



Introduction to Counselling

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What is Counseling

Counseling is an interactive process characterized by a unique relationship between counselor and client that leads to change in the client in one or more of the following areas:

- Behaviour (Overt changes in the ways clients act, their coping skills, decision making skills, and/or relationship skills).
- Beliefs and values (ways of thinking about self, others and the world) or emotional concerns relating to these perceptions.
- Level of emotional distress (uncomfortable feelings or reactivity to environmental stress).

Desire for change can stem from different sources-

- Loneliness
- Uncontrollable anxiety
- Poor social skills
- Desire for better life

In all cases, counseling should result in free and responsible behavior on the part of the client, accompanied by more insight into self and others and an improved ability to understand and better manage negative emotions.

Goals-Outcome and Process Goals

Outcome Goals

- Intended results of counseling, what the client desires to achieve as a result of his/her interactions with the counselor.
- Described in terms of change in the client, that will be manifested after the counseling and outside the counselor's office.

Process Goals

- Those events within the counseling sessions that the counselor considers helpful or instrumental in bringing about outcome goals.
- Described in terms of the counselor's actions and at other times in terms of effects to be experienced by the client.

OUTCOME GOALS OF COUNSELING

1) CHANGE MUST OCCUR

- Counseling leads to change in the client
- True of individual, group, family counseling etc.
- Change may be overt (noticeable by others- increasing number of social interactions) or imperceptible to anyone but the client (e.g. more positive thoughts)

- Categories of Possible change
 - a. Behaviour Change- Easiest type of change to recognize because it is overt and observable. For e.g., reduction in the number of fights initiated by the child, child's attention span has improved.

 - a. Changes in thoughts and attitudes - ('I am a good person' vs 'I have no worth at all'). Believed that changes in thoughts and attitudes must occur before one expects changes in behavior.

 - a. Coping Skills- Counseling may enhance individual's ability to cope with life situations- e.g. dealing with terminal illness. Changes in ability to cope usually includes both behavior change and change in beliefs and attitudes.

OUTCOME GOALS OF COUNSELING

d)Client's ability to make decisions- Counselor coaches the client on how to use information to arrive at personally satisfying answers. Career counselors frequently engage in this work, assisting students with career decision making.

e)Changes in beliefs (also called personal constructs)- Common goal: client will improve his/her self-concept. Kelley (1955) defined personal constructs as an individual's particular view of reality. People's behavior is based on what they believe to be true.

f)Relief of emotional distress- Clients feel sad, distressed, need a place where they can vent those feelings and feel sure that they will be accepted and understood.

2) FREE AND RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOR

- Freedom is the power to determine one's own actions, to make choices and decisions.
- Freedom is accompanied with responsibility.

OUTCOME GOALS OF COUNSELING

- Help clients assess the true margins of their freedom by focusing clients' attention to the consequences of their actions.
 - Some clients who only care about their freedom, even if it hurts others; others who give up on their freedom and need others to take their decision, so as to get accepted by others.
 - In either case, counselor works with the client to come to a more balanced perception of personal freedom.
 - Cultural differences in terms of freedom : Some cultures emphasize more individual freedom than others. Counselor needs to respect these values of the client.
 - For example, some cultures accept arrange marriage. If these are the values of the client, counselor need not express his/his disapproval for it or discourage the client unless the client is forced into it or if client entered counseling due to the discomfort/ problem related to the custom.
 - As long as the client is not coerced into the choice, understands the consequences and implications of his/her behavior.

OUTCOME GOALS OF COUNSELING

- When working with children and adolescents, counselor often faces conflicts about how far he/she can go in supporting free choice. The younger the child, the smaller the measure of autonomy he/she can be reasonably given.
- A counselor can help adolescent clients protect their freedoms by helping them consider alternatives carefully so that they can make well informed decisions about their behavior.

3)UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING NEGATIVE FEELINGS

- Common misunderstanding of counseling- it eliminates negative feelings.
- More appropriate goal of counseling- **help people understand negative feelings and to reduce debilitating anxiety, overwhelming anxiety or extreme anger.**
- Understand that negative feelings are unavoidable, can be healthy sometimes- alert the person to a problem or circumstance that demands the individual's attention.
- Better goal- leave clients with situation-appropriate levels of negative feelings. For example, feeling anxious about an important decision is normal. What clients need is the skill to cope with such emotions, the permission to experience their pain, and the capacity to express such feelings without harming others or themselves.

PROCESS GOALS IN COUNSELING

- For example, a counselor may have a goal- If I am to help this client, need to actively listen, make him feel understood, must understand his situation well, his attitudes etc. All of these are **process goals that relate to the counselor's behaviour.**
- 'If I am to help this client, client needs to be able to trust me, focus on his primary concerns, help client gain control anxiety related to talking about these concerns. These are **process goals described in terms of effects the client should experience.**
- Counselor **can act as a model for new ways of behaving**, indirectly teaching the client alternatives to accustomed ways of responding.
- Some process goals are common goal to all- e.g gaining trust of the client. Some specific for a particular person. e.g- helping client discuss her primary concerns (for a client who is avoiding this discussion).

CASE STUDY #1

- K.M, a 10-year old male, currently studying in 5th Grade. K.M lives with his parents and a younger sister, coming from a low socio-economic status.
- He has been referred to the school counselor for issues such as engaging in fights with other students, getting angry easily, using foul language.
- Client has enrolled in the current school during the last academic year. He was facing difficulties in adjusting to new school environment and making new friends. Counseling sessions were conducted earlier in order to facilitate the same.
- Currently, client does not have many friends because of his frequent anger outbursts.

Identify the outcome and process goals for the current case study.

(Additional- List down all the elements/areas listed in the case history. Mention which are the other areas about which you would like to seek more information.)

CASE STUDY #2

- S.D, 11 year old has been referred for counseling with the issues of low self esteem. Client gets extremely nervous when asked to answer in class. She has low tolerance for failure.
- Her mother is extremely dismissive of her strengths, compares her with her older sibling. She is always putting her down, not accepting nor accommodating of her mistakes.
- S.D usually sits alone for lunch.

Identify the outcome and process goals for the current case study.

(Additional- List down all the elements/areas listed in the case history. Mention which are the other areas about which you would like to seek more information.)

CASE STUDY #3

- A.R, 40 years, female, feels anxious about her future. She came to counseling, mentioning that she feels irritated and stressed all the time.
- Client is self-employed, working into sales. She lives with her husband and two children in a rental apartment.

Identify the outcome and process goals for the current case study.

(Additional- List down all the elements/areas listed in the case history. Mention which are the other areas about which you would like to seek more information.)

PERSPECTIVES ON EFFECTIVE HELPING RELATIONSHIPS

#1 Understanding Human Behaviour in Social and Cultural context:

Effective counsellor must have a thorough understanding of human behaviour in its social and cultural context and be able to apply that understanding to particular problems and circumstances of each client.

- Counseling is unlikely to be helpful without a clear understanding of the roots of the problems clients bring to counseling and the individual, interpersonal and social forces that serve to maintain the problems of the client.
- Therefore, diagnosis and hypothesis generating are important part of counsellor's work.
- Process of diagnosis has two interrelated functions- describe client's patterns of cognition, behaviour and affective experience and provide causal explanation for these significant patterns.
- The process of arriving at a diagnosis is mutual one in which client and counsellor work together to identify these significant patterns and their roots in the client's experience.
- Counsellors use theories and concepts about human behaviour to understand concerns, actions, perceptions, emotions, and motivations of their clients.

#1 Understanding Human Behaviour in Social and Cultural context:

There are 4 dangers in the diagnostic and hypothesis generating process-

1. It may lead **to labelling (Stereotyping)**. Once stereotyped, all general characteristics of those in that category are also attributed to the client and the uniqueness of the client as an individual is lost. The client's other important attributes are overlooked because categorizing creates perceptual blinders for the counsellor.

2. Counselor's **mistake in diagnosis** may lead to ineffective counselling.

3. Different counsellors may use **different terms for same experience**

4. Diagnostic and hypothesis generating process may involve **biases** based on cultural and ethnicity. Negative societal attitudes toward oppressed and culturally diverse groups may reduce objectivity and fairness of the diagnosis given to the client.

(Example, I hold a strong negative view towards members of Community A- will affect my ability to understand the client and his problems)

Counsellors who understand the human behavior in its social and cultural context will work hard to avoid these dangers.

#2: Client defined growth as the definition of Successful counselling

The ultimate purpose of the counselling experience is to help the client achieve some kind of change that he or she will regard as satisfying.

- Every significant theory of counselling states that creating growth oriented change in the client is the ultimate intended outcome of the counselling experience.
- Types of change/ outcome (discussed in definition)
- Behavioural change
- Changes in perception of self, others and life.
- Alleviating symptoms- changing dysfunctional behaviour to functional patterns e.g. Overcoming shyness, reducing debilitating anxiety etc.
- Helping people take important life decisions- enable the client to use rational thinking process to reduce confusion and conflict.
- Stimulating personal and interpersonal growth and helping them to become fully functioning beings.
- Behavioural change is easier to document, however changes can also occur in thinking, values, changes in experience of stress or emotional distress and the counsellor must be able to describe these changes in order to know whether counselling was effective.

3: Positive relationship between counsellor and the client as fundamental to client change:

The quality of the helping relationships is the single most significant factor in providing a climate for growth

- Clients can share deeply only if they perceive the trust in the counselling relationship. The **critical elements** of counselling relationships that promote openness are:
 - *Respect* (rather than rejection)
 - *Empathy* (rather than shallow listening and advice giving)
 - *Congruence or genuineness* (rather than inconsistency)
 - *Facilitative self disclosure* (rather than being closed)
 - *Immediacy* (rather than escapism to past or future)
 - *Concreteness* (rather than abstract intellectualizing)
- The **quality of relationship** not only provides a safe and comforting context from which interventions are introduced, but it is often **therapeutic in itself**
- If such relationship is absent the clients may **drop out** of counselling.
- **The client's perception** (and not the counsellor's) of quality of relationship is important predictor whether the client will stay or drop out of counselling.

4: Counselling as an intense working experience:

The counselling experience is emotionally powerful for both client and the counsellor

For the counsellor:

Intellectual activities of:

- Attentive listening,
- Information absorption
- Message clarification
- Hypothesis generation and
- Treatment planning;

All require sustained energy.

Emotional experience of caring enough about other person's suffering- without becoming lost in those emotions.

For clients:

- Attempt to understand what is difficult to understand;
- Endure confusion, conflict and uncertainty;
- Commit to disclose something that is painful;

4: Counselling as an intense working experience:

- Experience stress of revealing personally felt inadequacies to others;
- Deal with the worry that counsellor may fail to understand the uniqueness of their experience or judge them negatively.

All these are very demanding on the client though at the same time it can be fulfilling and rewarding.

Counselling is not same as casual, relaxed conversations.

- Intensity is higher
- Exploration at much deeper level
- Conversation- you move easily to other things, in counseling- ideas are developed more slowly and considered more carefully.

Sometimes people leave a counselling experience mentally and emotionally depleted, at other times they are energized by the new insights that they have gained.

5 : Clients as Active partners in the counselling process:

*Effective counselling is grounded in the client's commitment to be actively involved through **self disclosure**, **self confrontation**, and risk taking as facilitated by interaction with the counsellor*

I. Self-disclosure-

- For counselling to take place the client must disclose personal information to the counsellor.
- Counselor in turn tries to understand the client's world within the context of what the counselor knows about human behaviour.
- Personal information is revealed primarily verbally but through non-verbal behaviour as well.
- The more fully self- disclosure takes place, the more effectively the counsellor can help the client discover new ways of coping and the more the client will understand self.

5 : Clients as Active partners in the counselling process:

Client's comfort with **self-disclosure** varies greatly depending upon:

1. Client's **cultural and family norms** may dissuade the client from discussing personal issues with strangers.
2. Some client's may have **low level of readiness** for change (e.g. clients are not self referred).

Client's willingness for self-disclosure acts as a gauge for-

1. **Client's commitment** to be active in the process.
2. **Strength of trust** in the competence and caring of the counsellor.

Research indicates that counselors who effectively facilitate client self-disclosure in the first three sessions are significantly more likely to help clients stay in counseling and achieve their goals.

5 : Clients as Active partners in the counselling process:

II. Self-confrontation:

- Occurs when the client looks at the self with an expanded perspective that allows him or her to develop new perceptions about self.
- The counsellor helps the clients to broaden their perspectives on self by providing honest feedback.
- **Feedback can be of two levels:** low risk restatement level or high risk confrontation level. (Depending on the counsellor's understanding of the client and the strength of trusting relationship)
- Irrespective of the level, the client must confront self with new ways of seeing and understand self in life situations.
- Through this process, a new understanding of personal needs, desires, perceptions, assumptions and cognition emerges, and new coping skills are discovered and refined.

#6 : Ethical conduct as fundamental professional responsibility:

Professional ethics requires counsellors to place the best interests of the clients as their highest priority and to follow all other provisions of the codes of conduct for their profession.

- Ethical practice is defined as “Providing with care and conscientious effort, a therapeutic service for which one has been appropriately trained.”
- Involves valuing each client as a person with rights to fair, dignified and compassionate service.

Unethical practice occurs when:

- Counsellors practice outside the limitations of their competence
- Fail to place client’s interest ahead of their own needs
- Fail to respond sensitively to their client’s life experiences and rights

As counsellors have received training, they have more responsibility not to do harm to clients, and not damage the reputation of the counsellor’s employers and the profession as a whole.

Codes of ethics are developed to resolve ethical dilemmas.

Ethics in Counseling

Food for thought

- What does ethics mean to you?
- What do you think is the importance of ethics in counseling?
- What do you think are the most important ethics in counseling?
- Can you think of instances when a counselor would behave unethically?

CODES OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

When most people think of professional ethics, they think of written codes of conduct as:

- Set of behaviours that is expected of all professionals (e.g. confidentiality)
- Set of behaviours that is prohibited to all members (e.g. inaccurately advertising one's credentials)
- Set of aspirational principles that professionals can use to guide their actions (e.g. Respect the dignity and worth of people, rights of individuals...)
- Code of ethics by American Counseling Association (ACA, 1995) and American Psychological Association (2002)

Each code includes:

- Discussion of how the helping professional ought to relate to clients, to colleagues, to employers, and to the public.
- Emphasizing the responsibility to promote client welfare- Main Goal
- Also, includes statements describing client's right to privacy, accurate assessment of needs, freedom of choice, and fair and competent treatment or referral.
- Helping professionals' responsibility to present their training and experience honestly, to be direct and fair in assigning fees for services, to stay updated with changes in practice, to conduct research responsibly, to train competent future professionals.
- Professionals ought to balance their professional responsibilities to clients and to employers.
- Prohibit certain behaviours such as sexual intimacies with clients, claiming titles or degrees not earned, and using psychological tests inappropriately.

Identify possible ethical dilemmas that are present in the following counseling scenarios:

#1:A counselor's spouse's boss asks that the counselor see her college-aged son in counseling because he is confused and lonely. The spouse is being considered for a promotion.

(ACA Code of Ethics, Section A.6B-Dual Relationship)

#2:A colleague at a counseling agency routinely uses diagnostic categories more severe than the client's actual difficulties in order to get more the "most insurance reimbursement possible and give clients the full benefit of counseling."

(Section 6.06 of Ethical Principles of the APA, 2002)

#3 : A counseling session with an adult client ends at dinnertime. This client came to the counselor because of difficulties in social assertiveness. He asks the counselor to join him for dinner at his parents' restaurant.

Code of Ethics, ACA (1995)

- Section A: The Counseling Relationship

- Client Welfare- Respect dignity, encourage client growth, avoid fostering dependent counseling relationship, counseling plans review regularly, seek family involvement if necessary, guide in career and employment areas- matching client abilities and interest.
- Respecting Diversity- Nondiscrimination, respecting differences.
- Client Rights- Inform about counseling process, goals, risks, benefits, freedom of choice to decide when and from whom to seek counseling. Inform about fees, Termination and Referral.
- Respect Client Needs and Values
- Avoid Dual Relationships, Sexual Intimacies with Client
- Multiple Clients, Group Work.

- Section B: Confidentiality

- In different situations (Individual vs Group and families)
- Record Maintenance
- Confidentiality when using data for research and training, consultation

- Section C: Professional Responsibility

- Follow Code of Ethics, Maintain Professional Competence, No misrepresentation of Credentials, Public Responsibility (no sexual harassment), accurate media presentations.

- Section D: Relationship with Other Professionals

- Relationship with employer and employees- role definition, agreement, professional conduct
- Consultation, Do not accept a Referral Fee

- Section E: Evaluation, Assessment and Interpretation

- Psychological Assessment-explain use and nature, Competency to use and interpret tests, Standardized Test Condition, Obsolete Tests.

- Section F: Teaching, Training and Supervision
 - Section G: Research and Publication
 - Section H: Resolving Ethical Dilemmas
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- Standards Of Practice: Minimal Behavioural Statements of the code of ethics.
 - All members should adhere to Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics.

Limitations of Ethic Codes

- Codes of ethics have certain limitations.
- Counseling practice changes rapidly, and new intervention strategies are developed with great frequency. New populations often require new counseling approaches. However, code of ethics can never be fully current because the process of updating a code is cumbersome and takes several years to revise any code.
- No code can address every complicated situation a counselor will encounter.
- Sometimes statements of codes can conflict each other.

Ethical Principles

- Kitchener (1984, 2004) identified 5 ethical principles as fundamental to the ethics of counseling. These principles are:
 - Respect for autonomy
 - Beneficence (Doing good)
 - Nonmaleficence (Avoiding harm)
 - Justice (or fairness)
 - Fidelity (or promise keeping)
- These principles encompass the primary values shared by the profession, and in essence, its reason for existence.
- Ethics codes- explains **what behaviour** is ethical or unethical
- Ethical principles explain **why behaviours** have so been labelled as ethical and unethical
- Can be used as a resource when ethical codes seem inadequate to resolve a dilemma.