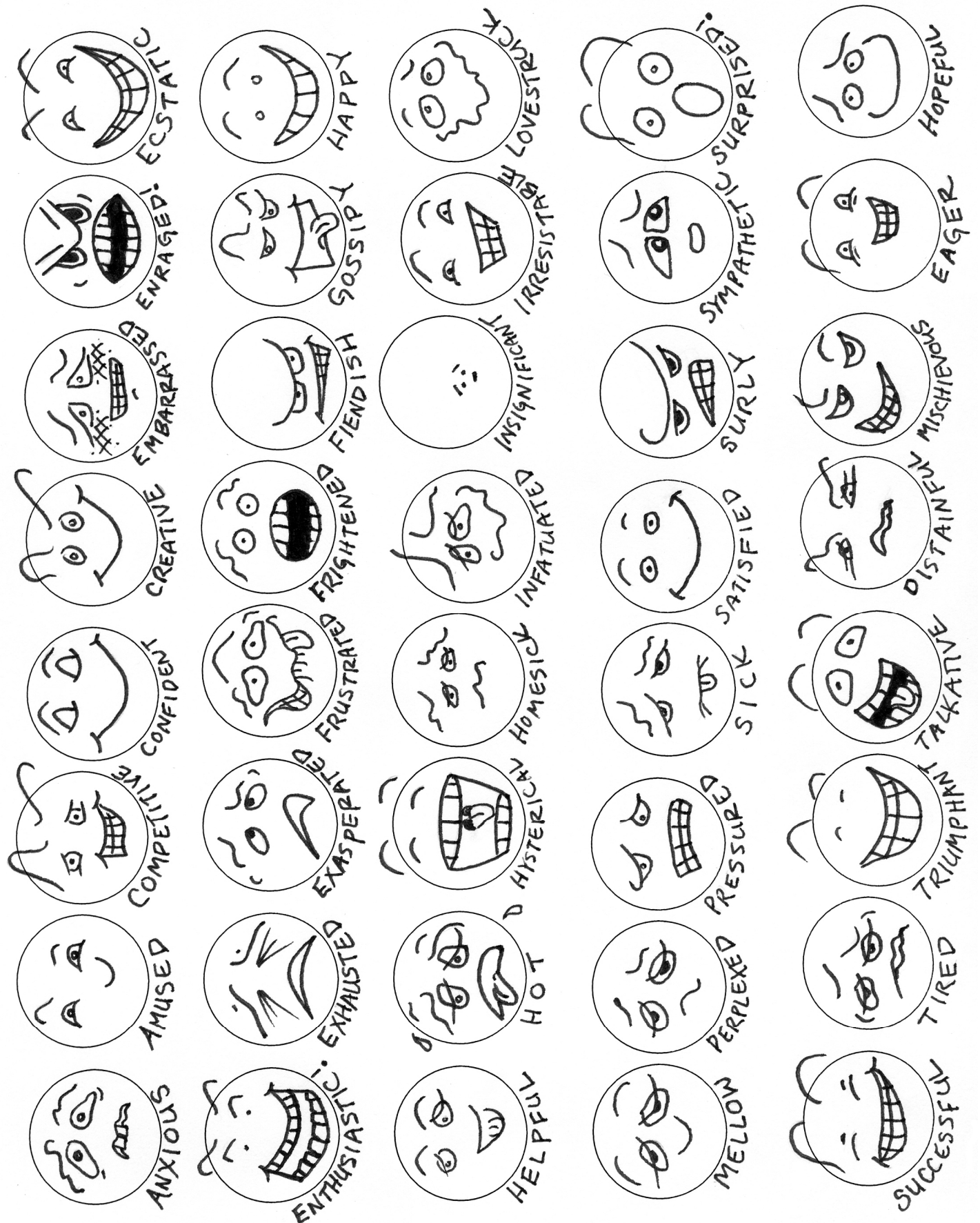


Face emotions



What Is A Counselor?

Somewhere between adolescence and adulthood there occurs in human development an age which is physically and psychologically impossible. It is that unfathomable stage known as the *camp counselor*, a creature undefined by psychologists, misunderstood by camp directors, worshiped by campers, either admired or doubted by parents, and unheard of by the rest of society.

A camp counselor is a rare combination of doctor, lawyer, indian and chief. She is a competent child psychologist with her sophomore textbook as proof. She is an underpaid babysitter with neither television nor refrigerator. She is a strict disciplinarian with a twinkle in her eye. She is referee, coach, teacher, and advisor. She is an example of humanity in worn out tennis shoes, a sweatshirt two sizes too large, and a hat two sizes too small. She is a humorist in a crisis, a doctor in an emergency, and a song leader, entertainer, and play director. She is an idol with her head in a cloud of woodsmoke and her feet in the mud. She is a comforter under a leaky tarp on a canoe overnight, and a pal who just loaned someone her last pair of dry socks. She is a teacher of the outdoors, knee deep in poison ivy.

A counselor dislikes waiting in line, cabin inspection and rainy days. She is fond of sunbathing, exploring, teaching new games, an old car named Mrs. Beasley, and days off. She is handy for patching up broken friendships, bloody noses, and torn jeans. She is good at locating lost towels at the waterfront, fixing stopped up toilets, making friendship bracelets, and catching fish. She is poor at crawling out of bed on rainy mornings, and remembering to fill out forms.

A counselor is a friendly guide in the middle of a cold, dark, wet night on the long winding trail to the TLC. Who but she can cure homesickness, air out wet bedding, play 16 games of 4-square in succession, whistle "Dixie" through her fingers, carry all the cook-out food, speak Pig Latin in Spanish, stand on her hands, sing 37 verses of "You Can't get to Heaven", and eat four helpings of Sunday dinner.

A counselor is expected to repair 10 years of damage to Jill in 10 days, make Julie into a woman, rehabilitate Judy, allow Joan to be an individual and help Gertrude adjust to a group. She is expected to lead the most prized possessions of 16 adults much older than she. She is expected to lead them in fun and adventure, even when her head aches; to teach them to live in the outdoors, even though she spends 9 months a year in the city; to teach them indigenous activities when she can't even spell the word; to guide youngsters in social adjustment, when she hasn't even reached a legal age; to ensure safety and health, with a sunburned nose, a band-aid on her thumb, and a blister on her heel.

For all this she is paid enough to buy the second text in psychology, some aspirin, some new socks, two tires for Mrs. Beasley, and some new tennis shoes. You wonder how she can stand the pace and the pressure. You wonder if she really knows how much she is worth. And somehow, you realize that you can never pay her enough when, as she leaves at the end of the summer, she waves goodbye and says, "See ya next year!"

Phyllis M. Ford, 1970