

Reflective evaluation of the skills of counselling



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This essay is a reflective evaluation of the skills of counselling applied to loss and grief in a student's process of learning how to travel the journey of the therapeutic relationship with the client. The essay will contain reflections of verbatim examples from during the practice session in which Steven Felice is the client, and Caroline Roberts the counsellor. The essay will also discuss via relevant literature the process of person-centred counselling in the focus of loss through bonds of attachment and continuing bonds.

The practice session took place in counselling room two, at ACAP on the 21st of April 2010, between Steven Felice and Caroline Roberts. Steven wanted to discuss the loss of a friendship. This friendship for Steven was a friendship that had begun in early childhood and carried a deep bond of attachment, for which Steven is finding the loss hard to accept. During the session I spent the majority of the time listening to Steven and reflecting as best I could the content and emotion of his experience. When dealing with loss in relation to friendships it is important to offer the client the same respect to emotional depth of expression as that of a person experiencing loss from a death.

For Steven the loss of significance surrounded his childhood friend no longer wishing to be as close as usual due to her recent change of religious affiliation. For Steven this seems difficult to accept, as he was willing to try to understand and acknowledge her needs and she seems to have rejected him. He also seems to feel loss around his confidence with how he relates and interacts with people, which appears to be trust related issues. Almost a loss of innocence has been triggered by the loss of this important attachment bond. Loss is such an immense part of living and loving that it

would be difficult to counsel without an understanding of the theory of attachment.

Mallon (2008) suggests understanding attachment in grief and loss counselling is essential due to the basis that all human relationships are based in attachment, from the first attachment to ones mother, extending through life's interactions to include those called friends and lovers.

Neimeyer, Baldwin, & Gillies (2006) discuss how with the loss of a loved one, people tend to keep the attachment alive and well within their memories, stories, dreams, images, and even music or ornaments. When a loved one is no longer in presence, then the attachment and relationship changes but it does not cease to exist, the relationship is merely rewritten or shifted to another reality or perception. As is the case with Steven's relationship, at 16:04 Steven says, he fights in his own head ...when asked about the whether he is still maintaining the relationship, which would seem to indicate quite clearly that he is continuing the bond and relationship even though she is unaware of this.

During the session I felt I established rapport, and was present with Steven, as well as using active listening, reflection, and questions, although I could have phrased these more appropriately, I also used silence to allow Steven his thoughts. I don't know that I was able to apply a structured assessment during the session, as in trying to purposely work on coping skills, support systems, and spiritual or cultural dimensions. However I feel that we talked about these issues in the course of the session as reflection, active listening and questioning allowed these issues to come into play, especially when

silence was used, allowing Steven to process and actualise his sense of spiritual connection and personal experiences and expectations.

I would like to reflect on my skills as an awaking, a process of realisation about how one is appropriate in being curious, respectful, congruent, empathic, and present simultaneously, without getting in one's own way.

Rogers (1942-2008) suggests that the counselling relationship provides a safe respectful environment in which the client feels comfortable and accepted enough to express their feelings knowing that the counsellor will not judge them, but will listen and support them. As a grief, loss and bereavement counsellor I feel it would be very beneficial to hone my skills around person-centred counselling, with particular focus on attachment theory and continuing bonds. Person-centred counselling is such a great grounding for doing no harm, as it is based in Rogers's core conditions. Tolan (2003) describes the core conditions as requiring the counsellor to be mentally and emotionally present and remove themselves' from the clients story by simply listening without judgment or bias, with respect, congruence, and empathy, no forgetting unconditional positive regard. Bryant-Jefferies (2006) explains presence as a line of communication whereby both client and counsellor are empathically aware of each other. With the felt presence, the most significant element would be whether or not the client feels they are being understood, which can be demonstrated with appropriate reflection.

During the session I felt that Steven and I were in a place of empathic contact, established through good rapport, and staying as present as

possible. I feel I can improve my sense of presence as time allows skills to become second nature, as right now I often get in my own way by worrying about whether or not I am demonstrating all the necessary skills. For example my art of reflection still needs to develop as shown with these examples; C: 06: 27; so you're missing the previous style of relationship and interaction that you had from. S: yeah, yeah I need that..... Some of my language could probably be improved by saying; I sense you are missing the closeness of your relationship. Also I need to be mindful of using words like so, as it can carry a feeling of judgement if the tone is not just right.

Another example; C: 09: 47; so you just said that, if I go back to you saying, that you are asking yourself about the relevance of keeping someone, now you're sort of talking about the boundaries and stuff, is that related. S: ah, by keeping someone and having boundaries as such, I feel like it, like when I meet a new person now..... Again I begin with so, I think I actually begin nearly every reflection with so. Note to self do not say so. The reflection would be better if I phrased it; I hear you questioning your feelings towards getting close to another affects you, which seems to be bring up the need for boundaries, could you tell me more about that.

Around 08: 45: I ask; so was she an intimate friend or... I made Steven uncomfortable as you can see by his body language, where instead I could have asked; could you tell me more about that, or what did that childhood friendship mean for you. The art of the question is another skill I need to practice, especially with careful open questions instead of closed blunt or, the too intrusive kind of questions. Nelson-Jones (2009) suggests that even though some background information can help the counsellor understand the

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client's background, open questions allow the client to express their story how they wish to, instead of the counsellor meeting their agenda. Respect is the underlying need in all questions with open questions such as, what does that mean for you, being a respectfully gentle asking for the clients meaning, and also another way to monitor counsellor curiosity with respect to the client.

I could really hear that Steven attaches to people very deeply and quickly or easily, and I wanted to explore that with him, but alas my skills in how to achieve that need practise. Attachment is such a deep seated need and reflex that helps one find and express love that I feel its importance cannot be overlooked. Russell-Chapin and Smith (2008) talk about the undeniable reality that love and loss are part of the whole experience of human attachment,

with the point being that the more attached the relationship the more the loss may be felt and experienced. In addition they discuss how beneficial it can be to tell stories, and share our losses, as a way of continuing the life of one's loved one, for which the word 'anamnesis' is used to describe the experience of remembering and representing our recollections and experiences of shared living with our lost loved one in the present moment. Here I relate to continuing bonds as there is sometimes no escaping the thoughts that float through ones consciousness and replay events, conversations, images, and special moments. Attig (2000) summed up the experience as the continuing of one's connection with those one loved when he stated; " the richness of lasting love consoles us" (p283). Such words truly express how much sense it makes to keep on loving, keep

remembering, keep dreaming, and keep sharing the memories of those we love, whose bodily presence is no longer tangible. Continuing bonds with ones loved ones also brings up how much attachment plays in relationships, for if no attachment is felt, no meaningful relationship exists, and therefore no need to miss or remember.

Around 14: 10; Steven begins telling me how his friend is involved in certain religious practices. At 14: 22; I reflect C: So you're worried about her. Steven continues his story and I feel it is important to listen and use silence here as I sense he might need to hear his thoughts process this. Geldard & Geldard (2008) express how new counsellors often find silence difficult because they are worried about appearing to demonstrate the skills required. However once the silence has become a comfortable reflex the counsellor can allow the client the precious moments of reflection often needed to mentally sit in a thought and own the feeling. Palmer & Milner (2003) suggest that silence can be a very supportive space for the client to contemplate their thoughts when used appropriately and respectfully in a comfortable measure.

Silence is a skill that requires self acceptance and a certain measure of self-assured comfort to be able to sit with the client when they require a moment to contemplate. Steven, given a moment to silently think then begins to reflect on his own spirituality in connection with the reactions he is experiencing. Walsh (2004) suggests that in some cases a person may be grieving their spiritual connection to self, brought into awareness by an experience of loss. As does feeling the loss of physical, emotional, or relational, connections, this could in turn affect one's ability to find some resolution within one's life. This is not surprising considering spirituality is <https://assignbuster.com/reflective-evaluation-of-the-skills-of-counselling/>

one of the concepts that give life meaning in death as it does in life. Walsh (2004b) goes on to explain that people's spiritual beliefs cross generations and evolve and develop, as family cultures evolve and develop, embedding and adjusting values and beliefs that surround not only life and love but also death.

When I look at the experience of loss Steven has shared with me, and consider how I could have explored this more to address his coping style, support system, spiritual or religious beliefs, as well as his cultural influences, I am not sure at my level of competency in twenty minutes how to achieve all of that whilst respectfully listening to his story and allowing the client to lead and own the session. Johns (2005) cites Rogers's who states "The degree to which I can create relationships which facilitate the growth of others as separate persons is a measure of the growth I have achieved in myself (p5)." This statement is a very powerful truth to which I feel as a counsellor is the aim of self development and a very necessary goal to practice and reflect constantly on the skills. Johns (2005b) explores some of the ways in which counsellor skills can be practiced, including personal counselling, doing practice sessions, keeping diary of skills development, taking risks when practicing to develop confidence, thereby, learning to relax and own the space of self within the counselling dynamic.

Personally I have volunteered at my local church to get actual practice and develop my confidence as well as my skills. I also believe that going through the process of being a volunteer within the counselling realm will also help me to understand more about myself and where I wish to focus my future as

a counsellor. So here in lies how I intend to move forward to becoming a better counsellor and person.

To conclude this wonderful and challenging self reflection, I would like to acknowledge that I am growing as a counsellor. I am learning how important the theories and models associated with bereavement are vital to allow a counsellor to be of actual assistance to a person suffering. I am confirmed through my research of the theories and models, that love and attachment are vital in life, death, and counselling. Being able to workshop my faults and successes is also a vital process in the development of my use and understanding of not just the skills but why they are so important, particularly in the field of counselling in loss.