

COUNSELING

DEFINITION

Counseling is a process by means of which the helper expresses care and concern towards the person with a problem, and facilitates that person's personal growth and brings about change through self-knowledge.

The British Association for Counseling (BAC) may have been the first professional association to adopt a definition of professional counseling. In 1986 it published the following definition:

“Counseling is the skilled and principled use of relationship to facilitate self- knowledge, emotional acceptance and growth and the optimal development of personal resources. The overall aim is to provide an opportunity to work towards living more satisfyingly and resourcefully. Counseling relationships will vary according to need but may be concerned with developmental issues, addressing and resolving specific problems, making decisions, coping with crisis, developing personal insights and knowledge, working through feelings of inner conflict or improving relationships with others. The counselor’s role is to facilitate the clients work in ways that respect the client’s values, personal resources and capacity for self-determination.”

In 1997 the Governing Council of the American Counseling Association (ACA) accepted the following definition of professional counseling:

“Counseling is the application of mental health, psychological or human development principles, through cognitive, affective, behavioral or systemic interventions, strategies that address wellness, personal growth, or career development, as well as pathology”.

The definition also includes these additional attributes:

- Counseling deals with wellness, personal growth, career, and pathological concerns. In other words, counselors work in areas that involve relationships. These areas include intra- and interpersonal concerns related to finding meaning and adjustment in such settings as schools, families, and careers.

- Counseling is conducted with persons who are considered to be functioning well and those who are having more serious problems. Counseling meets the needs of a wide spectrum of people.
- Counseling is theory based. Counselors draw from a number of theoretical approaches, including those that are cognitive, affective, behavioral, and systemic. These theories may be applied to individuals, groups, and families.
- Counseling is a process that maybe developmental or intervening. Counselors focus on their clients' goals. Thus, counseling involves both choice and change. In some cases, "counseling is a rehearsal for action"

SCOPE OF COUNSELING

Clients are encouraged to meet with a counselor even if they are not sure that they need counseling. Any clients facing the following common problems are encouraged to see a counselor -

- Academic Performance
- Trouble with Concentrating, Studying, or Attending Classes
- Anxieties about Aspects of Study including Exams and Presentations
- Achievement Conflicts
- Family Issues
- Anxiety/Persistent Worry/Panic Attacks
- Bereavements and Parental Separations
- Cultural Concerns

Essentials of Counseling

- Stress
- Life Transitions
- Loneliness/Isolation/Homesickness
- Difficulty Adjusting to Life
- Relationships/Intimacy Issues
- Friend or Roommate Conflicts
- Difficulty Making or Keeping Friends
- Lack of Self Confidence or Low Self esteem
- Self-Injury

- Suicidal Thoughts
- Worries about Appearance
- Anger Management
- Grief/Loss
- Identity Confusion
- Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity
- Eating or Sleeping Disorders/ Body Image Concerns
- Weight Loss or Gain
- Depression/Apathy
- Sexuality
- Abusive Relationships
- Alcohol or Drug/Substance Use/ Abuse
- Sexual Assault/Rape/Abuse
- Pregnancy
- Difficulty in making Decisions
- Uncertainty about the Future.

The Psychological Counseling Services approach psychological issues from the perspective that psychological health and well-being is affected by one's personal history and current environment. The aim of the service is to assist clients in developing healthy, fulfilling relationships and increasing enjoyment in productive working and learning. The Psychological Counseling recognizes that each person is unique. There are many approaches to help clients move towards growth and problem-resolution. Often counselors will provide them with opportunities to learn new skills and coping mechanisms while also increasing their self-understanding and insight. Counselors may also examine past patterns to help them assess in a healthier way their current/ past relationships, decision-making, and family dynamics. With the help of their counselors, clients will better understand their strengths and abilities to manage life challenges which can be very important in achieving their therapeutic goals.

GOALS OF COUNSELLING

Some of the different goals that are adopted either explicitly or implicitly by counsellors are listed:

1. ***Insight***: The acquisition of an understanding of the origins and development of emotional difficulties, leading to an increased capacity to take rational control feelings and actions (Freud: 'where id was, shall ego be').
2. ***Relating with others***: Becoming better able to form and maintain meaningful and satisfying relationships with other people: for example, within the family or workplace.
3. ***Self-awareness***: Becoming more aware of thoughts and feelings that had been blocked off or denied, or developing a more accurate sense of how self is perceived by others.
4. ***Self-acceptance***: The development of a positive attitude towards self, marked by an ability to acknowledge areas of experience that had been the subject of self-criticism and rejection.
5. ***Self-actualization or individuation***: Moving in the direction of fulfilling potential or achieving an integration of previously conflicting parts of self.
6. ***Enlightenment***: Assisting the client to arrive at a higher state of spiritual awakening.
7. ***Problem-solving***: Finding a solution to a specific problem that the client had not been able to resolve alone. Acquiring a general competence in problem solving.
8. ***Psychological education***: Enabling the client to acquire ideas and techniques with which to understand and control behavior.
9. ***Acquisition of social skills***: Learning and mastering social and interpersonal skills such as maintenance of eye contact, turn-taking in conversations, assertiveness or anger control.
10. ***Cognitive change***: The modification or replacement of irrational beliefs or maladaptive thought patterns associated with self-destructive behavior.
11. ***Behavior change***: The modification or replacement of maladaptive or self destructive patterns of behavior.
12. ***Systemic change***: Introducing change into the way in that social systems (e.g. families) operate.
13. ***Empowerment***: Working on skills, awareness and knowledge that will enable the client to take control of his or her life.

14. **Restitution:** Helping the client to make amends for previous destructive behavior.
15. **Generativity and social action:** Inspiring in the person a desire and capacity to care for others and pass on knowledge (generativity) and to contribute to the collective good through political engagement and community work.

CONDITIONS FACILITATING EFFECTIVE COUNSELING

The successful outcomes in counseling are associated with the counselor client relationship which is the outcome of all therapeutic efforts. There are two necessary conditions. They are:

1. **Counselor-offered conditions:** The core conditions for successful counseling are:

- **Empathic understanding** (Empathic understanding as a process that involves communicating a sense of caring and understanding).
- **Unconditional positive regard** (counselor communicating to clients that they are of value and worth as individuals).
- **Congruence** (Behaving in a manner consistent with how one thinks and feels).
- **Respect** (focuses on the positive attributes of the client).
- **Immediacy** (direct, mutual communication).
- **Confrontation** (Pointing out discrepancies in what the client is saying and doing).
- **Concreteness** (Helping clients discuss themselves in specific terms).
- **Self-disclosure** (Making the self-known to others).

These eight core conditions are necessary and sufficient for constructive personality change to occur.

2. Counselor-and client offered conditions

The working alliance is another concept that can be used to describe the counseling relationship. It goes beyond focusing on counselor-offered conditions and includes counselor-and client-offered conditions.

The working alliance is composed of three parts. They are:

- Agreement between the counselor and client in terms of the goals of counseling.
- Agreement between the counselor and client in terms of the tasks of counseling.
- Emotional bond between the counselor and client.

The strength of the working alliance depends on the degree of agreement relating to goals and tasks of counseling and the level of emotional attachment between the counselor and client.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A COUNSELLOR

Several skills need to be brought into a counseling session. These include:

1. Attitudinal skills;

There is probably nothing which has a greater impact on the outcome of a counseling session than the counselor's attitude. Attitudes can be positive or reactive. They include:

- ***Respect***, for oneself as well as for the client, expressed by praising the client's individuality and structuring the counseling to the needs, capacities and resources of the individual.
- ***Genuineness/congruence***: It is the consistency or harmony between what the counselor says, and what he/she is. This condition reflects honesty, transparency, and trust.
- ***Unconditional, positive regard*** which makes clients feel welcomed and valued as individuals.
- ***Empathy***: the ability to understand what the client experiences, and to communicate this kind of feeling. Carl Rogers (1980), defined it as perceiving the internal frame of reference of another person.
- ***Self-disclosure***: It helps the client to communicate easily and to reveal something about him/herself, creating mutual trust, and disarming the client, so that he/she feels free and talks openly.
- ***Confrontation***, which uses the client's behavior, or words, to point out inconsistencies between what is said and what is done. When handling a response, confrontation, or challenging attitudes, is a healthy development in counseling.

2. Listening skills;

Being a good listener entails receiving and sending appropriate messages. Listening to clients is not just a matter of receiving what they say, but also receiving how they say it. Sometimes

how they communicate is much more revealing than what they actually say, which may be more concealing than revealing.

Listening skills are basic to all human interaction, whether the purpose is for getting information, conducting in-depth interviews, or offering informal help. Listening is considered to be the most important counseling skill.

3. Verbal communication skills;

The use of words in counseling is a skill which, like any other skill, requires practice to master. Verbal communication takes place first in the literal or content phase. If inappropriate vocabulary is used, rapport and understanding will be hindered. When this happens, miscommunication occurs.

In addition to the literal phase of verbal communication, there is also the emotional phase. This refers to other attributes involved in vocal interactions, such as volume, the emotional edge, and other non-verbal cues such as gestures. Counselors must be sensitive to both the literal and emotional phases of verbal communication.

4. Giving leads;

Leads may be defined as statements that counselors use in communication with the clients.

Leads have been classified into categories of techniques, namely:

- a) ***Restatement of Content:*** Attempts to convey understanding by repeating or rephrasing the communication.
- b) ***Questioning:*** Seeks further information and asks the person counseled to elaborate a point.
- c) ***Reflection of Feeling:*** Understanding from the client's point of view and communicating that understanding.
- d) ***Reassurance:*** Serves as a reward or reinforcing agent. It is often used to support the client's exploration of ideas and feelings or test different behavior.
- e) ***Interpretation:*** Explains meaning behind the client's statements.

SCHOOL AND EDUCATIONAL COUNSELLING

School counselors provide counseling programs in three critical areas: academic, personal/social, and career. Their services and programs help students resolve emotional, social or behavioral problems and help them develop a clearer focus or sense of direction. Effective counseling programs are important to the school climate and a crucial element in improving student achievement.

The following are the objectives of counseling in schools:

1. To develop in students an awareness of opportunities in the personal, social and vocational areas by providing them with appropriate, useful information.
2. To help students develop the skills of self-study, self-analysis and self understanding.
3. To help all students in making appropriate and satisfactory personal, social educational choices.
4. To help students develop positive attitudes to self, to others, to appropriate national issues, to work and to learning.
5. To help students acquire the skills of collecting and using information.
6. To help students who are underachieving, use their potentials to the maximum.
7. To assist students in the process of developing and acquiring skills in problem solving and decision making.
8. To help build up/or sharpen the child's perception of reality, development of a sense of autonomy and to whip up the motivation for creativity and productivity.
9. To identify students with learning problems, so that different individualized methods can be used for effective teaching and learning.
10. To work with significant others in the life of the child, helping them to understand the needs and problems of the child. This aids in creating, arousing and sustaining their interest in and their understanding of the child's needs, problems and goals so that the child could be optimally helped to attain those goals, handle those problems and meet those needs.
11. To help route the nations human resources into appropriate useful and beneficial channels and identify and nurture human potentialities in various fields of study endeavors, thus ensuring adequate manpower in the various sector of the nation's economy.

CAREER COUNSELLING

Career counseling is ongoing face-to-face interaction performed by individuals who have specialized training in the field to assist people in obtaining a clear understanding of them (e.g., interests, skills, values, personality traits) and to obtain an equally clear picture of the world of work so as to make choices that lead to satisfying work lives.

Career counselors help clients within the context of a psychological relationship with issues such as making career choices and adjustments, dealing with career transitions, overcoming career barriers, and optimizing clients' work lives across the life span.

Career counselors are cognizant of the many contextual factors present in the lives of their clients and of the ways in which social and emotional issues interplay with career issues. It was Frank Parsons who developed a systematic way of helping individuals to find appropriate work that still has much influence on the way in which career counseling is conducted today. Parsons theorized that there were three broad decision-making factors:

- A clear understanding of oneself, including one's aptitudes, abilities, interests, and limitations
- A knowledge of the requirements, advantages, disadvantages, and prospects of jobs
- Ability to reason regarding the relation of these two sets of facts.

These three factors have had an enormous impact on how career counseling has been practiced.

A career counselor employs certain tests and inventories to help clients get to know themselves, self-assess their personal resources, enable them for decision and planning their own careers. They purport to understand aptitudes (intellectual, verbal, numerical, reasoning, reaction speed, special talents, etc.), personality, interests and special needs, values and attitudes, assessment of academic acquisitions (learning skills and methods), interpersonal relations, self-image, decision making etc. In other words, the assessment instruments can help clients with:

- Awareness of personal aptitudes, ability, skills or knowledge
- Choosing education and training pathways in accordance with their projects and results regarding their career in given life contexts

- Identifying occupational alternatives complementary to their structure of interests, aptitudes and dominant personality traits
- Drawing up a positive and realistic self-image
- Identifying the causes, the nature and the amplitude of barriers in their occupational area
- Preparing for decision-making and autonomous career planning development;
- Compensating the gap in information, incomplete or erroneous information and diminishing the stereotypes regarding the world of work
- Identifying possible sources of professional dissatisfaction, social misfit or difficulty in carrying relationships and role performing.