COUNSELLING PROCESS

STAGES OF COUNSELLING

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THE SIX STAGES OF THE COUNSELING PROCESS

A counseling session is therefore sometimes referred to as the 50-minute hour. It takes place in a session depends on the client's needs and the counselor's personal approach to counseling. Although there is some variation during a session, there is a basic structure. That structure was described by Cormier and Hackney (1987) as a five-stage process: relationship building, assessment, goal setting, interventions, and termination and follow-up. These stages have been expanded in the following six-stage model of the counseling process.

**Stage one:** Relationship building  
**Stage two:** Assessment and diagnosis  
**Stage three:** Formulation of counseling goals  
**Stage four:** Intervention and problem solving  
**Stage five:** Termination and follow-up  
**Stage six:** Research and evaluation

Counseling can be conceptualized as a series of stages or steps that lead one through the counseling process. A typical counseling session can involve all six stages except termination. The focus of counseling may shift as the counseling process progresses over time. For example, during the first few sessions with a client, a counselor may place the primary emphasis on building a positive counseling relationship, assessment and diagnosis, and formulating counseling goals. During the later phase of the counseling process, the counselor may shift the emphasis to intervention and problem solving, termination and follow-up, and research and evaluation.

**Stage One: Relationship Building**

The counseling is the heart of the counseling process. It supplies the vitality and the support necessary for counseling work. The successful outcomes in counseling is associated with the counselor-client relationship which is the outcome of all therapeutic efforts. Although the counseling relationship is important, it is less clear how important it is and in what way. There are two general categories in counseling. They are:

i. Counselor-offered conditions  
ii. Counselor-and client offered conditions

**i. Counselor-offered conditions:** Counselor-offered conditions relate to how the counselor influence the counseling process. It is relating to core conditions for effective counselling and the Social Influence Model. They are:

a. **Core Conditions.** The core conditions for successful counseling are empathic understanding, unconditional positive regard, congruence, respect, immediacy, confrontation, concreteness and self-disclosure, the development of listening skills. These eight core conditions were necessary and sufficient for constructive personality charge to occur. The descriptions and purpose of the core conditions are as follows:
1. **Empathy.** The most important core condition in terms of promoting positive outcomes.

*Description:* Empathic understanding as a process that involves communicating a sense of caring and understanding.

- The stages of empathy are:
  - The counsellor has an emotional reaction to the client’s situation
  - The counselor attempts to understand the client’s situation from the client's perspective
  - The counselor communicate empathy to the client
  - The client feels a sense of caring and understanding from counselor

- Kinds of empathy are:
  - Primary empathy – a process that involves the counsellor attending, listening and communicating accurate perceptions of the client’s messages.
  - Advanced empathy – the characteristics associated with primary empathy as well as utilizing the skills of self-disclosure, directives, or interpretations.

*Purpose:* to establish rapport, gain an understanding of the client; and encourage self-exploration in the client.

2. **Unconditional Positive Regard:**

*Description:* Unconditional positive regard involves the counselor communicating to clients that they are of value and worth as individuals.

The other names of unconditional positive regard are non-possessive warmth, acceptance, prizing, respect, and regard. This concept is neither desirable nor obtainable. Unconditional positive regard does not imply that the counselor reacts permissively, accepting all the client's behavior. Instead, it means that the counselor's unconditional positive regard involves acceptance of the client while setting limits on certain behaviors.

*Purpose:* to promote acceptance of the client as a person of worth as distinct from accepting the client’s behavior.

3. **Congruence:**

*Description:* Behaving in a manner consistent with how one thinks and feels. This condition is also known as genuineness. An example of not functioning congruently is a counsellor who says, “I am glad to see you”, when a client arrives for an appointment, even though the counsellor doesn’t like the client.

*Purpose:* To be genuine (not phony) in interactions with the client.

4. **Respect:** Respect is similar to unconditional positive regard

*Description:* It focuses on the positive attributes of the client. Counselors can communicate respect by making positive statements about the client and openly and honestly acknowledging, appreciating, and openly and tolerating individual differences.
5. **Immediacy:** The concept of immediacy is the idea of direct, mutual communication.  
*Description:* Communicating in the here-and-now about what is occurring in the counseling session. It allows the counselor to directly address issues of importance to the counseling relationship; describing how they feel in relation to the client in the moment. For example, if a client does not appear interested in counseling, the counselor might say, “I am getting concerned that you are not finding our sessions meaningful. How are you feeling about what is going on in counseling now?”  
*Purpose:* To promote direct mutual communication between the counsellor and the client.

6. **Confrontation:**  
*Description:* Pointing out discrepancies in what the client is saying and doing (between statements and nonverbal behavior); and how the client is viewed by the counselor and client. It is a difficult and risky counseling technique that is used most effectively by high-functioning counselors. It can have a negative effect on the counseling process, for example when a client misreads the confrontation and feels attacked or rejected by the counselor.  
*Purpose:* To help clients clearly and accurately understanding themselves and the world around them.

7. **Concreteness:**  
*Description:* Helping clients discuss themselves in specific terms. Clients can feel overwhelmed with their problems and have difficulty putting things into perspective. When this occurs, concreteness can help the counselor create a focus for the client in the counseling process.  
*Purpose:* To help clients focus on pertinent issues.

8. **Self-disclosure:**  
*Description:* Making the self-known to others  
Two types of self-disclosure statements:  
- Self-disclosing: Counselors disclose factual information about themselves.  
- Self-involving: Counselors describe what they are experiencing in relation to the client in the counseling process.  
*Purpose:* To promote increasing counseling, relevant communication from the client; enhancing the client's evaluation of the counselor; and Increasing the client's willingness to seek counseling.

b. **Social Influence Model:** Emphasizes the importance of counselor-offered conditions in the counseling process.  
It has two stages. They are:
The first stage, the counselor attempts to be perceived by the client as expert, attractive, and trustworthy. When this occurs, the counselor establishes a power base.

In the second stage, the counselor uses the power base to exert positive influence on the client within counseling process.

- Counselors tended to be perceived as expert when they had objective evidence of training and utilized prestigious cues such as consistent, and responsive nonverbal behaviour such as touch, smiling, and body leans; and used narrative analogies and empathic responses.
- Counselors were perceived as attractive when they had objective evidence of training; and were self-disclosing.
- Counselors appeared more trustworthy when they used credible introductions and reputational cues; responsive nonverbal behavior; and verbal and nonverbal cues associated with confidentiality. Once counselors establish a power base by appearing expert, attractive, and trustworthy, they can exert a positive influence on the client.

**ii. 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 have 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.

**Stage Two: Assessment and Diagnosis**

Assessment and diagnosis help a counselor develop an in-depth understanding of a client and identify mental disorders that require attention. This understanding can facilitate goal setting and also suggest types of intervention strategies.

Assessment procedures can be divided into two categories

- standardized measures – include psychological tests that have a standardized norm groups
- non standardized measures – not have a standardized norm group and include strategies such as the clinical interview and assessment of life history.

Diagnosis is a medical term that means "... identification of the disease-causing pathogens responsible for a physical illness". There are four reasons for making a diagnosis:

- facilitating communication shorthand
- indicating possible treatment strategies
- communicating etiology
- aiding in scientific investigation.
Stage Three: Formulation of Counseling Goals

Three functions that goals serves in the counseling process:

a) Motivational
b) Educational
c) Evaluative.

- **Motivational function:** The clients are involved in establishing the counseling goals. They may be more motivated when they have specific, concrete goals to work toward. It is also important for counselors to encourage clients to make a verbal commitment to work on a specific counseling goal.

- **Educational function:** From this perspective, clients can learn new skills and behaviors that they can use to enhance their functioning. For example, a counseling goal might be to become more assertive. During assertiveness training clients can learn skills to enhance their functioning in interpersonal situations.

- **Evaluative function:** Clear goals allow the counselor and client an opportunity to evaluate progress.

We can also conceptualize counseling goals as either process or outcome.

**Process Goals:** This establish the conditions necessary to make the counseling process work. These goals relate to the issues of formulating positive relationship by promoting the core conditions. Process goals are primarily the counselor's responsibility.

**Outcome goals:** This specify what the client hopes to accomplish in counseling. The counselor and client should agree on these goals and modify them as necessary.

Five types of outcome goals

- Facilitating behavior change
- Enhancing coping skills
- Promoting decision-making
- Improving relationships
- Facilitating the client's potential.

1. **Facilitating behaviour change:** Some form of behavior change is usually necessary for clients to resolve their concerns. The amount of change varies from client to client. For example, one client might need counseling to learn how to deal effectively with a child, while another might require psychotherapy to change an unhealthy, stressful lifestyle.

2. **Enhancing coping skills:** Several developmental tasks and associated coping mechanisms unique to the various stages of development. Coping skills are necessary to proceed through the life span. For example, intimacy and commitment are developmental tasks of young adulthood. Coping behaviors necessary to meet these developmental tasks include appropriate sexual behaviour, risk-taking behavior, and value-consistent behavior such as giving and helping. Clients may have problems dealing with stress, anxiety, or a
dysfunctional lifestyle. In these situations, clients may benefit from a stress management program that includes relaxation, meditation and exercise.

3. **Promoting decision-making:** Some clients have difficulty making decisions. They may feel that no matter what they decide, it will be wrong. They may even think that they are going crazy. Difficulty making decisions is often a normal reaction to stressful life situations. In these situations, the counselor may want to reassure clients that they are not going crazy, helping clients feel normal can encourage them and alleviate unnecessary worry.

4. **Improving relationships:** A person who did not have a close relationship with anyone was at risk for mental problems. Counselors can use a variety of counseling strategies to help clients improve their interpersonal relations. These strategies include social-skill training programs; group counseling that focuses on interpersonal relations; couple therapy; and marital therapy.

5. **Facilitating the client's potential:** Goals in this category are more abstract and relate to the concepts of self-realization and self-actualization. Self-realization implies helping clients become all they can be as they maximize their creative potential. There can be roadblocks to self-realization that require the counselor's attention. In these instances, the counselor can help clients gain a more realistic understanding of what is required to be successful. Self-actualization is related to the need to fulfill one's potential. He believed that as people's basic needs were met, they would move toward self-actualization.

**Stage Four: Intervention and Problem Solving**

The counsellor and client may choose strategies to implement from a variety of interventions, including individual, group, couples, and family counselling. It may be best to begin with individual counselling for clients with problems of an intrapersonal nature. Couples or family counselling may be more appropriate for clients with difficulties of an interpersonal nature, as in a marital or parent-child conflict. Involving clients in the process of selecting intervention strategies has some advantages. This would help the client and the counsellor together can select a strategy that seems realistic in terms of its strengths and weaknesses, instead of working out with the strategies without apparent success.

The counselor should provide an overview of the different treatment approaches available; describe the role of the counselor and client for each procedure; identify possible risks and benefits that may result; and estimate the time and cost of each procedure. In addition, it is important for the counselor to be sensitive to client characteristics such as values and beliefs when selecting an intervention strategy. Counselors should also be aware of a client's personal strengths and weaknesses in selecting a counselling approach.

*Problem-Solving Strategies:* Problem solving is a way conceptualize interventions. It involves individual, group, marriage, or family counseling. Counselors should develop a systematic approach to problem solving, in order to help a client to resolve problems. This approach would enable clients to learn skills that could contribute to their personal autonomy.
A six-stage model for problem solving strategies include:

- problem detection
- problem definition
- identification of alternative solutions
- decision-making
- execution
- verification

This model is a behaviourally oriented approach that involves describing a particular problem in behavioural terms; identifying possible solutions to the problem; deciding on a course of action relative to various alternative solutions: implementing the decision; and verifying if the outcome is consistent with the expected outcome. There are other set of problem-solving approach that can be used to incorporate in the counseling. Counselors should adjust this approach to the unique and emerging needs of the client. It is also important to note that it may take more than one session to utilize the six steps.

1. The counsellor assists the client in selecting a goal to work on in counseling
2. The counselor and client identify what problems they must overcome to achieve the counseling goal.
3. The counselor attempts to increase the client's motivation for change by helping the client understand the "cost" of not changing.
4. The counselor assists the client in selecting a particular problem
5. The counselor and client utilize the counseling techniques necessary to assist with the problem.
6. The counselor gives the client a homework assignment to practice away from the counseling session.

The following example illustrates how these six steps might be used in counseling.

1. The counselor and client identify two counseling goals: improve interpersonal skills and explore career options. They decide to work first on interpersonal skills.
2. The counselor and client identify the following problems associated with poor interpersonal skills: lack of assertion, poor listening skills, low self-image, and impatience. They also identify the client's assets: hard-working, dependable, and interested in personal growth.
3. The counselor attempts to increase the client's motivation for changing by identifying the cost of not changing. For example, the client will continue to have interpersonal difficulties and will feel lonely and lack meaning in life.
4. The counselor assists the client in identifying a particular problem to work on from Step 2: develop more effective listening skills.
5. The counselor uses a particular counseling strategy for the problem selected in Step 4: the counselor teaches the client how to use basic listening skills.
6. The client is given a homework assignment to practice listening skills outside of counseling. At the beginning of the next session, the counselor and client review how
the homework assignment went and then do additional work developing listening skills as required.

**Stage Five: Termination and Follow-Up**

Termination can be done when clients have worked through their concerns and are able to proceed forward in their lives without the counselor's assistance. At this point, counseling can be terminated. It is usually best for the counselor and client to agree on a termination date, reducing the chance of premature termination or feelings of ambivalence.

Termination should be planned several weeks in advance to provide an opportunity for the client to prepare psychologically. The counselor should also arrange for appropriate follow-up with the client. An appointment for a formal follow-up counselling session can be made 2 to 4 weeks after the final session. This can allow the counselor and client adequate time to evaluate how things are going without counseling. Clients should be reassured that they will be able to obtain additional counseling services if the need arises. They should also be informal as to how they can request these services in the future.

**Stage Six: Research and Evaluation**

Research and evaluation can occur at any time during the counseling process or after-termination. Counselors are asked to evaluate counseling whenever they implement an intervention strategy. These research procedures involve face-to-face interaction between the counselor and client. These procedures may be used before or after a client has terminated.