

# Pre-Practicum Seminar

## Class 2 Notes

### CHAPTER 2: Getting Started: Skills and Tasks for Engaging New Clients

READ pages 44 – 61 (TEXT “The Essential Counsellor”)

#### 1. Planning for your first meeting with your client

The three primary goals of the first session are

- i. **Initial engagement** – providing support and engaging the client in the process
- ii. **Education:** Giving client information about counselling, how you work and what is expected of them for example completing homework. You need to include:
  - a. Your qualification (Counsellor-in-Training or M.A. in Counselling etc)
  - b. Fees if applicable
  - c. Ground rules
    - time and length of session
    - confidentiality and its limits
    - cancellation policy
  - d. Informed consent (**see copy of TCC Informed Consent**) and other paper work (e.g. form for demographic data-address, place of employment, next of kin, doctor’s name and address, medications if any-these documents are at TCC and will be provided when seeing clients there. External sites usually have their own forms).
  - e. Fact sheet for clients to take home and read (I usually have these handouts printed beforehand for clients to read e.g. Fact Sheet on Depression, Worksheets)
- iii. **Assessment:** Begin to ascertain the person’s strength and deficits (anything that can help in the therapeutic process and help the client to function better or anything that can retard the client’s progress in therapy-example of a strength is the client saying “I did not go into depression because my mother was there for me” this shows the client has a support system that is readily available.)

## 2. The First Contact

- Engage the new client in a relationship with you, find out who the new person is and why he has come to see you
- The working alliance between you and the client is nurtured by your ability to be present with **genuineness, positive** regard and **respect**
- All of these convey your empathic **acceptance** of the person

## 3. Skills of Attending (Attending Behaviour)

Attending is the behavioural aspect of building rapport. When a counsellor first meets with a client, they must indicate to the client that they are interested in listening to them and helping them. Through attending, the counsellor is able to encourage the client to talk and open up about their issues.

Eye contact is important and polite (in Western society) when speaking or listening to another person. This does not mean that the counsellor stares at the client, but maintains normal eye contact to show genuine interest in what the client is saying.

Attending behaviour encourages client to talk while reducing helper talk

It facilitates self-exploration and reinforces helpee openness and self-disclosure. See attending behaviours described below:

Maintaining eye contact: - Involves directly gazing at clients with occasional breaks

- a. break eye contact in response to client anxiety, helper needs to provide significant, direct eye contact until the client shows discomfort (**clues includes looking away, fidgeting, speaking haltingly**).

Using Appropriate Body language. Involves having an open, relaxed posture.

- a. Includes facing the client squarely with helpers left shoulder across from helpee's right shoulder
- b. Helpers should position themselves about 3 feet from the client
- c. Helpers should sit towards the edge of their chairs to facilitate **leaning forward** when talking and **leaning back** when client talks productively

- d. Use head nods and body and hand gestures to communicate appropriate verbal and nonverbal messages

#### 4. Questioning

As a good counselor, you should ask open-ended questions as opposed to close-ended questions. You should also ask probing questions. In other words, make use of questions to help clients elaborate on the issues they are facing and how they feel about the situations of concern. Below close-ended questions, open ended questions and probing questions are defined (see class 1 handout also for explanation of these types of questions):

- *What is a closed ended question?*

A closed ended question is a question that invites a “Yes” or “No” response. For example, “Are you happy with your husband?” This is a bad question because it does not provide the client with an opportunity to express his or her feelings.

- *What is an open-ended question?*

An open-ended question is a question that leaves room for a client to give a detailed and complete answer. For example, “tell me about your experience so far with the new strategy you learnt last week”.

- *What is a probing question?*

A probing question is a question that asks for more details for example, “And what else can you tell me?” or “What happened after that?” “Is there anything else you would like to add?” And so on.

Since open-ended questions that are difficult to answer in a few words, they encourage the client to talk, other examples follow:

E.g. *“What is your reason for being here.”*

*“What are your thoughts about that situation?”*

#### **Note also:**

- Questions starting with **how** lead to discussion of **feelings**.

- Questions starting with *what* leads to discussion of *facts* related to issues or concerns.
- A statement to open a session could start like this: “Please tell me what you would like to talk about”.

How to Use Open-Ended Question; Open ended questions can be used to start a conversation, to have clients clarify and elaborate, to solve problems etc. See some examples below (also in your spare time read on Socratic questioning for ideas of some questions you can ask your client in counselling- socratic questioning is a technique used in counselling):

#### Beginning a conversation

- “What would you like to talk about?”
- “What’s going on with you?”

#### Clarifying and elaborating

- “How is this problem for you?”
- “What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?”
- “What is it about the situation that bothers you?”

#### Working with feelings

- “How do you feel about that?” (Make sure you get an answer about feelings, not thoughts.)
- “What is [that feeling] like for you?”
- “How do you feel right now?” (This helps people bring feelings into the here and now.)
- “What would you like to say to him/her?” (This helps people get in touch with their feelings about other people.)

#### Solving problems

- “What options do you have?”
- “What have you thought of doing?”
- “How do you feel about each of these options?”
- “What’s the best thing that could happen?”
- “What’s the worst thing that could happen?”
- “What do you think will actually happen”

## 5. The Importance of Non-Verbal Behaviour

- The ability to observe a client's non-verbal behaviour is important, but so is your awareness of your own non-verbal behavior. Significant evidence has shown that the counsellor's nonverbal behavior plays an important role in interactions with clients. The way you present yourself, your own nonverbal behavior, should be intentional and thoughtfully designed-in as natural a way as possible- to increase the potential for building a connection with this person who has come to see you.
- Client's nonverbal behaviour provides clues for further exploration and

## 6. **Taking Control of Your Nonverbal Behaviour.**

- **Body movements/language** may include any motion of the body. Are you sitting with reasonably good posture, in an open, straight ahead fashion? Or are your arms and legs crossed protective? Are you reasonably still or nervous and jittery?
- **Eye contact and movements** are the direction and focus of a person's eyes. Are you comfortable looking in your client's eyes or are looking down or away? Do you occasionally break eye contact to accommodate the anxiety level of the client?
- **Tone of voice** is the range of pitch in the voice that may communicate something other than the words being spoken. For example, a voice that is gentle and soft yet clearly heard communicates respect and a desire for engagement
- **Facial expressions** refer to any movement and changes of the facial composition. Is your face relaxed, smiling or holding tension and tight? How natural and spontaneous are your facial expressions?

## 7. **Nonverbal Behaviour: Cultural Considerations**

- There are different cultural comfort zones relating to physical proximity and eye contact

## **Other Simple, Supportive Tools for Engagement**

### a. The Use of Silence

New Counsellors are sometimes reluctant to allow for silence. Anxiety can breed a desire to fill every silence, usually with some new questions. Some silence is acceptable even to be nurtured. Learn to avoid the temptation to fill the void that silence implies. Oftentimes there is a great deal happening for your client in that silence, and whatever it is it may become more apparent if the silence is left untrammelled (if it is not restricted or hampered). Of course, too many silences and exceedingly long silences can provoke great anxiety, for both you and your client. However, the trick is in finding the right balance, in knowing when to jump in-and experience is the greatest teacher in perfecting your timing.

As a general rule, allow for less silence with newer, less counselling-sophisticated clients. They will be the ones most likely to become overly anxious if there is too much silence. Clients whom you know better, particularly those who are experienced in the ways of counselling, can be allowed to sit with somewhat longer silences. And again, careful observation of the client's nonverbal behavior in the silent interval can cue you as to its effect.

#### b. The Simple Prompt

An alternative to silence is the statement that asks for more information without stating the request as a question. There is little need to elaborate much about this particular mode of inquiry for it truly is simple, yet it can be quite effective. Two examples are below:

“Tell me more about.....”

“Let's explore more.....”

Other prompts include “Hmmm. Go on...” also a head nod and a smile can be used as nonverbal simple prompts. Sometimes in the counselling literature simple prompts are referred to as “*minimal encouragers*” or “*acknowledgements*”

Such prompts are effective in that they nudge your client into more discussion of what is already being talked about. They do not tend to move the client away from the topic already in focus, and they make you sound more confident than the use of a question might.

**For the counselling role-play with first time clients you may use the following outline as a guide:**

- Introduce yourself and give client information about counselling
  - Your qualification (counsellor in training in the M.A. Counselling Psychology Programme, CGST)
  - Ground rules governing the sessions (lateness, cancellation policy, missed session etc)
  - Inform the client of your main theoretical orientation

- (CBT) and will use other approaches as become necessary. At this point also, you should seek client's permission to use prayer and scriptures in sessions
- o Discuss frequency of sessions
  - Example, the sessions are usually held weekly, however at times there might be a two week, three week or even a month break in between some sessions to facilitate completion of Home Work, to follow-up with referrals made to other agencies etc.
- Discuss confidentiality and its limits
- Complete the paper work (Informed Consent etc)
- Ascertain client's reason for seeking counselling
  - o This is the commencement of the clinical interview-where the client shares his/her story)
- Utilize the Skills of Attending
  - o Eye contact
  - o Using appropriate body language-lean forward
- Ask probing and open-ended questions
- Reflecting and Paraphrasing

Reflecting is the process of paraphrasing and restating both the feelings and words of the speaker. The purposes of reflecting are:

To allow the speaker to 'hear' their own thoughts and to focus on what they say and feel.

To show the speaker that you are trying to perceive the world as they see it and that you are doing your best to understand their messages.

To encourage them to continue talking.

**Examples of reflection are noted on the last page of this handout**

**Note:** during the clinical interview and as appropriate, you would also use skills/techniques such as:

- immediacy (also known as challenging)
  - confronting in a caring way
  - affirmations
  - validations
  - self disclosure
  - encouragements
- Ascertain what the client's goals for counselling are.

Sometimes a client may not be able to articulate these goals but with prompting and cuing you can assist (for example "based on what I am hearing you are experiencing burnout and so a goal of counselling maybe to engage in self care activities that will reduce your physical stress, am I correct?")

Or, if the client is not in position to identify clearly all the goals he/she hopes to achieve in counselling, you could assign him/her Home Work to consider these goals, written them down and come next session prepared to discuss

- Ascertain client's commitment to action.

For example "the effectiveness of counselling depends us working together as a team to achieve the desired results, as your counsellor I will work closely with you as you seek to achieve your goals however you will also need to be actively involved in the process, this means completing Home Work when assigned, being punctual for your sessions, participate in the in-session activities, being honest with me. If I introduce a counselling technique that you are uncomfortable using feel free to let me know"

- Discuss treatment planning with the client
  - Inform the client that you normally develop a treatment plan after which you are able to say how many sessions you will have with him/her. The treatment plan is based on his or her goals for counselling and is based on a collaborative effort of you and the client.
- Provide client with resources you may have on hand and assign home work as appropriate
- Summarize and end session agreeing on a date for the next session

### **Below are Examples of Using Reflection in Counselling**

Client: I had a terrible day. My dog got hit by a car, but I think he will be OK. I saw it happen, and it was really awful. I love my dog very much, he is like a best friend to me. I never should have let him off the leash. Also, I had to get him to the vet which threw me off schedule and messed up the rest of my day

#### **Example 1: Responding with ReStatement**

Counsellor: You had a bad day today. Your got hit and this threw off your entire day

Restatement is simply giving back, in perhaps somewhat altered form, exactly what your client has said. This is not a distortion of what the client has said but it certainly doesn't lead the client to think deeper about the situation.

#### **Example 2: Responding with Reflection of Content**

Counsellor: Today was a bad day for you. There was the trauma of your dog getting hit by a car. Then your entire day got messed up having had to deal with the situation.

Responding to content, or paraphrasing, implies that you understand the material. Your response can help the client go into more depth with it. The best reflections of content are brief, to the point, summary statement of what has been said. These reflections are truly outstanding when they respond not only to the obvious content but also to the latent, or hidden content.

#### **Example 3: Responding with Reflection of Content and Feeling**

Counsellor: That is awful. You love this dog so much and you had to go through the trauma of watching it get hit. No wonder your day got messed up.

Intelligent reflections of content and feelings capture not only the essence of what the client has said but also the feeling associated with the content. These responses can help the client explore further and also communicate the counsellors emotional understanding and connection with the client.

### **References**

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