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## 4

# "A Problem Well Stated Is a Problem Half Solved."

A. Peter MacLean

"A problem well stated is a problem half solved."

Charles Kettering (1876–1958)  
American inventor and engineer

## Summary

This chapter is based on the thesis that a comprehensive clinical assessment is an essential first step in the collaborative effort between clinician and client to help solve the problems brought to therapy by the client. A very important engineering concept, the free body diagram, is introduced to illustrate the need to consider *all* the micro and macro influences that impact on a person's mental health. Consequently, it is argued that a proper clinical assessment must incorporate the bio-psycho-social-cultural model of human nature. A close look at clinical assessment is taken and includes defining assessment, and examining "what" and "how" to assess. Three models of assessment in marriage are considered, and several other aspects of the assessment process are presented such as ethics, stages of change, writing an assessment report, and providing feedback to the client.

The great physicist Albert Einstein was once asked what he would do if he was informed that the world would be destroyed in exactly one hour. Einstein was reported to have thought carefully and then responded that he would spend the first 55 minutes collecting as much information as possible to understand the situation, and the last five minutes actually trying to resolve it. This story and the above Kettering insight – a problem well stated is a problem half solved – capture the essence of assessment in clinical work. In the same way that humans habitually need to practice the maxim, think before you act, clinicians need to carry out a comprehensive assessment before proceeding to therapy.