

LESSON 1 WHERE CAN COUNSELLING BE USED?

There are differences between formal counselling and the use of counselling skills.

A counsellor is a person who meets with a client on a professional basis to help to resolve their problems and issues. A counsellor will use counselling skills in their work.

Basically, we can say that counselling is –

A process where a counsellor and client meet up to discuss difficulties the client finds stressful or emotional. Through these helping sessions, the client is able to see their problem more clearly. This can enable them to focus on their feelings and experiences, which can help them to facilitate change. The client/counsellor relationship is a relationship based on trust and confidentiality.

Counselling is not –

- Being judgemental
- Giving advice
- Trying to solve problems for the client

However, many people will use counselling skills. This does not mean that they are counsellors.

As we said in the introduction, a professional counsellor fulfils a different role to someone using counselling skills or techniques.

To summarise:

- Formal counsellors will tend to base their counselling on a particular theory or theories.
- They will receive supervision at regular intervals during their counselling.
- They should abide by ethical guidelines and standards.
- They should have a formal contract with their clients.

Formal counselling is undertaken by a counsellor within a professional setting, but many different professionals use counselling skills e.g. psychologists, psychiatrists, psychotherapists.

It is not just people involved in psychology who use counselling skills. Other people will use them, such as

- teachers
- social workers
- volunteers

Suggested Tasks: ▼

Throughout this course you will be provided with suggested tasks and reading to aid with your understanding. These will appear in the right hand column. Remember: these tasks are optional. The more you complete, the more you will learn, but in order to complete the course in 20 hours you will need to manage your time well. We suggest you spend about 10 minutes on each task you attempt, and no more than 20 minutes.

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Suggested Tasks

How would you define a counsellor?

Do you see your own work as counselling or using counselling skills?

Make a list of the counselling skills you use in your daily life (at home and work).

- nurses
- doctors

But basically, anyone working with other people in a helping relationship.

This lesson will consider:

- What are counselling skills?
- Who uses them?

What Are Counselling Skills?

Counsellors use a wide range of counselling skills and techniques. These can also be used by other professionals within their daily role. Counselling skills fall into three main areas: attending skills, listening skills, and influencing skills. We will now consider important counselling skills.

Active Listening



Listening is an art that requires practice.

Many people will experience distressing or painful situations that they find hard to talk about. Active listening skills can encourage people to talk. Active

listening helps people to talk through their problems by helping them to find a way to put into words what is troubling them. It may sound odd to consider “active” listening. I am listening, what needs to be active about it? Think about how you listen. How often have you been having a conversation with someone where you have been listening to them talk but whilst you are listening, you are thinking about what you want to say next, planning what to eat for lunch, interrupting them and so on. This isn’t really listening or paying attention. You are not REALLY listening to what they have to say, but thinking about what you are thinking about. Active listening means that you are really paying attention. So what is active listening?

With active listening, you may do some talking, but mainly you are acting as a sounding board for the person to discuss their difficult issue. Active listening should just encourage the person to talk, not influence what they have to say.

Think about this, someone is telling you something distressing and you say:

“I know, I had the same experience when.....”

“I know how you feel.”

“Try not to worry about, it will get better soon.”

“That doesn’t sound so bad, last week, this happened to me.....”

All of these statements may be well-intentioned, but they could lead to the person stopping what they are saying, changing the subject or ending the

conversation because they feel you don't understand. With active listening this can be avoided. By listening actively you demonstrate to the person or client that you are interested in what they have to say. It is one of the chief skills in building rapport and trust in a client-counsellor relationship. Active listening is part of the repertoire of listening and attending skills a trained counsellor uses to help client's to discuss their issues. The following skills are all part of the listening techniques.

Open Questions

Open questions are those that are likely to receive a longer answer. They give the respondent time to think and reflect, to give their opinions and feelings. They give control of the conversation to the respondent. They are useful to find out more about the person, what their problems are and so on.

The use of open questions is one method of active listening. Try to use questions that do not require a yes or no answer. This encourages the person you are speaking to, to open up more. So rather than say "Does this really bother you?" you could try "This sounds like it really bothers you. Tell me why?" The first question could be answered "yes" or "no" and that could be the end of the question. The second question requires the person to speak more, to expand on why the situation bothers them. This encourages the person to keep talking. So, if you want to encourage the client to talk more freely you should avoid questions like "Are you okay?" or "Does that help?" or "Do you want to talk more about this?" as this can shut down a conversation. Try

instead to use questions like:

- Do you want to tell me more about how you feel?
- What would help you now?
- Can you tell me more about this?
- How did you feel when that happened?

Active listening and using open questions does not just have to be part of a helping relationship. It can also be part of our day to day conversation.

All of these questions encourage conversation. They encourage the person to express their feelings, say how they feel. If you are not experienced in counselling skills, you may find this a little awkward at first. It may be artificial, but the more you do this the easier it becomes. Try asking open questions in your general conversation. You will be amazed at how much more people will open up, when it looks like you are really interested in what THEY have to say. It doesn't just have to be when someone has a problem. You can also use open questions and active listening when people are talking to you about anything.

Often, open questions begin with the words: *can, could, why, how* or *what*.

Closed Questions

Closed questions are questions that can be answered by a single word or short phrase. How old are you? Where do you live? They can often be answered by yes or no. Closed questions are useful in some ways -

- They give us facts.
- They are easy for the person to answer.
- They are quick to answer.
- They keep the control of the conversation with the person answering the question.

Closed questions do sometimes have their place. Sometimes you want a person to make a definite decision or choice. So closed questions can be used to clarify something. For example, “So let me see if I’ve got this right, you are annoyed with your boss because he wouldn’t let you have last Friday off?” The client can then answer ‘yes’ or ‘no.’ This tells you that you are on the right track, you have understood what the person is saying. This also tells the person you are listening to that you have understood as well.

As we said above, open questions allow conversations to flow more freely and encourage conversation and debate, so are more useful in exploring client issues. But closed questions are more useful for obtaining brief factual information. They are also useful for bringing focus to an interview situation, though the onus is on the counsellor to guide the interview.

Often, closed questions begin with the words: *do*, *is* or *are*.

Whether asking open or closed questions, they should not be overused. Too many questions may make a client feel as though they are being interrogated. Alternatively, they may feel overcome with anger or guilt. Also, the

guiding nature of questions may be too authoritarian for some. Indeed for some non-Western cultures questions are deemed inappropriate.

Paraphrasing

Another element of active listening is paraphrasing. It is a way that the counsellor can say back to the client what they have heard using some of the client’s own words. It is not merely repeating back parrot-fashion what the client has said, rather it is an abbreviation of the client’s statements using several of the client’s key words along with a few of the counsellor’s own words.

For example, a client might say: “I’ve had a terrible week - my car broke down, my cat has run away, I’ve got a cold, work is stressful, and my neighbour is pissing me off.”

To paraphrase, the counsellor might say: “You’ve had a terrible week because lots of things have gone wrong.”

Again, paraphrasing demonstrates to the client that they have been heard and understood. Done properly, a paraphrase will stop the client from feeling that they have to keep repeating the same information and can go on to discuss and explore other issues.

Clarifying/Encouraging

Sometimes we want to avoid difficult things. We can avoid saying them. A person you are speaking to might do this. They may avoid saying something,

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Suggested Task 1

Listen to the conversations of others. Listen to their use of open and closed questions.

Watch the impact of those questions.

DO closed questions shut down the conversation?

DO open questions encourage more conversation?

Suggested Task 2

Have a conversation with someone you don’t know very well. Try and find out more about them. Use closed and open questions. Think what works best.

Suggested Task 3

After the conversation, think what you could have done better. Were you happy with your use of closed and open questions or do you think you could have done better?