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Counseling
A Comprehensive Profession
Samuel T. Gladding
Seventh Edition

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by disempowering the client. For example, if a client is advised to break off a relationship he or she is ambivalent about, the client is denied the opportunity to become aware and work through the thoughts and feelings that initially led to the ambivalence.

Sack (1985) suggests that advice giving need not always be destructive. He notes that there are emergency situations (as in crisis counseling) when, for the client's immediate welfare and safety, some direct action must be taken, which includes giving advice. He cautions counselors, however, to listen carefully to make sure the client is really asking for advice or simply being reflective through self-questions. There is a big difference between "What should I do?" and "I wonder what I should do." In addition, Sack advocates the responses developed by Carkhuff (1969) as ways in which counselors can answer direct requests for advice. In this model, counselors respond using one of seven approaches: respect, empathy, genuineness, concreteness, self-disclosure, confrontation, and immediacy. Sack (1985) concludes that counselors must examine their roles in counseling to "free themselves of the limitations and pitfalls of giving advice and move toward employing a variety of responses that can more appropriately address their clients' needs" (p. 131).

Lecturing, or preaching, is really a disguised form of advice giving (Welfel & Patterson, 2005). It sets up a power struggle between the counselor and client that neither individual can win. For example, if a sexually active girl is told "Don't get involved with boys anymore," she may do just the opposite to assert her independence. In such a case, both the counselor and client fail in their desire to change behaviors. Counselors are probably lecturing when they say more than three consecutive sentences in a row to their clients. Instead of lecturing, counselors can be effective by following the client's lead (Evans, Hearn, Uhlemann, & Ivey, 2011).

PERSONAL REFLECTION

When have you found advice helpful? When have you found it harmful? What were the results of each?

Excessive questioning is a common mistake of many counselors. Verbal interaction with clients needs to include statements, observations, and encouragers as well as questions. When excessive questioning is used, the client feels as though he or she is being interrogated rather than counseled. The client has little chance to take the initiative and may become guarded. Children may especially respond in this way or make a game out of answering a question, waiting for the next one, answering it, waiting, and so on (Erdman & Lampe, 1996). Counseling relationships are more productive when counselors avoid asking more than two questions in a row and keep their questions open rather than closed.

Storytelling by the counselor is the final nonhelpful behavior. There are a few prominent professionals who can use stories to benefit clients. Milton Erickson, a legendary pioneer in family counseling, was one. His stories were always metaphorically tailored to his clients' situations. They were beneficial because they directed clients to think about their own situations in light of the stories he told. Most counselors, however, should stay away from storytelling because the story usually focuses attention on the counselor instead of the client and distracts from problem solving.

Okun and Kantrowitz (2008) list other nonhelpful verbal and nonverbal behaviors. Some of these behaviors, such as yawning or acting rushed, clearly show the counselor's disinterest. Others, such as interrupting, blaming, and directing, are dismissive or disempowering, which is just the opposite of what counseling should be.,

EXPLORATION AND THE IDENTIFICATION OF GOALS

In the final part of building a counseling relationship, the counselor helps the client explore specific areas and begin to identify goals that the client wants to achieve. Hill (2009) emphasizes that establishing goals is crucial in providing direction at any stage of counseling. Egan (2010) observes that exploring and ultimately identifying goals often occur when a client is given the opportunity to talk about situations or to tell personal stories. The counselor reinforces the client's focus on self by providing structure, actively listening (hearing both content and feelings), and helping identify and clarify goals.

Rule (1982) states that goals "are the energizing fabric of daily living" but are often elusive (p. 195). He describes some goals as unfocused, unrealistic, and uncoordinated. ***Unfocused goals*** are not identified, too broad, or not prioritized. Sometimes counselors and clients may leave unfocused goals alone because the time and expense of chasing them is not as productive as changing unwanted behaviors. In most cases, however, it is helpful to identify a client's goals, put them into a workable form, and decide which goals to pursue first.

Unrealistic goals, as defined by either counselor or client, include happiness, perfection, progress, being number one, and self-actualization. They have merit but are not easily obtained or sustained. For example, the client who has worked hard and is happy about being promoted will soon have to settle into the duties of the new job and the reality of future job progress. Unrealistic goals may best be dealt with by putting them into the context of broader life goals. Then the counselor may encourage the client to devise exploratory and homework strategies for dealing with them.

Uncoordinated goals, according to Rule (1982), are generally divided "into two groups: those probably really uncoordinated and those seemingly uncoordinated" (p. 196). Goals in the first group may be incompatible with one another or with the personality of the client. A person who seeks counseling but really does not wish to work on changing exemplifies an individual with incompatible goals. These clients are often labeled resistant. Into the second group, Rule places the goals of clients who appear to have uncoordinated goals but really do not. These individuals may be afraid to take personal responsibility and engage any helper in a "yes, but . . ." dialogue.

Dyer and Vriend (1977) emphasize **seven specific criteria for judging effective goals in counseling**:

1. ***Goals are mutually agreed on by client and counselor.*** Without mutuality, neither party will invest much energy in working on the goals.
2. ***Goals are specific.*** If goals are too broad, they will never be met.
3. ***Goals are relevant to self-defeating behavior.*** There are many possible goals for clients to work on, but only those that are relevant to changing self-defeating action should be pursued.
4. ***Goals are achievement and success oriented.*** Counseling goals need to be realistic and have both intrinsic and extrinsic payoffs for clients.
5. ***Goals are quantifiable and measurable.*** It is important that both client and counselor know when goals are achieved. When goals are defined quantitatively, achievement is most easily recognized.
6. ***Goals are behavioral and observable.*** This criterion relates to the previous one: An effective goal is one that can be seen when achieved.
7. ***Goals are understandable and can be restated clearly.*** It is vital that client and counselor communicate clearly about goals. One way to assess how well this process is achieved is through restating goals in one's own words.

CASE EXAMPLE

Crossing the Goal Line

Benjamin has lived with an overlay of depression all his life. Now that he is in college, he has decided to do something about it. When he visited the College Counseling Center, his counselor, LaShonda, suggested that he set goals on how he was going to handle his depression. Benjamin listed the following:

1. Exercise every morning before class.
2. Eat healthy food.
3. Get engaged in at least one campus activity, such as playing an intramural sport.
4. Keep a journal of my thoughts and feelings and when they come.
5. Come to counseling for a month.

What do you think of Benjamin's goals? Are they realistic? What else do you think he should do (if anything)?

Egan (2010) cautions that in the exploratory and goal-setting stage of counseling, several problems may inhibit the building of a solid counselor–client relationship. The most notable include moving too fast, moving too slow, fear of intensity, client rambling, and excessive time and energy devoted to probing the past. Counselors who are forewarned about such potential problems are in a much better position to address them effectively. It is vital that counselors work with clients to build a mutually satisfying relationship from the start. When this process occurs, a more active working stage of counseling begins.

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Summary and Conclusion

Building a relationship, the first stage in counseling, is a continuous process. It begins by having the counselor win the battle for structure and the client win the battle for initiative. In such situations, both parties are winners. The client wins by becoming more informed about the nature of counseling and learning what to expect. The counselor wins by creating an atmosphere in which the client is comfortable about sharing thoughts and feelings.

Counseling may occur in any setting, but some circumstances are more likely than others to promote its development. Counselors need to be aware of the physical setting in which the counseling takes place. Clients may adjust to any room, but certain qualities about an environment, such as the seating arrangement, make counseling more conducive. Other, less apparent qualities also affect the building of a relationship. For example, the perception that clients and counselors have about one another is important. Attractive clients who are young, verbal, intelligent, and social may be treated in a more positive way than clients who are older, less intelligent, and seemingly unmotivated. Clients are likely to work best with counselors they perceive as trustworthy, attractive, and knowledgeable.

Regardless of the external circumstances and the initial perceptions, a counselor who attends to the verbal and nonverbal expressions of a client is more likely to establish rapport. The counselor's conveying of empathy and the use of other helpful microskills such as the use of the SOLER model may further enhance the relationship. When counselors are attuned to their own values and feelings, they are able to become even more effective. The initial counseling interview can be counselor or client initiated and can center on the gathering of information or on relationship dynamics. In any situation, it is vital for the counselor to explore with the client the reasons for the possibilities of counseling. Such disclosures can encourage clients to define goals and facilitate the setting of a mutually agreed-on agenda in counseling. When this step is accomplished, the work of reaching goals begins.

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Working in a Counseling Relationship

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