

# How does counselling differ from other helping skills

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In everyday life people experience difficulties and problems that they feel they are not able to deal with on their own and need help with. The help that people receive to overcome their problems can be in many different forms.

People may receive help in an informal way, such as having a chat to a close friend or relative, who can offer support and advice or they may seek help in a more formal capacity from various helping professionals, such as counsellors, social workers, psychiatrists, doctors, etc. For all of these professionals it is their formal role to help people manage distressing problems of life, but the help that is given can be very different depending on the profession of the helper & their specific skills.

This assignment aims to consider how counselling differs from other forms of helping. Not every person who uses counselling skills is designated a counsellor. We can distinguish two groups of people who use counselling skills. People who are called counsellors, who engage in counselling as a distinct profession and others who use counselling skills as part of their role. We may go to a doctor to discuss a problem we are facing and a helping relationship is formed, but what the doctor offers is not counselling.

They may well use their counselling skills, by listening to the patient to gain an understanding of their distress, but they also use other skills such as giving advice and providing factual information. The British Association of Counselling & Psychotherapy define counselling as 'taking place when a counsellor sees a client in a private and confidential setting to explore a difficulty the client is having, distress they may be experiencing or perhaps their dissatisfaction with life, or loss of a sense of direction or purpose.

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It is always at the request of the client, as no-one can properly be sent for counselling'. It is a supportive relationship that enables clients to explore, understand, come to terms with and resolve their problems. Hough (2006) describes counselling as a relationship which is often between two people, but can sometimes be in a group setting. The counselling relationship is unique to other forms of helping for various reasons. One reason is due to the special form of communication that takes place between the client and counsellor.

A primary difference between counselling & other forms of helping is the way in which counsellor's listen. By listening attentively and patiently the counsellor begins to perceive the difficulties from the client's point of view and can help them to see things more clearly or from a different perspective. Active listening involves thinking behind the client's words and about their feelings and emotions. It also involves being aware of non-verbal communication such as eye contact, facial expressions and body language. All of which can provide the counsellor with information about what the client may be experiencing.

Some helping relationships involve giving advice, which means telling people what they should do. This should not take place in counselling. The counsellor may well talk through with the client what is possible and explore different ways that problems could be resolved but it is about helping the client to take responsibility for finding a solution that feels right for them. This enables the client to take control of their own life and is based on the

principle of empowerment. Freud (1920) even cautioned against giving advice.

He felt that people should be helped to come to their own independent decisions without pressure. Confidentiality is also an essential part of the agreement between counsellor and client, but it can also be important to other helping professionals in their work. During counselling, clients may reveal intimate details about their lives. They would not want these private details to be passed on to other people and need to be reassured of confidentiality, probably more so than in other helping professions due to the depth and intimacy of the information that is being discussed.

However, it is not always that simple and there may be some instances when it is not possible to maintain total confidentiality and the counsellor may have to pass on certain information that was revealed. For example, if a crime has been committed or if there is a risk of harm to another person. In this case the counsellor must be clear with the client what information they may have to pass on and to whom. Professional counsellors are also bound by other ethics such as being non-judgemental and should not exploit their clients in any way.

They must be respectful of how their clients choose to live and their right to self-determination. Counsellors must not impose their own thoughts or feeling on other people & should not have any expectations or impose any conditions on their clients. The relationship between counsellor and client should be one of equality. Although, the client may not feel that there is equality, they may feel powerless, as they are seeking help. The counsellor

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must try and convey a sense of equality and use their skills and knowledge to enable the client to take control of their life and feel empowered.

The setting where counselling takes place is also very important. The counsellor must have an environment that feels comfortable, safe, private and consistent to enable the client to feel more at ease and therefore able to talk more freely about difficulties they are experiencing. Professional counsellors also have to undergo specific training. As previously mentioned many helping professionals use counselling skills such as listening and attending to clients, asking questions, helping clients to clarify their thoughts etc. Professional counsellors become experts at using these particular skills.

Professional counsellors also have training in the theory behind counselling and for example have knowledge of the process of human development and personality, knowledge of problems which can occur at different stages of the life and how the environment and other influencing factors can affect people's ability to deal with everyday life. They are aware of common psychological processes such as bereavement, loss and attachment and how people form and interact in relationships. Personal development is also another aspect of the role of a counsellor, as it is essential that they have increased self-awareness.

The more self-aware the counsellor is the more they will be able to understand their clients. They often have their own supervision or counselling to enable them to reflect on their own thoughts and feelings. To summarise, people experience difficulties and problems that they feel they are not able to deal with on their own and need help with. The help that they

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receive to enable them to overcome their problems can be in different forms, it can be informal advice from a friend or family member or it can be help from a professional that has particular skills in helping others.

It was identified that many professionals use helping skills in their work but this differs from the work of a professional counsellor. Counselling is a supportive relationship that enables the client to explore, understand and resolve their problems in a private and comfortable setting. There is a special relationship between counsellor and client that is based on equality, respect, confidentiality and a non-judgemental attitude. The counsellor uses expert skills such as listening, enabling them to perceive the difficulties from the clients point of view.

They also have specific training to develop these skills and have knowledge of the theory behind counselling and increased self-awareness through personal development.

## References

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