

Counselling Skills

Excerpt from a paper presented by Dr. Bene Madunagu at a training workshop organised for CIINSTRID/CMA staff September 4-8, 2000 at the Marian Hotel, Calabar.

OBJECTIVES:

- * Discussing the meaning of counseling,
- * Knowing types of counselling
- * Learning the skills used in decision-making counselling
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- * Learning examples of basic counselling skills
- * Learn the characteristics of good counselling
- * Learning tips on counselling adolescents.

Definition

Counselling is a process with personal qualities and style. What is important is the skills and the knowledge. The counsellor can learn basics and adapt to her/his style. In counselling, client is the term used and not patient in order to emphasise that counseling addresses issues of normal development.

Counselling help people make choices and act on those choices as part of normal development.

Through the decision-making process, counsellors can help people correct situational problem, expand their skills, restore a sense of well-being and correct some self-destructive behaviour.

Counselling responds to feelings, values, and attitudes, thus enabling a decision making process to occur.

Counselling is different form psychotherapy because counselling does not provide the opportunity to resolve deep-seated problems or conflicts or restructure personality or change major life situations (except pregnancy). Counselling rather focuses on the need to make a particular decision and facilitates exploration of feelings that affect such decisions e.g which contraceptive method to use.

Types of counselling

- in-depth
- Long-term
- Decision-making

Skills For Decision-Making Counselling

There are five basic skills used in decision-making counselling. These are

- Questioning
- * Reflecting feelings
- * Paraphrasing
- * Summarizing
- * Instructing

The counsellor uses these skills to help the client make a decision and then act on it. The counsellor needs to develop a special discipline to ensure that she/he listens to and understand the unique characteristics of each client.

Questioning:

The type of information the counsellor receives from the client depends partly on the



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kind of questions asked. There are two ways of phrasing questions

Example (1) You feel that even if you tried, things wouldn't work out. You sound discouraged.

(2) Client: All of the methods stink, but I will just take the diaphragm anyway. It doesn't seem like it makes much difference because they're also awful

Counsellor: You don't seem to feel very good about your choice.

Technical Information

Sometimes verbal communications seem to contradict nonverbal ones. E.g. The client might say "I'm really happy" in a slow and heavy voice with a sad facial expression or even absent mindedly. The counsellor is expected to sense this contradictions and ask the client for clarification - "I'm not clear about what you're feeling. I hear you say you're happy and at the same time you look sad."

A client can feel pain on conflict and may use talk to deny the feelings. It is the counselor's restatement through reflecting feelings that challenges the client to acknowledge the feelings and begin to integrate them. E.g Client: I really didn't want to have sex with Joan, but she kept pushing and pushing, saying that it means I don't love her. It had nothing to do with loving her. I love her but because of the other night, I'm angry. I haven't called in 8 days. I don't know when I'll call. I'm pretty confused. I have no idea what I'm feeling.

Counsellor: It sounds like you love her and you're also very angry. Client: Angry? Where did you get that from?

Counsellor: Perhaps since you love Joan, It's difficult to understand how you could also be angry at her.

Client: But what makes you think I'm angry?

Counsellor: Actually, you told me you are

angry with Joan.

Sometimes a counsellor can reflect a feeling that does not accurately capture the client's experience. Rather the counsellor view herself/himself as "making a mistake", or saying something wrong, she/he has actually provided a further challenge. e.g. Client: When I got home last night, it was two in the morning. My father was sitting up in the living room with that look on the face. All he said was, "Never again, now get to bed.". He was totally serious and stern - no negotiation. I didn't even try.

Counsellor: You must have been pretty scared.

Client: No, I wasn't scared. I'm not sure (pause for a few minutes). Actually am surprised at myself, but I think I felt relieved.

Counsellor: Can you explain your feeling relieved?

Client: I'm sure, but it's kind of like my father was saving me. I like Caro a lot, but I wish we didn't have to stay out so late. That's when things start getting hard for me. I can't say no - but if my father says no - then that's it. I guess I feel protected, too.

Here the counsellor's inaccurate perception of the client's feeling, was a powerful stimulus for his own probing, leading to new insights.

Paraphrasing:

Through the skills of paraphrasing, the counsellor tries to understand the essence or central ideas of what the client says in order to provide feedback. The counsellor does not try to change what the client says but clarifies or reorganises the thoughts that the client has expressed.

Client: I don't know about my father. One minute he's real nice and helps me, and the next he's shouting and telling me to get out.

Counsellor: He's inconsistent, so you don't know what to do.

Technical information Paraphrasing can be difficult because the client frequently expresses several thoughts at the same time. Hence, the counsellor has to choose the one to comment on.

E.g Client: I also feel like my mother might be right. It's not such a good idea to have sex so young or before marriage. So even though I really like him, I don't end up liking sex. I just try to pretend it will be over quickly. Sometimes I just pretend I'm not even having it.

Counsellor: Your discomfort with sex makes you deny that you're having it. You are beginning to think that sex before marriage is not for you.

Paraphrasing is a timely tool by counsellor to keep track of a range of information and help client remembers central issues. When counsellor tries to understand and explain the "why" or meaning of the client remarks, she/he is no longer paraphrasing but interpreting. This is inappropriate in short-term counselling.

E.g. Client: I know what I want but I'm scared to do it. I want to keep seeing Joan, but I'm scared to tell her that I don't want to have intercourse anymore.

Interpretation:

Counsellor: Perhaps you're frightened

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Counselling Skills

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* Personalised information is that put in terms of the clients' own situation. Personalising information help the client understand what the information means to her or him personally, e.g Do you already have a method in mind? What is it in this method that you like?

If someone needs counselling on deciding to prevent himself against HIV/AIDS what do you suggest as best tailored and personalised information. He has 2 girlfriends.

(1) "Having certain other STDS can raise the chances of getting HIV/AIDS" Good.

(2) "For a person with more than one sex partner, the best protection against getting STDS during sex is using a condom every time". (Tailored)

(3) "You mentioned that you have 2 girlfriends now. The best way to protect yourself and your girlfriends is using a condom every time you have sex with either of them" - tailored and personalised).

H = HELP, Help client identify the full range of possible choices

- Tell clients that the choice is theirs
- Only offer guide and advise but **avoid** ever making the client's decision for them.
- To help client choose, ask them to think about their plans and family situations.
- Help clients think about the results of each possible choice
- Advise without controlling. Let the client decide
- Ask what partner may want
- Check whether the client has made clear decision - specifically ask "What have you decided to do?"

E = Explain

What to do?

- After the client has made a choice, explain responding to how, when, where etc.
- Example, for a Family Planning method, how to use, effectiveness, side effects, when to use etc.
- Ask for questions, provide enough explanation to build confidence

Encourage follow-up/return visit.

R = RETURN

A follow-up visit: Plan the next visit with client

- Ask for experiences from decision/action
- Treat all concerns seriously
- Ask if clients is satisfied with decision
- Have there been problems?
- Assist client to handle any problem
- Check if problems necessitate the choice of another option. If about health, consider referral.

- Invite client to come back anytime for any reasons as needed.

- Refer client for any care you cannot give.

TIPS ON ADOLESCENTS

Adolescents face different sexual and reproductive health issues than adults. So counselling adolescents requires being more -

open; more flexible; more knowledgeable and more understanding. Counselling adolescents can be challenging but more rewarding to help young people make wise and healthy decisions.

Being Open: letting young people know that no question is wrong, and even embarrassing topics can be discussed.

Being Flexible: talking about whatever issues the young person want to discuss.

Giving simple direct answers in plain words, learn to discuss puberty and sex comfortably.

Be Trustworthy: Honesty is crucial to young clients. You and the information you give must be believable. If you do not know the answer, say so. Then find out.

Emphasis confidentiality: make it clear that you will not tell anyone else about the client's visit, the discussion or the client's decisions.

Be approachable: Don't get upset or excited, keep cool.

Show Respect: Do not talk down on adolescents

Be understanding: Recall how you were when you were young and avoid judgements.

Be patient: Young people may take time to get to the point or to reach a decision. Sometimes more than one meeting is needed.

Thus basic qualities essential for counselling are: empathy, warmth, respect, genuineness, and concreteness.

POINTS TO REFLECT ON ABOUT ADOLESCENT COUNSELLING

Group work

1) Adolescent often need skills as much as facts. They need to learn how to deal with older people. For good reproductive health, they need important skills such as - how to say no; how to negotiate and how to make decisions.

2. Adolescents often want to know how social relationships and sexual relationships fit together. Often this is more important to them than facts about reproductive health.

3. Adolescents often focus on the present. They find it difficult to make long term plans or to prepare for the distant future.

4. Adolescent often find it hard to understand the idea of risk or risky behaviour.

Technical Information: Sexually active adolescents often face more STDs risks than older adults.

- A young persons sexual behaviour may be forced or pressured, possibly by an older person.

- A young person may have sex only once in a while

- A young person may plan not to have sex again, but still do so.

- Young adults of the same age may have very different levels of knowledge and different sexual attitudes, behaviour and experiences.

How do these points affect how you counsel adolescents?

MEETING COUNSELLING CHALLENGES

1. Challenge counsellors meet with clients:

- Silence
- Crying
- Not sure on what advice, can't see solution
- Not knowing answer to clients questions
- Making a mistake
- Pre-knowledge of each other
- Being asked a personal question
- Trying to get counsellor to make the decision.

Coping with these challenges.

1. Silence

Counsellor: I can see that it is difficult to talk. It is often that way for new clients. I wonder if you are feeling a bit anxious? Look at the client and use body language that shows empathy and interest. Then wait for client to answer. Give client time to think or decide how to express feelings of thought.

2. **Crying:** This could be to express sadness; to win sympathy; out of stress, being nervous; or to stop further discussions. Wait for a while, assure it is okay to cry. It is a natural reaction. This allows client to explain why they cry. It is also okay to ask the reason gently and tactfully.

3. **No Solution:** Anxiety for not knowing what to advice. Expressing understanding. You can't solve all problems. Suggest others who could

4. **Not Knowing answer to a question:** Say honestly and openly that you do not know the answer but together you can find out. Check with a knowledgeable co-worker or reference book before giving an accurate answer.

5. **Making a mistake:** Correct the mistake and say you are sorry. It is important to be accurate. It is not important to look perfect, no one is. Admitting a mistake shows respect for the client.

6. Pre-knowledge of counselor and client

- Emphasise confidentiality and ensure privacy

- If the client wishes, arrange for another counsellor

7. Client asking personal question. In general, try not to talk about yourself. It takes attention away from client.

You do not have to answer personal questions counsellor/client relationship is professional not social.

8. Client wants counsellor to make decision;

Ask such questions as - you seem to be having trouble reaching a decision. Perhaps you are not quite ready? Would you like to discuss this further? Do you need more information? More time to think? Would you like to talk over with someone else? I can help to answer your questions but you know your life best. The best decision would be those you make yourself

By

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