

## EDPY442: Introduction to Counselling

Lecture 4: Working in a Counselling Relationship

<http://www.ualberta.ca/~ep442a1>

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### Phases of the Counselling Process

1. Establishing structure and building a relationship (last lecture)
2. **Exploring/understanding** client's narratives, gathering information, defining the counselling issue, and continue building a relationship
3. Collaborative goal setting with SMART objectives (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, timely)
4. **Working (action) stage** within a good relationship

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### The Exploring/Understanding Phase

- Counsellor works towards understanding the client's presenting concerns and goals for therapy by:

Actively listening for:

- client's stated concerns
- pre-disposing, precipitating, and perpetuating factors
- client's past and current coping and healing strategies
- cues about what is most important to the client

During this time, the counsellor is considering:

- many possibilities for intervention (brainstorming)

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### Exploring/Understanding Phase: Leads

- Leads are a skill that can be used to get a clearer idea of the factors contributing to a client's presenting problem
- **General Leads:** involves asking the client to talk about a subject or area of life that he/she has not yet spontaneously brought up, and that the counsellor suspects may be relevant to the presenting problem
- **Interpretation:** involves suggesting the possible trigger of the client's problem or concern to the client

NOTE: it is always important to check out your interpretation with the client for verification or correction

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### Exploring/Understanding Phase: Leads

- Leading is critical to successful therapy if used with beneficence and nonmaleficence.
- Factors to consider when leading a client:
  - Timing (in session and in course of therapy)
  - Direct or indirect
  - Minimum or maximum

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### Exploring/Understanding Phase: Immediacy

- **Relationship Immediacy:** Is a skill that involves both assessing how the counselling relationship is going and using the relationship to have an impact on the client's view of him/herself.
- **Self-involving Immediacy:** involve the counsellor sharing his/her perception of the client with the client: this lets the client know how the counsellor views him/her and the problem situation

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### Exploring/Understanding Phase: Self-disclosure

- Counsellor self-disclosure involves sharing information with the client about the counsellor's life

*What purpose might self-disclosure serve in the exploring/understanding stage?*

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### Exploring/Understanding Phase: Self-disclosure

- It can promote disclosure on the part of the client so that the problem can be better understood
- It can also help to build trust in the counselling relationship by making the client feel that the counsellor is also willing to show some vulnerability
- Self-disclosure can normalize clients' presenting problems and improve their perspectives by helping them to see that they are not alone
- In multicultural counselling, self-disclosure is often a prerequisite for establishing enough credibility with clients for them to be willing to move into the action phase

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### Exploring/Understanding Phase: Multi-focused Responding

- In trying to develop a solid understanding of a client's presenting problem, we need to meet the need of his/her own level and in his/her mode of expression, be it cognitive (thinking oriented), emotional (feeling oriented), or behavioral (action oriented)
- We need to match the client's pace of speech and client's level of language use

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### Exploring/Understanding Phase: Transference and Countertransference

- **Transference** occurs when the client projects feelings, attitudes or desires he/she has in relation to a significant other in his/her past or present life situation onto the counsellor
- **Countertransference** can involve the following:
  1. The counsellor projecting his/her own feelings and thoughts onto the client: this serves to impair objectivity and change the focus of the counselling relationship
  2. Involves reacting to the client in a way similar to how the counsellor reacts to a significant other in his/her life

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### The Action Phase:

- Moving into the working/action, there are marked shifts from information gathering, contextual factors- thoughts- perceptions –beliefs- other people
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- Feelings, present internal processes, challenging old perceptions
  - Deciding to make changes and making them
  - Utilizing the therapeutic relationship itself (immediacy)

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### The Action Phase:

- There are three different options for taking action and appropriate target of change depends on the particular case: Change the Person, Change the Environment/situation, or Change both the Person and Situation

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### The Action Phase: Change the Person

- It is most appropriate to focus on changing aspects of the person in 4 situations below:
- 1. The client's view of him/herself or the problem is part of the problem
- Primary Strategy- changing perceptions through reframing. **Reframing** involves offering the client another probable and positive viewpoint on the problem

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### The Action Phase: Change the Person

- 2. The client lacks the skills to deal with the problem but has the ability or aptitude to acquire the skills
- Primary Strategy- involves **teaching** clients the needed skills, and helping them apply these skills in their lives (i.e., stress management, anxiety reduction)

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### The Action Phase: Change the Person

- 3. The client already has the skills to deal with the presenting concern but is afraid to use them or to tackle the situation
- Primary Strategy: In working with clients in these situations, **role plays**, **overt** and **covert rehearsal**, and **homework assignments** are really useful
- Overt rehearsal** having the client act out the feared problem
- Covert rehearsal** involves encouraging the client to imagine possible scenarios related to the presenting problem

\* Covert rehearsal can be used before overt rehearsal to identify all relevant situations the client might encounter and then choose which ones to role play with the counsellor

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### The Action Phase: Change the Person

4. The client can't change the situation he/she is in, so the client needs to be emotionally or behaviorally prepared to respond to or handle the situation

Primary Strategies: role plays, overt and covert rehearsals

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### The Action Phase: Change the Situation

- It is most appropriate to work with the client towards changing his/her life situation in the circumstances below:
  1. The situation is the main trigger for the client's presenting problem, the situation is changeable, and it is appropriate and desirable for the person to remain in the situation
- Two subtypes of this condition exists: Relational Problems and Problems involving environmental control

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### The Action Phase: Change the Situation

*Example of Relational Problem:* Conflict among newlyweds.

- The action phase may involve working with the parties in the situation to renegotiate aspects of their behaviors, expectations, or relationships, and to apply the negotiated changes

*Example of a Problem with Environmental Control:* Family Eating Patterns and childhood obesity

- The action phase often involves encouraging the client to engage in restructuring the environment by removing triggers or cues related to the problem behavior. People who represent cues for the problem may also be considered for avoidance and people who support problem resolution may be identified as preferred contacts and supports

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### The Action Phase: Change the Situation

2. The situation is the main trigger for the presenting problem and the situation is unchangeable, or poses a significant threat to a person's safety or emotional stability

E.g., Cycle of domestic violence

- In these situations, the counselling tends to focus on helping the clients with decision-making about staying versus exiting the situation
- Among clients in abusive situations, this may also involve rehearsal of exit plans, safety and backup plans, contact with external resources like women's shelters
- A key counselling skill that is often used with clients in these situations is confrontation

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### The Action Phase: Change the Situation

- Confrontation involves challenging a client to examine, modify, or control a part of his/her behavior that is inconsistent with what the client wants to get out of life
- When making confrontations, it's more useful to emphasize clients' strengths and resources rather than their weaknesses

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### The Action Phase: Change the Person and the Situation

- It is appropriate to change both the person and the situation when aspects from within and outside the person are affecting the presenting problem, and the situation is changeable

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