: The empty-chair technique, sometimes called the double-chair technique, is used to clarify the issues involved in an interpersonal conflict. It helps the client view the conflict from a different angle and gain insight into why he or she is feeling and behaving in a certain way.
The social worker may elect to employ this technique after recognizing a specific conflict that needs to be explored with the client. To get started, the worker pulls up an empty chair and places it opposite the client. The chair becomes the person or situation with which the client is in conflict. The client is asked to speak to the chair, explaining his or her perceptions and feelings. The client is then asked to sit on the chair (assuming the role of that person or situation) and respond to what was just said. The client may move back and forth several times throughout this dialogue. The worker uses other interviewing techniques to explore the exchange as it unfolds.

As an example of application, consider Mary, a 40-year-old woman, who has exhaustingly high housekeeping standards. Even though she does not enjoy housework, she spends hours each day cleaning all rooms in her house, including her children’s rooms and the garage. When asked how she became so devoted to cleaning and housework, Mary says that her mother emphasized the importance of housework. The worker pulls up an empty chair and asks Mary to sit on it, assume the role of her mother, and tell Mary about the importance of doing housework. In the role of her mother, Mary explains that cleanliness is next to godliness, that the oldest child should take care of the younger ones, and that a good wife is devoted to her home. Then, the worker has Mary switch chairs, become herself, and respond to what her “mother” had to say. Her first response is, “Yes, ma’am.” Exploration reveals that this response covers much hostility. What Mary really wants to say aloud is, “No, I don’t want to do it. I am tired of working all the time. I am tired of doing things for other people.” The worker then uses the empty chair to represent Mary’s husband and invites Mary to express her feelings to him. During the course of this dialogue, Mary may realize that, as an adult, she now has choices that she did not have as a child. Moreover, she realizes that she has never told her husband how she feels.

In the hands of a skilled practitioner, this is a powerful technique. It can be combined effectively with the behavioral rehearsal and role-reversal techniques.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

### 13.11 Confrontation and Challenge

**PURPOSE:** To increase the client’s self-awareness, especially in regard to self-imposed barriers to change.

**DISCUSSION:** The technique of confrontation (also called a challenge) refers to gentle and respectful efforts to help the client recognize that he or she is using distortions, deceptions, denials, or manipulations that are self-defeating and getting in the way of desirable