

Counselling in a diverse society



A White 43 year old female was attending for a one off 30 minute counselling session. This session was taking place in a dedicated room in a college setting. The client arrived for counselling in what seemed to be an anxious and preoccupied state. Although this session was being recorded for the purpose of assessment by my fellow peers and tutors, providing some anxiety on my part.

I wanted the tape to be a true reflection of my counselling ability, placing emphasis on the need to empower and be present for the client. On this occasion I was offering the client a one off 30 minute counselling session. At the beginning of this session I opened with a contract .

Which is a vital part of the process of working towards client empowerment. This begins with a professional working contract at the beginning of that first meeting. This contract includes several key points which aim to create a solid foundation for the client. The need for this contract is to fully explain what is on offer, to fully inform the client and to enable the client to have an empowered choice. The contract is fundamental to the whole session and enhances client autonomy, which is to give the client informed choice.

In evaluation of the contracting process Bond 2000 says that ethically the contracting process serves to offer the client a sense of their own autonomy, which would include both ethical and practical issues.??? Respect for client autonomy is both explicitly and implicitly the ethical priority in the BACP code. The priority of an ethic of autonomy is indicated by explicit reference to client autonomy at key points in the code, a strong emphasis on client consent, clarity of contracting and confidentiality??? Bond T 2000The key

points covered within the opening of the session include making the client aware of time boundaries, this is to give the client an understanding of how long the session will last for, and also to enable a safe ending by being aware of the time and expressing this to the client prior to the session ending.

Using the time left for summarizing the clients words from the clients perspective.. Counsellor- The session itself will last about 30 minutes, so I will be checking my watch (indicates to client the watch on the table) That doesn't mean that I'm not present with you, just a matter of being aware of the time boundaries and how much of the session is left, there is also a watch on the table there for your own awareness to see how long we have left of the session.

In enabling the client access to the watch on the table it served to give the client an awareness of time if the client chose. Client- yes;yes.. Counsellor- Five minutes before the end of the session I will let you know that we have five minutes left In order to summarize what we have discussed. Client - okCounsellor- and to bring the session to a safe close.

Client- okThis indicated to me that the client fully understood when she responded by saying yes ;yes ;and okThis working contract serves to enhance client empowerment in an ethical, sensitive and safe way, which begins to build up from the beginning an empowering relationship with the client, by being open and transparent within the contracting process through to the end of the session. It is within this initial beginning that the clients presenting problem is revealed. The client shared that on this occasion the presenting problem was about her own feelings in relation to an experience her daughter had recently had and how this had left her feeling. When a

client is sharing personal sensitive material, it is vital that an ethical framework exists for both counsellor and client as this is for the protection and safety of both parties involved. Confidentiality limits are addressed within this contract.

Within this session I address with the client the issue of confidentiality and ask the client to express their understanding of what confidentiality means to them. Counsellor- I must inform you that what you share with me today is not confidential to me alone and I would like to take a moment if at all possible to just check out your understanding of confidentiality, what that perhaps means to you. Encouraging the client to express their own perspective on what confidentiality means to them Client- I would take that to mean something that stays between two people Counsellor- yes, yes Client -if something was confidential Counsellor- and generally that is the case , there are exceptions to that Dependent on the counsellors perception or the organisation, but this session today is not confidential to you and I alone, with your permission I do hope to share this tape with my tutors, group members and the external verifiers in order for them to assess my skills, they will not discuss what you and I have talked about. Client- yes! then went on to inform the client the situations in which confidentiality may be extended and clarified the clients understanding of this. In evaluation of the need for confidentiality Bond 2000 states that confidentiality is a paramount element to counselling as the client is sharing of themselves and their innermost thoughts, and these feelings can only be shared in a relationship which is based on trust, this generally means that the client feels a reassurance that what is said remains confidential between counsellor and

client. Although all elements of the contracting process relate in some way to the safety and empowerment of the client, there are several important issues which directly address the health and safety of the client, these issues would include discussing with and clarifying the clients understanding on fire drill protocol, where the fire exits were, how to exit the building in the event of a fire.

I explained this process to the client and asked the client to express their own understanding as to these procedures. I also asked the client if they were currently taking any medication and should they become unwell during the session and the paramedics were called is there any information I would need to pass on to them. Self harm and suicide risk assessment is an area that also needs to be sensitively addressed with the client, to ascertain as to the clients state of mind and if they are presenting for counselling with a suicidal intent. It is important to address this issue as it is paramount to the clients emotional and physical safety. Being attentive to the clients needs begins in the opening of the session by respecting and valuing the client, being sensitive to your clients needs and their own individual way of being. To be attentive to the client involves giving the client the space to express themselves, by acknowledging the clients feelings and reflecting back these feelings to the client.

It is important to be aware of both verbal and non verbal client expression when attending to the client. An example of attending to the clients emotional needs were when I made the client aware we were coming to the last five minutes of the session. Counsellor- I am aware that we are coming to the last five minutes so taking the time to just summarize and I??™ m

wondering does that feel ok Client- Yes Becky that's fine thank you I felt that this demonstrates attentiveness for the clients emotional safety and in doing so empowers the client giving the client a clear awareness of the time left. To listen to your client and to clarify your understanding of your clients words and feelings it is important to actively listen to gain understanding of the clients individual story, active listening involves paraphrasing and summarizing the clients words and feelings back to them, which enables the counsellor to gain a deeper understanding of the clients experiencing and therefore respond in an empathic way, to convey an accurate understanding of what your client is telling you. I believe I was actively listening to the clients words when I was hearing the clients story and reflecting to the client my understanding of that story through their words. I find myself more able to be present and deeply listen to the client effectively, due to having learned to listen to myself less critically than before.

Rogers (1961) mirrors my own feelings himself when he says; I find I am more effective when I can listen to myself and can be myself. Rogers (1961) focusing on the clients feelings due to the skill of active listening. I believe this is reflected in the taped recording and example of this was when the client talked of her feelings of sadness. Client- So her pain becomes my pain in the same way, when she is jubilant jumping all about the house and full of beans I suppose I think fantastic; you know Counsellor- It almost like I'm hearing you say that when she is sad you almost share in that sadness, that pain and when she's jubilant you almost share in that too. Client yes I was able to reflect to the client my understanding of her words and feelings and the client responded by saying

yes, which indicated to myself that I had heard what she was expressing and been able to reflect an accurate understanding of the client. When evaluating listening skills and hearing the clients spoken words I feel it is also important to be able to sit with a clients silence. When a there is silence in the counselling room, this can be a healing process for the client, this can also encourage the client to silently reflect.

I am aware that there were not managed silences within the taped session yet it is important to respect a clients silences as well as their spoken words. Also there may be times when a client does not elaborate on a certain feeling initially but when minimal encouragers are used , this can invoke the client to go deeper into their feelings. A minimal encourager is to reflect to the client part of their dialogue an example of using a minimal encourager was when in the tape recording the client talked of her feelings of sadnessClient- and then I spoke with her Becky and it made me feel very sadCounsellor- SadClient -I feel sadThis response was empowering to the client as the minimal encourager used enabled the client to take ownership of the feeling of sadness. I felt that I was empathically listening to the clients words and feelings during the session by reflecting content and feelings to clarify with the client your understanding from their individual perspective. This can also be an opportunity to convey empathic understanding, which is to gain an understanding through the clients expression of themselves, empathy is a way of staying in touch with clients and there individual experiencing . It is important to check out your understanding of a clients experiencing.

Rogers 1951 evaluates empathy as a way of being that gives even the most reluctant of clients a deep sense of being heard and belonging. An example of a reflection of the clients words and feelings were when the client shared a feeling of being cross and pissed off
Counsellor- so you say you are sitting with your feelings and feel really cross and pissed off
Client- I do feel cross and pissed off
Another element of understanding can occur when open questions are asked. Open questions are opposite to closed questions, in which the client may give yes or no answers, open questions give the client to chance to elaborate more to what is asked and although I did not use open questions in the taped recording yet this can give the counsellor a deeper empathic understanding of the client. Empathy can be a powerful experience for both client and counsellor as Thorne 1988 evaluates that it may be quite intense for the counsellor experiencing clients powerful thoughts and feelings.

Throughout the tape I intermittently summarize the feelings and experiencing of the client and at the end of the session summarize elements of the clients words feelings and story. This means I gave back to the client a verbal interpretation of the main themes and feelings she expressed within the session. I feel that there were times when perhaps it may have been useful to have challenged the client, yet I am aware that I didn't do this on the tape. Sometimes to challenge a client can be an uncomfortable experience for the client unless the counselling relationship is a developed one. I also feel that it is important to go at the clients pace and sometimes to challenge too soon in the counselling relationship can be detrimental, even though I acknowledge that challenging can enable the client to focus and

explore contradictions of feelings. I feel an important factor of the counselling relationship is being present in the immediacy of the moment.

Immediacy is being aware of the here and now experiencing Merry 2002 evaluates the skill of immediacy as the counsellor being able to use the here and now experiencing within themselves or the client, which are not avoided but expressed openly and appropriately. This is a skill which is a product of the counsellors attentiveness to the clients individual experiencing. Within the session I was aware of a feeling of confusion arise within me. I chose in the immediacy of the moment to share this feeling of confusion with the client. Counsellor- I am almost sounding myself quite confused, I am recognising in me that. and I am wondering if that is how you are feeling Client- yes.

. yes I am confused Becky In offering to the client my here and now experiencing of feelings of confusion and asking the client if that was mirroring her feelings, I was able to clarify that the client was feeling confused by her response to the question. In evaluating the skill of immediacy I felt it served to empower the client by enabling the client to acknowledge their own confusion, which the client then elaborated on further in the dialogue. Client- Absolutely absolutely. yes because I cant understand it.

And that is probably what is coming across from me in a sense. I cant understand it I cant understand what would have gone on. Although I used the skill of immediacy, I am aware that it a skill that can come with risks as Hazler&Barwick- 2001 explore, immediacy does involve a certain amount of

risk for the counsellor, the concern of derailing the process of counselling, perhaps being wrong or the risk of verbalizing what the counsellor is feeling and how this may impact upon the clients process. It is of paramount importance to work to empower the client at all times for example, there may be times when it is necessary to refer the client to other agencies. It may be because I lack the professional or personal resources to help them any further in recognising my own limitations and to work for the best interests and future empowerment of the client referral may be necessary.

I was aware of my own limitations being a trainee counsellor when counselling on the tape, therefore I made the client aware of this in the beginning contract and again referred to this at the ending of the session and made the client aware of how she could access, should she need it, the service of a fully qualified counsellor. When ending the session it is important to show sensitivity and care to the clients needs and feelings, this process begins in the initial contract itself and some elements of the contract are addressed and clarified with the client at the ending of the session , it is also an opportunity when ending with a client to summarise themes of the clients story. I place great importance on working ethically towards client autonomy and enhancing client empowerment and feel a personal and ethical responsibility for the wellbeing of the client and take accountability for enhancing the professionalism of counselling as a profession. Although for the purpose of the tape the client was aware that it was a one off session and that there would not in this instance be follow up sessions I asked the client if they wished to access other support from a qualified counsellor.

Counsellor- I am aware it has been an emotional session and would you like some follow up support??. Do you feel that you would like to access the

counselling service or do you have that support for yourselfClient- Well I have accessed it before ??. and maybe it is something I might think about.

Counsellor- Are you aware of how to access thisClient- I am thank youI clarified that the client knew how to access this service, should she wish to do so. This indicated to me that the client fully understood with the response she gave to me and it was important to give the client an empowered choice as to follow up care should the client wish to access this service. I also asked the client if she was happy to end the session, although on this occasion the client said she was ok to end, the answer could have been different.

The client could have made a door knob comment, which is a comment that could be said at the end of the session which could promote further client dialogue and cross the time boundaries, which are in place for the empowerment and safety of the client. When ending with the client after a series of sessions , there can be many cues that the client is ready to bring these sessions to a close. The reasons for ending can be that the client has improved enough that they feel the time has come to end or that the client may be relocating to a different area. I believe that the client themselves is the only one who knows best as to when they feel that the time has come for them to bring counselling to an end. Ansell 2003 evaluates this by saying that whatever the clients reasons are for deciding to end the counselling alliance, it is important to have trust in the clients ability to have come to that decision for themselves and to fully accept that this is a decision that is

theirs to make. Thorne1988 himself says that it is a general rule within person centred counselling for the client to dictate the ending.

It is important for the client to have an empowering ending, showing respect and sensitivity, also being aware of the emotions and feelings than an ending can evoke for the client, such as abandonment and rejection issues Potter2007 talks of how clients can form strong attachments with their counsellors regardless of which therapeutic approach is adopted and due to this attachment ending with a client can invoke a fear of separation from the counsellor. An ending that disrespects the clients needs and feelings can undo all the good work that may have been done and create an unproductive and unsafe ending. Thorne 1988 evaluation of a productive ending is that, though it is part of the therapeutic alliance that there an ending will occur at some point, this does not mean that the client may not seek out counselling in the future especially if it has been a positive experience for the client. Within this one off recording I acknowledged that it had been an emotional session for the client and as I had mentioned in the initial contracting took the opportunity to check with the client if they would like to access any follow up support and again made the client aware of how she could access counselling with a qualified counsellor should she want follow up support. This is to check out my understanding of the clients wishes and to carry out what I had initially said I would address with the client at the end of the session , such as the clients permission to use the tape but to acknowledge that the client may need some time to reflect on that initial decision and give the client that time so to be able to make an empowered choice. I feel that I

have been on a journey into my own way of working with clients. I feel that I have come to the end with much more clarity than when I began.

Studying on the Diploma In counselling have given me , what I believe to be a very solid foundation in the person centred approach, I have been able through personal, peer and tutor assessment of my skills, move towards working effectively and ethically with clients focusing on the empowerment and growth of the client throughout. Having this training will I feel, enable me a solid foundation from which , in my future professional practice to branch out and learn other models. Dryden 1994 evaluates counselling training as a solid training in one core model which allows the trainee counsellor a good framework to work with, from which they can venture out and explore other theories. I believe that I will continue to favour the person centred way of working with clients as a foundational approach but I am sure that I will continue to develop and evolve from both a personal and professional perspective and I feel strongly that this is of vital importance to my evolvment not only as a counsellor but as a person. My own experience of doing this taped recording has confirmed my own belief in the importance of the relationship that can exist between counsellor and client and how the skills used serve to enhance and develop this relationship and empower the client.

Thorne 1988 when talking of the self development of the counsellor, highlights that the commitment to work on the self is a life times task that can never be completed. It is to be remembered that this growth goes hand in hand with counselling as it is all about change and development.

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