

Elements of a Successful Therapeutic Relationship

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CNL-515: Counseling Skills

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October 9, 2024

Introduction

The key to effective counseling is the relationship between the counselor and the client, based on trust, empathy, and mutual respect. This relationship directly affects the success of counseling, enabling clients to communicate openly and allowing counselors to provide tailored support. This paper will explore the essential components of a strong counseling relationship and how they promote lasting emotional well-being.

Counselor Role

My primary responsibility as a clinical mental health counselor is supporting, guiding, and empowering clients to achieve emotional well-being and resilience. With a focus on the military, first responders, law enforcement, and clients with anxiety and PTSD, I will respect client rights, build trust, maintain confidentiality, and practice ethical principles (ACA, 2014). I will help clients process emotions, recognize maladaptive behaviors, develop healthy coping skills, and provide tools to manage life's challenges beyond counseling. I will educate and mentor these communities and collaborate with other professionals on and around Luke AFB, local and government agencies, fire departments, and police departments to provide comprehensive care, reduce stigma, and tailor support for these clients' unique needs, promoting better outcomes. Advocating for the needs of this demographic is a priority as they face higher risks of PTSD, depression, anxiety, traumatic brain injury, and sexual harassment (Goodtherapy.org, 2019; SAMHSA, 2018).

Obtaining licensure ensures I meet professional and ethical standards set by the state of Arizona. This validates my qualifications and holds me accountable for maintaining ongoing professional development. Licensure protects both myself and my clients by establishing trust

and credibility in my practice and addressing violations of standards of professional conduct (MDLR, n.d.).

Counselor Identity Strategies

My professional identity includes cultivating a blend of self-awareness and professionalism and demonstrating ethical conduct as reflected in the ACA ethics code (ACA, 2014). I will stay informed of current trends, pursue continuing education, and ground my counseling practice in theories that align with my values, such as CBT and person-centered therapy; having a clear framework that guides my work and ensures consistency in my approaches, leadership, and advocacy (Egan & Reese, 2023). I will obtain certifications in trauma-focused treatment approaches like TF-CBT and EMDR to better serve the military, law enforcement, and first responder population, highlighting advanced training and my dedication to serving this population. I aim to become a mentor for new counselors while incorporating diversity into my practice by recognizing cultural factors influencing mental health. I will join and actively participate in professional organizations like the American Counseling Association (ACA). I will build my professional network and seek mentors who will help strengthen my identity and allow for teamwork and shared learning. I will advocate for clients and the profession to develop leadership and influence in the field. I will strive to maintain a balance between empathy and fairness to ensure I provide caring support while also respecting professional boundaries and implementing effective interventions.

Dispositions

In my practice counseling sessions, I remained professional and showed care and understanding for the client's struggles with work stress, life balance, and being laid off. I conveyed genuine compassion and empathy through my facial expressions and body language. I

used SOLER and open-ended questions to provide empathetic support, allowing my client to express her emotions. When she told me she lost her job, I adjusted my approach to match her feelings at the time. This showed that I was fully present, attentive to her needs, and flexible by changing the session's focus to what was most important for her at that moment, even though it differed from the original plan (Egan & Reese, 2023; GCU, 2022). I used a client-centered approach, focusing on her emotions and respecting her control of the conversation. I validated her feelings, pointing out that they were very normal under the circumstances, creating a professional and nonjudgmental environment, accepting her as she was (GCU, 2022).

Counseling Skills

During the practice sessions, I maintained clear boundaries by scarcely sharing prudent self-disclosure without elaborating, telling the client I had experienced anxiety and sleeping issues, and offering a device I use called the chill pill to relieve anxiety and stress and promote restful sleep (Egan & Reese, 2023). I adhered to ethical guidelines, reviewed confidentiality and consent well in each session, and effectively opened and closed sessions (ACA, 2014). I used SOLER, body language, and facial expressions to reflect empathy and genuineness. I used open-ended questions, reflection, and paraphrasing to build a rapport with the client and give her a safe, comfortable space. I applied evidence-based practices like cognitive restructuring and mindfulness to manage anxiety. When we discussed her job loss, I emphasized it as a new opportunity and highlighted her comments about feeling less stressed by the change. I used scaling to show that her anxiety and stress were higher in her old job than after her layoff. I also used motivational techniques, respect, and empowerment, pointing out her strengths from her previous position and how they would help her find new work and adjust quickly (Egan & Reese, 2023). I praised her for achieving goals such as seeking jobs with a better work schedule

and being more present at home. I employed active listening and flexibility and used the client-centered approach, focusing on the client's needs and responding accordingly (Egan & Reese, 2023).

I want to improve active listening by speaking less and listening more. The goal is to help clients manage their problems effectively and see challenges as learning opportunities (Egan & Reese, 2023). I need to practice explaining the breathing technique for stress and focus on the relaxation part of SOLER in organic settings.

Theory Knowledge

Understanding counseling theory provides a framework for comprehending human behavior and mental health issues. My guiding theories, based on my values and beliefs, combined with interpersonal skills, client conceptualization, and treatment planning will help me develop a strong professional identity (Barth et al., 2019). I am building my counselor identity around the client-centered approach, using CBT and SFT to help clients with cognitive restructuring, coping skills, and resilience and TF-CBT and EMDR for trauma recovery. CBT is evidence-based and fosters respect, honesty, empathy, integrity, and accountability, which are all vital to me as a counselor (Cuncic, A. 2023; Murdock, 2017).

According to the ACA, counseling is a professional relationship that helps diverse people achieve mental health, wellness, education, and career goals (ACA, 2014). Counselors focus on wellness, not just addressing problems, which sets them apart from other therapists. They can use different counseling theories within the holistic framework to meet clients' needs (Barth et al., 2019).

Supervision

During my practicum, I will focus on learning and improving foundational counseling skills such as active listening, empathy, and case formulation. I will seek feedback on these skills by discussing client interactions, practicing different scenarios, and identifying areas for improvement with my supervisor (Peetoom & Nuttgens, 2019). Supervision will provide a safe space to gain confidence in working with clients by asking questions and learning how to apply theory to practice. I will reflect on my personal reactions during sessions, explore transference, countertransference, and how my values and biases might influence my work with clients (Joe & Borland, 2023). This self-awareness is crucial to my development as a trauma-informed and culturally sensitive counselor.

Supervision will help me develop and refine my case conceptualization and treatment planning skills as I take on a larger caseload. I will seek guidance on formulating treatment goals, choosing appropriate interventions, and adjusting my approach based on client progress. Supervision will be essential for addressing ethical dilemmas (Joe & Borland, 2023). I will address challenges with confidentiality, boundaries, or dual relationships, to ensure I adhere to ethical standards and best practices.

An internship is a time to integrate theory with practice and develop my personal counseling style. Supervision will help me explore how different theoretical approaches fit with my counseling identity, receive feedback on which interventions resonate most with clients, and refine my approach. As I work toward licensure, supervision will help me to deepen my clinical competence, such as working with co-occurring disorders. I will seek guidance on integrating trauma-informed care and substance use counseling into my practice. I will focus on clinical skills and growing as a leader and advocate within the field. I will use supervision to explore how I can engage in advocacy, participate in community work, and eventually take on

supervisory roles myself. Supervision post-graduate will be essential for maintaining self-awareness, ensuring I am practicing self-care, and preventing burnout.

Conclusion

Trust, empathy, collaboration, and mutual respect are crucial for effective counseling and the healing process. They create a supportive environment for clients to confront challenges and achieve growth. Therapy's success depends on the quality of the therapeutic relationship, making it vital for immediate and long-term outcomes. By prioritizing these elements, counselors can foster connections that lead to lasting positive change.

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