

COUNSELING SKILLS AND TECHNIQUES

10. BASIC COUNSELING SKILLS & TECHNIQUES

10.1. Benefits of Counseling

Tackling the ups, downs, and all around issues that come along with living a healthy life is no easy bull's eye to hit. Every week can bring family emergencies, health problems, relationship issues, and career concerns. With all of these things that we cannot ignore how do we go about facing them head-on with strength, self-assurance, and a clear mind? If you are a counselor, or have been to a counselor before, you would know the benefits that being able to speak with someone one-on-one about your issues have to offer. There is no shame in asking for help, and there are plenty of people that are qualified professionals that are here to service your personal, career, or family needs. This summary will go over some helpful counseling techniques that, if you are a counselor, you are likely to put into play, and, if you are a patient, you can look forward to engaging in. So get ready to open up to make the best use of counseling techniques.

First, what are the benefits of counseling? These are helpful to know whether you are a counselor or wanting to be counseled as you will see why counseling is so important. Counseling can help you...

- Feel better about yourself.
- Feel more at peace, at ease in your daily activities, more comfortable, and more secure in the world.
- Feel more successful and more joyful on a more regular basis.
- Feel more connected to others, especially those who are close to you, such as your family, spouse, or best friends.
- Reduce stress at home, in the workplace, or in relationships.
- Help with your physical health by reducing emotional worries or stressors.
- Work through your problems with a skilled and compassionate professional counselor.
- Identify the goals that you have in life, as well make new goals that you want to achieve.
- Learn new behaviors or responses to situations that can help you better achieve your goals.

- Establish healthy and efficient ways and techniques for reaching your goals.
- Understand your own thoughts, feelings, and responses.
- Understand your loved ones and your relationships with them.
- Develop a safe and friendly listening ear.
- Speak with a skilled professional about your fears and perceptions of the world, and others.
- Feel safe about expressing any personal troubles or private concerns.
- Work towards greater self-fulfillment.

10.2. 24 Counseling Techniques

There are many different techniques that counselors can use with their clients. Here is a look at some of the techniques that are felt to be most effective during a counseling session:

- **Spheres of Influence:** This assessment tool will get the individual to look at areas of their life and see which areas may be impacting and influencing them. The person's job is to figure out which systems in their life give them strength, and which ones give them stress. Some spheres of influence to consider are: themselves, immediate family, friends, husband or wife, extended family, job or school, community, culture or religion, and any external influences.
- **Clarification:** A counselor should often ask their client to clarify what they are telling them to make sure they understand the situation correctly. This will help the counselor avoid any misconceptions or avoid them having to make any assumptions that could hinder their feedback.
- **Client Expectations:** When a person enters therapy, they should voice their opinions about counseling and their beliefs about treatment. In the beginning, they should be able to communicate with their counselor as to what they expect to get out of counseling. This can help the counselor guide and direct their counseling accordingly.
- **Confrontation:** This does not mean the client confronting the therapist, or vice versa. The confrontation that should happen here is within the client. The client should be able to self-examine themselves during counseling. However, the speed at which they do this should be discussed between the counselor and the client.
- **Congruence:** This has to do with the counselor being genuine with their feedback and beliefs about their client's situation and progress. The more

authentic and true they are with their counseling, the more that their client and work to grow and benefit from their help.

- **Core Conditions:** This technique in counseling goes over some essential traits that the counselor needs to integrate for effective counseling, which are: positive regard, empathy, congruence or genuineness, and warmth.
- **Encouraging:** Being encouraging as a counselor for your client is an essential technique that will help facilitate confidence and respect between both parties. This technique asks that the counselor focus on the client's strengths and assets to help them see themselves in a positive light. This will help with the client's progression.
- **Engagement:** As a therapist, having a good, yet professional relationship with your client is essential. However, there are bound to be difficult moments in counseling sessions, which will require influential engagement on the counselor's behalf.
- **Focusing:** This technique involves the counselor demonstrating that they understand what their client is experiencing by using non-judgmental attention without any words. Focusing can help the counselor determine what the client needs to obtain next from their services.
- **Immediacy:** This technique features the counselor speaking openly about something that is occurring in the present moment. This helps the client learn from their real life experiences and apply this to their reactions for other past situations.
- **Listening Skills:** With any relationship, listening skills are needed to show that the counselor understands and interprets the information that their client gives them correctly. The counselor should do this by showing attentiveness in non-verbal ways, such as: summarizing, capping, or matching the body language of their clients.
- **Open-Ended Questions:** Open-ended questions encourage people in a counseling session to give more details on their discussion. Therefore, these types of questions are used as a technique by counselors to help their clients answer how, why, and what.
- **Paraphrasing:** This technique will show clients that the counselor is listening to their information and processing what they have been telling them. Paraphrasing is also good to reiterate or clarify any misinformation that might have occurred.
- **Positive Asset Search:** A positive technique used by counselors helps clients think up their positive strengths and attributes to get them into a strong mindset about themselves.
- **Reflection of Feeling:** Counselors use this technique to show their clients that they are fully aware of the feelings that their client is experiencing. They

can do this by using exact words and phrases that their client is expressing to them.

- **Miracle Question:** The technique of asking a question of this sort will help the client see the world in a different way or perspective. A miracle question could be something along the lines of: “What would your world look like if a miracle occurred? What would that miracle be and how would it change things?”
- **Stages of Change:** By assessing a client’s needs, a counselor can determine the changes that need to occur for their client, and when they should take place. This can be determined by what they believe to be most important.
- **Trustworthiness:** The counselor must create an environment for their client as such that their client feels that they have the capacity to trust their counselor. A therapist must be: congruent, warm, empathetic, and speak with positive regard to their client.
- **Capping:** A lot of counselors use the technique of capping during their sessions. Capping involves changing a conversation’s direction from emotional to cognitive if the counselor feels their client’s emotions need to be calmed or regulated.
- **Working Alliance:** Creating a working alliance between a counselor and their client is essential for a successful counseling environment that will work to achieve the client’s needs. This technique involves the client and therapist being active collaborators during counseling and agreeing upon goals of treatment that are necessary, as well as how to achieve those goals.
- **Proxemics:** This technique has the counselor study the spatial movements and conditions of communication that their client exhibits. By studying their clients’ body orientation, the counselor can determine mood, feelings, and reactions.
- **Self-Disclosure:** The counselor will make note when personal information is disclosed at certain points of therapy. This technique will help the counselor learn more about the client and use this information only to benefit them.
- **Structuring:** When the individual enters counseling, the counselor should discuss the agenda for the day with their client, the activities, and the processes that they will go through. This technique in counseling will help the client understand their counselor’s train of thought into determining how this routine will work for them. Soon enough, the client will get used to the routine, and this establishes comfort and trust in counseling.
- **Hierarchy of Needs:** This technique involves the counselor assessing their client’s level of needs as based on the progress that they are making. The needs that they will factor in are: physiological needs, safety needs, love and

belonging needs, self-esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. All these will determine if change needs to take place in counseling.

10.3. Counselor Interactions with Patients

Research is increasingly finding that the type of therapy used is not as important to outcomes as are specific counselor behaviors such as (1) Enthusiasm, (2) Confidence, and (3) Belief in the patient's ability to change. Although there is nothing which will ensure change, it would appear that clients are more likely to achieve their goals when a good and positive relationship exists between them and their therapist. In essence the counselor's interactions with the client are a powerful tool in the helping relationship. The following summary highlights the basic effective counseling skills useful for positive interactions with patients;

1. Listening – The act of listening is further delineated into the following two components;

a. Attending - Orienting oneself physically to the patient to indicate one is aware of the patient, and, in fact, that the client has your full, undivided attention and that you care. Methods include eye contact; nods; not moving around, being distracted, eye contact, encouraging verbalizations; mirroring body postures and language; leaning forward, etc. Researchers estimate that about 80 percent of communication takes place non-verbally.

b. Listening/observing - Capturing and understanding the verbal and non-verbal information communicated by that patient.

2. Empathy -The ability to perceive another's experience and then to communicate that perception back to the individual to clarify and amplify their own experiencing and meaning. It is not identifying with the patient or sharing similar experiences, not "I know how you feel"!

3. Genuineness - Ability of counselor to be freely themselves. Includes congruence between outer words/behaviors and inner feelings; non-defensiveness; non-role-playing; and being unpretentious. For example, if the helper claims that they are comfortable helping a client explore a drug or sexual issue, but their behavior (verbally and nonverbally) shows signs of discomfort with the topic this will become an obstacle to progress and often lead to client confusion about and mistrust of the helper.

4. Unconditional positive regard - An expression of caring and nurturance as well as acceptance.

- Includes conveying warmth
- Also conveying acceptance by responding to the patient's messages (verbal and non-verbal) with nonjudgmental or noncritical verbal & non-verbal reactions.
- Respect - Ability to communicate to the patient the counselor's sincere belief that every person possesses the inherent strength and capacity to make it in life, and that each person has the right to choose his own alternatives and make his own decisions.

5. Concreteness - Keeping communications specific and focused on facts and feelings of relevant concerns, while avoiding tangents, generalizations, abstract discussions, or talking about counselor rather than the client. This includes the following functions:

- a. Assisting client to identify and work on a specific problem from the various ones presented.
- b. Reminding the client of the task and re-describing intent and structure of the session.
- c. Using questions and suggestions to help the client clarify facts, terms, feelings, and goals.
- d. Use a here-and-now focus to emphasize process and content occurring in current session, which may help to elucidate the problem being worked on or improving the problem-solving process.

6. Open Questions - A questioning process to assist the client in clarifying or exploring thoughts or feelings. Here, the counselor is not requesting specific information and not purposively limiting the nature of the response to only a yes or no, or very brief answer.

- a. Goal is to facilitate exploration – Not needed if the client is already doing this.
- b. Have an intention or therapeutic purpose for every question you ask.
- c. Avoid asking too many questions, or assuming an interrogatory role.
- d. Best approach is to follow a response to an open-ended question with a paraphrase or reflection which encourages the client to share more and avoids repetitive patterns of question/answer/question/answer, etc.

7. Counselor Self-Disclosure - The counselor shares personal feelings, experiences, or reactions to the client. Should include relevant content intended to help them. As a rule, it is better to not self-disclose unless there is a pressing clinical need which cannot be met in any other way. Remember empathy is not sharing similar experiences but conveying in a caring and understanding manner what the client is feeling and thinking

8. Interpretation - Any statement to the client which goes beyond what they have said or are aware of. In interpretation the counselor is providing new meaning, reason, or explanation for behaviors, thoughts, or feelings so that patient can see problems in a new way. Interpretations can help the client make connections between seemingly isolated statements of events, can point out themes or patterns, or can offer a new framework for understanding. An interpretation may be used to help a patient focus on a specific aspect of their problem, or provide a goal.

9. Information Giving and Removing Obstacles to Change - Supplying data, opinions, facts, resources or answers to questions. Explore with client possible problems which may delay or prevent their change process. In collaboration with the client identify possible solutions and alternatives.