

EDPY 442: Introduction to Counselling



Lecture 5: Termination of the Counselling Relationship

Functions of Termination

- Termination refers to the conclusion of the counselling process upon the will of the client, the counsellor, or a mutual decision
- It is the conscious awareness and preparation of ending each session and ultimately the entire relationship
- Termination at the end of counselling is the final stage of the counselling process and involves maintenance of changes made and autonomy of the client

Three Types of Termination

1. Client Initiated Termination

This is when the client determines the end of therapy. This can happen in 3 ways:

- i) The client experiences some life event that forces the termination of counselling (e.g., loss of job, moving etc.). This is also known as **premature termination**.
- ii) Client articulates their desire or readiness to end the counselling relationship. Most often this is because they feel they have met their goals.

Three Types of Termination: Client Initiated Termination

- iii) When the client stops coming to therapy or does not come to the last session (no show). This is also known as premature termination.

Premature Termination: is one that occurs during the phases of Building a Counselling Relationship or Working in a Counselling Relationship and is client-initiated. Clients terminate counselling before their presenting problems have been properly understood by the therapist, or before their personal goals have been achieved.

Questions for Reflection....



Have you ever skipped a meeting with someone? What were your reasons? How do you feel about saying goodbye to someone you care about?

Three Types of Termination Cont'd

2. Counsellor Initiated Termination:

This is when the counsellor determines the end of therapy. This can happen in 3 ways:

- i) Counsellor's job is time-limited or ends abruptly (e.g., short-term employment). When this is known, it is usually addressed, but can still be premature as well.
- ii) No new goals have been made and all previous goals have been met; thus, there is no need to continue therapy (and in fact can be unethical to do so).

Three Types of Termination: Counsellor Initiated Termination

- iii) When the client's goals are beyond the competency of the counsellor. This happens when the counsellor is unskilled in the area of has an ethical conflict. When this happens, a referral is typically made.

Questions for Reflection....



What do you feel competent to talk to a client about? How would you know if a client is beyond what you should work with? How would you tell a client that you need to refer them elsewhere? How would you feel about this?

Three Types of Termination Cont'd

3. Mutual Agreement Termination:

This is when both client and counsellor decide to terminate therapy. This can happen when:

- i) Client and counsellor collaboratively review goals and progress and decide that the work at this time, is complete, but leaving the door open to future sessions if needed
- ii) Third-party insurance funding runs out. This is known from the onset of counselling so is not considered premature termination

Discussion Question:

Everyone has had relationships that have ended. With friends, family members, colleagues, casual acquaintances. What reasons have you had for ending relationships in the past? What feelings have you had about these endings?



Indicators of Readiness to Terminate

- Clear expression and evidence of commitment to maintenance plan
- Positive identifiable changes in the client's life (behavior, mood, emotional state)
- Consistent reports of improved ability to cope with life situation and/or referral concerns
- Disengagement or slowing pace in sessions
- Apparent disinterest in the counselling process
- Missed, cancelled appointment (s)

Client Reactions to Termination

Sadness

- For some people, the therapeutic relationship is one of the most important relationships they have. So the ending of the relationship is experienced as a loss. Therapy provides an opportunity to talk about the loss directly and their feelings associated with it.

Anger

- Some clients may experience a sense of abandonment, that it is unfair that the relationship can't continue

Client Reactions to Termination

Fear

- Some clients may worry about not being able to “make it on their own” and are frightened by termination (e.g., what if I relapse?). Even if autonomy has been prioritized throughout therapy, this may still be the client’s response. So, it is important to emphasize who did the “work” in creating their change.

Happiness

- Some clients celebrate the ending of therapy and feel a sense of pride and accomplishment in their progress

NOTE: Clients may have any or all of these feelings during termination so it is important to explore and normalize.

Resistance to Termination

External attribution of change:

- This is when the client believes they are dependent on counselling and/or counsellor to maintain their changes. This is often the case for short-term therapy when the changes appear to have happened fast.

Having someone to talk to:

- Clients can often feel like they are accountable for their feelings/behaviors when they come in to counselling and enjoy having someone to “check-in” on them
- Clients may often just enjoy the relationship and having someone consistent to talk to about their life

Resistance to Termination Cont'd

History of abandonment and/or rejection:

- The ending of a counselling relationship may remind or trigger a client of unresolved feelings related to loss

Counsellor's countertransference:

- If the counsellor has unresolved issues of loss, the ending of a counselling relationship can trigger an emotional reaction in the counsellor, especially when he/she feels particularly connected to the client.
- Countertransference can also interfere with termination when the counsellor has feelings of wanting to protect or nurture the client and as a result, is not ready to let them go.

Facilitation of Termination

- Termination needs to be discussed early- preferably from the very first session
- The longer the client has been engaged in counselling, the more notice and preparation they need for termination
- When possible, it is good for termination to be a gradual process rather than an abrupt ending. This can be done by meeting less frequently before ending.
- Termination is after all, an indication of progress. So, review highlights and accomplishments of therapy. This can be done ceremoniously as well.
- Plan for relapse and practice maintenance.

To follow-up or not to follow-up?

Thoughts to Consider...

- Who is the follow-up for? Does it serve the needs of the counsellor or the client?
- Emotions of client (feelings of loss, termination might re-surface)
- Is it feasible? (financially, continuity of care?)
- Is it ethical? Is the client still considered a "client"? Issues of confidentiality... what if they decide to share new information, how would you deal with that?

How do you prepare a client for termination?

Case Study:

You have been seeing an adult client for 1 year and have been working towards her addition to substances. You will be changing jobs in the next couple of months. How do you prepare the client for termination?

What would be different if it were a child or adolescent?
