

Counselling skills essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The aims of this assignment are to explore where I am in relation to counselling skills and to show evidence that I have started to identify and reflect on my own strengths and weaknesses in relation to using counselling skills. I will first look at the counselling skill inventory and give a brief overview of which skills I feel most comfortable using and which I find more challenging, I will then go on to discuss in detail 3 skills that I wish to focus on and develop more during my course.

In writing this essay I hope to gain a better awareness of my strengths and weaknesses and to understand what my learning needs are so that I can become a more effective support worker, which in turn will help the clients that I work with.

Overview of Strengths and Weaknesses

In starting the Graduates Certificate in Counselling course it was brought to the classes attention that we would not be learning counselling skills from scratch because we would already have some of these skills that we have been using all along whether it be embedded counselling through work e. g. Nursing/Teachers or in the way we relate to other human beings, it is during further study and training that we learn to develop these skills to become better at helping people find a safe space to talk through their issues/problems.

McLeod explains this “ What happens during counselling training is that the person learns how to use their existing interpersonal skills and awareness in a particular way in order to be able to facilitate the person seeking help to ‘ talk things through” (McLeod 2011 p20) I feel that when it comes to

counselling skills my strengths lie mainly with listening, direct guidance, information giving and in helping a person to explore and understand his or her thoughts, feelings and actions.

I am most comfortable with these skills as I have previous experience as a support worker with Dundee Women's Aid and in my role as a support worker I found that these skills were most useful in helping women and children deal with their experiences of domestic abuse. It is very important that your client feels like your attention is completely focused on them, that you understand them, I feel this is one of my strengths as I naturally like to listen to peoples stories and my practice and experience has helped me develop this skill more.

As a support worker I was responsible for providing a safe place to provide emotional support based on person centred counselling skills and as women who have suffered domestic abuse will identify issue such as depression, anxiety, poor confidence and feelings of inability to cope and reassess their lives, in using this approach I was trying to help the client to find ways to cope and to allow themselves to live the life they deserve.

Most times during my support sessions with women at DWA I was able to treat each woman with unconditional positive regard but there was one exception when I was asked to support a woman who disclosed to me that she had left her children with the man who had been physically abusing her and she knew that he was sexually abusing her children when she was not there, I had to take myself out of the support session and ask someone else

if they could deal with the client as I could no longer give her the support she needed.

I have kept my own personal journal since I began studying Community Education at Dundee University in 2006 after this difficult session with the client at DWA I wrote in my personal journal that “ I found the woman repulsive and I did not think of her as a good mother and I felt she did not deserve support, I was very angry with her because she had left her children behind with the abuser”. (June 2009) I realise that taking myself out of the support session was the best thing I could do for the woman as my body language had changed and I just couldn't hear her anymore due to all the judgements I had going through my mind.

I was able to discuss my feelings with my manager when we had a support session later and she also agreed that I did the correct thing and we then discussed the importance of keeping ourselves safe as often clients will tell their counsellor something that can be difficult to hear, especially when working with survivors of abuse. I am more confident now that I could keep my inner feelings hidden from a client should I experience this kind of situation again.

I find direct guidance and information giving a fairly simple skill as I have experience in this through volunteering with the Citizens Advice Bureau and women's aid where I dealt with enquiries from benefits/housing enquiries to legal issues and sign posting clients to other agencies. I feel that providing direct guidance and information can be simpler because the client will

usually just ask for the information and then you would go get them an answer, or signpost them to somewhere else that they could get help.

During training at CAB we were encouraged to try to get clients to find out the information for themselves this was not an easy task as mostly the reason that people came to citizens advice was because they had become stuck with an issue or problem and they wanted someone else to sort it out for them. I found this frustrating sometimes as it can be time consuming helping people with what I would consider easy tasks, I often had to remind myself that although I may find some tasks easy this didn't necessarily mean that others do too.

As a support worker we were encouraged to keep our support sessions at 45 minutes to 60 minutes long but sometimes during counselling sessions at women's aid it was very easy to get side tracked especially when discussing things that the client and I had in common, one minute we would be talking about the serious issue of how the client was planning to leave her partner, where she would go and what would happen with her children and then the conversation would get light hearted as we discussed the delights of having children, I have found this can happen quite often when serious issues are being discussed I feel this may be due to the client avoiding talking about difficult subjects or the counsellor/client trying to lighten the atmosphere because they feel uncomfortable with what is being discussed.

I have found it to be more comfortable to set time boundaries at the beginning of a session so that the client knows what time they have, but sometimes I find it difficult to redirect the conversation back to the issues

that need to be explored. During our practice sessions in class we are required to give feedback to other students I like to do this when it's positive but find it difficult when it's not, I believe this is due to me thinking that my negative comments may lead to arguments, this is an issue of mine I need to explore further in order to develop this skill. When I have received negative feedback it has knocked my confidence but usually I will recognise that I've made a mistake or that I've forgotten something and try to rectify this the next time I have a chance to.

Using Silence A definition of silence in counselling: " The temporary absence of any overt verbal or paraverbal communication between counsellor and client within sessions" (Feltham and Dryden, 1993) I have found it difficult when things have gone silent in a support session, especially the first session, as sometimes it can feel awkward or embarrassing, for me this is a very difficult skill to get right, Carl Rodgers explains; " In an initial interview, long pauses or silences are likely to be embarrassing rather than helpful. In subsequent contacts, however, if fundamental rapport is good, silence on the part of the counsellor may be a most useful device." (Rodgers 1974)

In my experience as a support worker I often tried to fill in gaps of silence and instead of giving the client time to speak I would start offering activities for them to do to in order for them to make sense of their feelings but I now realise that using silence can help the client reflect on what they are feeling and this can be useful in helping the counsellor to assess the next step, but this could depend on what the clients issues are, clients who may be seeking help for anger issues, paranoia or who are anxious may not find this to be so helpful, research into using silence in counselling has also shown this to be

accurate, Twelve experienced therapists were interviewed about their perceptions of why they used silence in therapy.

Qualitative analyses revealed that these therapists typically perceived themselves as using silence to convey empathy, facilitate reflection, and challenge the client to take responsibility, facilitate expression of feelings, or take time for themselves to think of what to say. Therapists generally indicated that a sound therapeutic alliance was a prerequisite for using silence, and they typically educated their clients about how they used silence in therapy. Therapists typically believed they did not use silence with clients who were psychotic, highly anxious, or angry. They typically thought they now used silence more flexibly, comfortably, and confidently than when they began doing therapy.

Therapists typically believed they learned how to use silence from their own experience as a client and from supervision. (Landany 2004). When I look back at my journal I realise that when I had a particularly difficult time dealing with one of the service users at DWA my silence towards her more than likely would have shown her that I was not comfortable with what she was saying to me and this may have made her feel more upset as she was in a really bad situation and she was coming to me for help with this. I hope that in future I can deal with a situation like this in a better way as I realise how difficult it can be for some people to open up and if they don't get the reaction they need then they may never feel comfortable in opening up again.

I feel that my weaknesses in using silence effectively are down to me trying to fill in the gaps with anything other than staying silent and seeing where it may lead, my strengths are that I am aware of what a powerful skill it can be in helping the client reflect and think of what to say. I will pay particular attention to silence opportunities in practice sessions in order to help develop this skill further. Challenging Egan (2010) explains this is a way of discovering unused strengths and resources the client has and overall goal of challenging “ to help clients do some reality testing and invest in what they learned from this in their futures” (Eagan, 2010, pg. 211). In my opinion challenging people can be, well ...challenging!

I have noticed that if you know someone quite well you can easily recognise any discrepancies or contradictions in their behaviour but I have often found that if you challenge these then you can leave yourself wide open to be challenged right back this may be due to people not wishing to hear the truth so then they turn the tables to focus on the person challenging them, I have often cringed when my friends or family members have challenged me on a way I have behaved or they have pointed out that I haven't reacted in a very good way in a certain situation, it can be quiet hard to hear and often I have retaliated by picking out some of their discrepancies so I could avoid looking at my own but the advantage of seeing yourself through someone else's eyes can be very useful when you are trying to become more self-aware.

Recently in my journal I had written a little paragraph reminding me of something a friend had pointed out to me after a night out, she said that I turned very girlie and flirty whenever I was around men, I had written that; I

did not like hearing this as I don't like women who act this way, in fact they really annoy me and my friend knows how I feel on this subject and because of this I feel embarrassed that my friend has recognised this in me and felt she wanted to challenge me about it. (Journal Oct 2013) My friends observation has lead me to make a conscious decision to get to the root of why I find flirty women annoying and why I want to change this behaviour in myself. I feel that my weaknesses when it comes to challenging people are due to the fact I hate being challenged myself, to me it feels like you are being told off or it makes you face up to something your really don't want to deal with.

I find challenging the client can be difficult sometimes too as I get concerned that they may think I am putting them down or that I'm not on their side but in my experience I find that if you have a good rapport with a client then challenging things that the client does not recognise such as irrational beliefs or contradictions gets easier and that the client actually appreciates your honesty McLeod 2011 echoes this " someone who is seeking help will usually want their counsellor to be ' on their side', to be supportive, safe relationship. However, clients also want their counsellors to be honest with them to point out when they seem to be not making sense, contradicting themselves avoiding things or indulging in self-destructive behaviour". (McLeod 2011 p46) I believe that once I get more comfortable with people challenging me then I will become much better at challenging clients, I feel that by getting feedback from my tutors and other students on my counselling skills then this will help me to develop this skill further.