

THE ROLE OF THE PSYCHOSOCIAL SERVICE PRACTITIONER AND ETHICAL ISSUES IN THE WORK

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ETHICS OF THE PSYCHOSOCIAL SERVICE PRACTITIONER

Ethics is essentially a body of moral principles absorbed by practitioners who are active in the psychosocial area with the sole purpose of ensuring provision of fair and proper services. The terms “*ethics*,” “*moral*,” “*law*,” “*value*,” “*standards of professional behavior*,” and “*professionalism*” are often encountered in the services extended to survivors of human trafficking. In her/his work with the survivors of human trafficking, it is important that the counselor is quite clear about how S/he uses them. The words “*value*” and “*ethics*” are the ones that are largely approached, and more frequently used interchangeably. “*Value*” often implies a good and desired behavior, while “*ethics*” implies something fair and proper. In the professions involving assistance to people, the laws and codes of conduct regulate ethical issues.¹ The latter are the guidelines in a counselor’s work. However, none of them can ever produce a clear-cut answer as to what is best for the client.

The ethical practices and legal requirements in social services in Albania are already outlined. The Code of Conduct for Social Services of the National Social Worker Association is a document, which is being ever more supported by the social service workers.

The social and psychological services offered to survivors of the consequences of human trafficking aim at addressing their immediate needs. Essentially, ethical behavior boils down to self-assurance in being fair with the client, with this confidence arising from the ability to combine the personal and professional skills while providing assistance to this group in need. This is best achieved when the counselor has:

- Sufficient knowledge, the capacity to judge, and the required skills allowing intervention in the vulnerable client’s behavior;
- The decency and humanism to respect the client’s human dignity and freedom;
- The necessary strength to intervene, and the mettle to be held accountable for using her/his influence in the right manner;
- The ability to respect himself, and the other practitioners so as to encourage the community’s trust in the psychological and social services.

Providing counseling, amending someone’s way of thinking, her/his concept of her/himself, her/his whole routine surrounding self-esteem and self-efficiency, and extolling the clients’ human behavior means firmly relying on knowledge of the nature and the typological characteristics of behavior. Providing counseling means respecting the clients’ psychological, gender, age, and cultural characteristics. If the need for respecting the clients’ developmental characteristics is ignored in the course of counseling, it is most probable that the client will end up being indoctrinated.² The type of counseling, in the course of which one’s age and developmental dynamics are not taken account of, is likely to be preaching, moralizing, and unfair in nature.

¹ Prof. Assoc. Dr. Milika Dhama, University of Tirana, Ethical Issues Relating to Social Services Extended to Children and Youths, 2005.

² Ibid.

A Psychosocial service provider in his/her services should:

- Remember that women/girls and children have the right to respect (this includes respect for their physical, intellectual, social and emotional welfare)
- Respect the cultural, religious and ethnic background of all the people with whom he/she works, however different it may be from his own.
- Model good conduct for others to follow
- Ensure that there is always be more than one adult present during activities with children and young people, or the activities should be within the sight and hearing of others.
- Respect the right of the client of personal privacy
- Create an atmosphere of trust in which the clients can challenge attitudes or behaviors which they do not like.
- Feel able to comment on each other's conduct and be prepared to offer and accept constructive criticism.
- Challenge any inappropriate behavior of the client.
- Report any suspicions or allegation of abuse.
- Be aware that some actions may be misinterpreted, no matter how well intentioned.
- Recognize the need to exercise special care and caution in discussing sensitive issues with children and young people.
- Be aware of and comply with the codes of conduct and rules of the agency or organization with which he/she is working.
- Seek advice about any concerns about the behavior of any adult with children.
- Be sure that client has knowledge for legal guardians (e.g. councilors, psychosocial service providers) with whom they can share their concerns, and how to contact those people if they are worried about any issue.

A Psychosocial service provider in his/her services should not:

- Have any inappropriate verbal communication with women/girls and children.
- Have any inappropriate physical contact with client.
- Allow himself to be drawn into inappropriate or attention seeking behavior
- Make suggestive or derogatory remarks or gestures to(or in front of) client.
- Jump to conclusion about others without checking the fact.
- Exaggerate or trivialize client abuse issues
- Show favoritism to any individual.
- Rely on his/her good name or his job to protect himself/herself.
- Think 'it cannot happen to me'.
- Take a chance when common sense, policy or practice suggests a more prudent approach.

A client's right to information

If a counselor is keen to offer fair, ethical, and legitimate services, S/he should build her/his performance on thorough knowledge of the clients' rights. This is especially important when working with children and youths.

The primary right to be dealt with in the course of counseling is the right to being briefed on what it is going to happen in the course of counseling. After being duly briefed only, the client will be able to take decisions. The following are the mistakes most commonly committed in the course of briefing a client:

The counselor does not put the client in the picture, believing that the latter has the capacity to elaborate the information, and take the best decisions about him on the basis of the information available.

The counselor may communicate only a piece of the information, which often leads to the client's being manipulated. Manipulation through ill information or misinformation is ethically harmful, and may result in consequences of permanent dependence for the client.

The counselor believes that her/his task consists of briefing the client only, without giving due thought to the upshot of this information. Therefore, before deciding on the piece of information to provide her/his client with, the counselor should consider the client's capacity to process this information, her/his ability to understand this information, and her/his ability to take independent decisions building on the information received.

In a correct working practice, the counselor should produce evidence in support of the information imparted.

Matters of confidentiality in counseling

Confidentiality is one of the most important ethical matters in the course of counseling. When confidentiality is present it may lead to a quick and reliable change in the client; when put in question, the client may seclude himself hermetically, and fossilize forever her/his problem on account of the newly emerging situations surrounding dependency or other dysfunctions. At face value, confidentiality may be paraphrased very simply: everything said in a counseling setting is absolutely confidential, and the counselor has no right whatsoever to breach confidentiality, and leak the truth S/he has learned in the course of counseling to third parties.

The conditions for confidentiality should be made clear to the client right at the outset of counseling. Overall, the counselor ensures the client that S/he will maintain confidentiality irrespective of any imposing, though not coercing, circumstance to breach it S/he might be facing. This means that, when the client discloses private information, the counselor keeps that for the purpose that it was disclosed. Yet, there are certain situations in which the counselor has to breach confidentiality, especially when S/he should forewarn and protect third parties. Nevertheless, whenever the counselor deems that confidentiality should be breached, S/he should make this purpose clear to the client, and encourage him to participate in telling the truth.

Confidentiality is breached when:

- The life of the client or third parties is at risk.
- The client gives permission for the information gathered in the course of counseling to be passed on to third parties.

This is a situation surrounding the counselor's obligation to respect the client's confidentiality. Yet, more often than not, the counselor's need to raise specific cases with their clients' family members, or work colleagues. The counselor needs to reflect and to speak about things. This comes as a result of the emotional and psychological burdens S/he carries away from discussion with her/his client. The counselors have a great need to free themselves of what they have accumulated in the course of counseling; therefore, the supervisors of the counseling centers are considering counselor-focused professional assistance schemes. What is advised is that supervisors develop "debriefing" schemes, namely brief sessions in the course of which the counselor does not reveal the cases, but what happened to him, to her/his self, as S/he focused on her/his cases. Similar sessions help release the day's burdens, and minimize the stress, avoid professional exhaustion, and develop protocols on the conduct in the course of counseling.

For the purpose of maintaining confidentiality, and ensuring the service quality, the counselor should not lose sight of:

- His professional responsibilities;
- His obligation to forewarn and defend the life of all the stakeholders involved in the counseling scheme
- The risk of children being ill-treated, and abused physically, emotionally, and psychically;
- The risk of promoting poverty;
- The risk of having hesitant relations with children, and that they address their own needs with their own behaviors.

The matters of confidentiality become even more difficult if account is taken of the fact that counselors often promote the group work and counseling.

The ethical risk arises from situations in which the following aspects are underestimated:

- Developmental dynamics in a group
- Confidentiality in a group
- Personal relationships within a group
- The likelihood of abuse with the group counseling techniques
- The likelihood of abuse with the independence of the group members.

Interviews with Women/Girls and Children

How to make an interview a positive experience.

Generally, the client should be interviewed alone, but a younger child would benefit from having a trusted adult with her or him.

Any adult who is the alleged perpetrator of the abuse/neglect **must never** be with the child during any interview. The adult who accompanies the child at an interview are there to provide support to the child at a difficult time. They can and should offer verbal and physical comfort, but **must not** interrupt or prompt answers from the child, must not express any shock, anger or disbelief, and they must keep the content of the interview confidential.

Choosing the right venue and facilities.

Venue

The interview should be in a quiet room, free from distraction (such as television or radio playing) and free from the interruptions of people entering and leaving.

Allow the client to have some control over when and where the interview takes place.

Make sure that the client is fully at ease with the venue of the interview. Make sure that the child knows and feels comfortable in the premises and the interview room, and that they feel at ease.

Provide, as a minimum, at least comfortable seating, toilet facilities nearby, and water. Paper, and writing materials may be provided. Refreshments may be available for the end of the interview.

The interview room, should be as private possible. Others, who are not involved in the interview process, should not be able to stare in through windows, or to overhear the conversation in the interview.

There should not be interruptions during the interview, and others should be coming and going in and of the interview room whilst the interview is taken place.

Points to remember.

Clients do not all disclose in the same way. Some will deliberately talk about traumatic events, others will accidentally disclose traumatic things that have happened to them through behavior.

Disclosure of abuse may come through medical or other means.

Clients may not tell everything that has happened to them all at once.

There may be a delay before a client discloses, sometimes for a long time. They need to feel safe before they can tell what has happened.

Sometimes a client will deny abuse or retract a disclosure, (for many reasons including fear) even if it is true and supported by other evidence.

Age, culture, circumstances and the nature of the abuse may influence willingness to disclose what has happened.

If clients tell about abuse, they may not understand what will happen as a result of the disclosure.

Remember that the circumstances of the abuse may have left the client traumatized, and that psychological reactions to the trauma may influence responses to questioning. Recalling traumatic events may also impact on the client psychologically.

First stage of the interview.

Introduction.

To put the client at ease, make sure that the client knows in advance, who will be present at the interview and why they are there. If the client has strong feelings about not wishing any specific person to be present, explore the reasons why, and respect the client's wishes and feelings. At the interview, introduce yourself, also introduce the interpreter, and any other person present.

Establishing appropriate boundaries and trust.

After introducing everyone, explain to the client what will happen in the interview. Explain the purpose of the interview and make sure that the client understands as far as their age allows.

Confirm that the client consents to being interviewed. If an older client who has a clear understanding of the situation refuses to participate in the interview, their decision must be respected. No client should be forced to answer questions. There should be breaks for comfort or refreshment, but refreshments should not be used as a reward for disclosure or co-operation, or withheld in the absence of cooperation. Emotional safety is established through trust, honesty, clarity and openness.

Trust: the client needs to have trust in the interviewer. Never lie, or mislead a client, or make promises that cannot be kept.

Honesty: tell the client the truth, for example when they want to know why you are interviewing, and what you will do with the information gained.

Clarity: if the client ask questions (the circumstances of the interview) give clear, understandable answers.

Openness: be open to the client's experiencing. Clients will not usually make up detailed false accounts of an experience. However, sometimes trafficked or abused clients are taught that they must tell a certain story if they are asked questions by social works or law enforcement officers, and they may have been coached in what they must say. Once they feel safe from oppression the true story will usually emerge.

Remember that clients need to tell their story in their own way.

Each client's experience is unique and different from that of others.

Clients will describe their experience accoutering to their character, culture, and level of understanding. Do not make assumption about what a client means.

Try to remain open to their way of describing what happened, and to find out what it is that they want to say.

Clients who have suffered prolonged trauma may have difficulty in giving a clear account of events in chronological sequence. They may confuse several incidents and run them together.

Confidentiality issues.

Explain to the client why you are interviewing, and what you will do with the information gained. If the information from the interview might result in legal action against an offender, then the clients concerned need to know how their interviews may be used.

Establishing rapport.

The time spent in an interview establishing rapport has a number of useful functions:

Establishing a relationship of empathy and trust between the client and the interviewer.

Explaining the purpose of the interview and making introduction of people present.

Discussion of neutral topics and reassuring the client that they have done nothing wrong

Ascertaining the client's linguistic competence (if the client is a foreigner or a child,) level and methods of communication.

Understanding the personality and life circumstances of the client.

Setting ground rules, challenging assumption and minimizing suggestibility.

It is vital to make sure that the client understands the importance of telling the whole truth.

Example:

You can say something similar to:

"It is very important that you tell me the truth about things that have happened to you. Now I want you to tell me everything that happened. Please do not add anything, and do not leave anything out".

If you think that a client is not telling the truth, do not become angry, but gently ask questions to try to find out why they may be avoiding the truth:

S/he/she may be afraid

S/he/she might not be able to remember everything clearly

S/he/she does not want to get someone else into trouble

Further questions that assist in establishing rapport:

Try to avoid questions that can be answered with just "yes" or "no". Open questions are helpful in establishing effective rapports.

Warming-up questions

"How are you today?"

"How was the trip?"

"How is your week been?"

Introducing questions

"Can you tell me about...?"

"Do you remember an occasion when...?"

“What happened in the episode you mentioned?”

“Could you describe a situation in which you...?”

Second Stage of the Interview

Open questions.

The interviewer should gradually move the general discussion to establish rapport, to free narrative and open questioning moving towards those issues that have given rise to concerns. It is important to move at the client's pace.

The following are example of possible general lines of questioning, gradually moving towards specific events:

Probing questions

“Could you say something more about that?”

“Can you give a more detailed description of what happened?”

“Do you have further examples of this?”

Specifying questions (“what”, “when”, “where”, “how”)

Specific questions are the ‘*what*’, ‘*where*’, ‘*when*’, ‘*why*’, ‘*how*’, ‘*who*’ questions, eliciting more details. A useful question between open and specific is to ask more about a chosen topic, e.g. “ Can you tell me more about...?” It allows the client freedom to tell more about an incident at their own pace and in their own way.

Other examples are:

“What did you actually do when you felt...?”

“What did you think then?”

“ How did you body react?”

“Please, describe where it was happened?”

Note that “Why” questions are very difficult. Quite often when you ask a person ‘why did you do that?’ S/he thinks that you are criticizing, and not simply enquiring their reason for the action. If s/he is defensive, try to put the question in a softer voice and more neutral way... “Why do you think that you did that? What made you do that?”

Direct questions

“When you mentioned depressed, what it means?”

Indirect questions

“How do you believe other women react in a similar situation?”

Structuring questions

“I would now like to introduce another topic”

Clarification questions

“When you say you got... how exactly did you feel?”

Once a client has started to tell his/her story, then just listen carefully, and show that you understand and are open to what s/he says.

Try not to interrupt, but try to get a picture of what the client's experience is.

Once the client has a (natural) stop, then specific questions may be asked to elicit more details.

Closed questions.

These are the least productive questions, but they can be used with care at the end of the interview to clarify issues raised earlier. This type of question poses fixed alternatives, or gets a 'yes' or 'no' answer.

Example:

“Were you in the bedroom?”

“Did anyone see you?”

“Did you run away?”

Note: Interviewers should NOT put ideas into the witness' head.

Leading questions (ones which suggest the answer) should be avoided, e.g. *'It was blue, wasn't it?'* If a client wants to please the interviewer, S/he might simply agree and answer 'yes' to please. This sort of questioning will not elicit good reliable evidence.

Constructing questions

Use “funnel” technique: start with more general questions and move to more specific concerns (“Please, tell me about your experiences of violence”, and “Could you tell me what did the children during that night”).

Questions should be neutral rather than value-laden or leading (e.g. Bad: “Do you agree that our manager is doing a bad job?”; Better: “What do you think of our manager's record in office so far?”).

Use open not closed questions (e.g. Less effective: “Should the president resign?”; Better: “What do you think the president should do now?”).

One question should include only one idea (e.g. Less effective: “Are you satisfied with this service and how it was provided to you?”; Better: “Are you satisfied with this service?”; “How it was provided to you?”).

Use familiar and clear words and expressions;

Avoid jargon;

Avoid scientific terms.

Always probe (How do you mean...?, In what way...?)

Avoid leading probes (It is true that...?, Do you dislike this...?, Are you neglect your...?, Do you mean...?, Are you saying...?, Is that the only thing you can think of...?, You do not mean...?)

Avoid “yes” or “no” short-answer questions

Avoid WHY questions

Use the silence (There is no hurry; take a moment to think about it and tell me all that comes to your mind)

Final stage of the interview: Closing

The closing part of the interview is as important as the opening. If the client has been trusting and has spoken of many things, it may be the first time that the client has felt that someone has listened to him/her.

If the things talked about have been painful and difficult, the client may feel relieved to have told someone about them, perhaps for the first time, but the client may also feel sad and upset by the memories.

It is very important to make sure that the client has a person to be with after the interview (a social worker taking care of him, therapist, or other trusted person) who will offer them the appropriate support and help if they are sad and upset.

Closure is also an important part of the interview process because it provides an opportunity to thank the witness, and also to answer any question that the client may wish to ask.

The clients should be invited to add anything they wish, or to correct anything they have said.

The interviewer can leave advice on seeking help, and a contact name and telephone number.

The interview should not be prolonged and tire the client, but also it should not feel rushed.

The ending of the interview should ensure that the client witness leaves the room feeling confident, safe and supported in the investigation process.

ACTIVE LISTENING: WHAT MAKES COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVE?

Things that make listening effective:

- Same physical level
- Relaxed posture
- Physical safety
- Pleasant surroundings
- No distraction
- Privacy
- Clear boundaries (e.g. time, place, duration and frequency of meeting; confidentiality, mutual expectations and responsibilities)
- Good psychological contact
- Genuineness
- Non-judgmental acceptance
- Respect and valuing the other person
- Showing interest and alertness

- Open mindedness
- Good eye contact
- Acknowledgment of the other person and what is said (e.g. reflecting back, nodding)
- Open body language
- Confidentiality
- Trust
- Showing undivided attention
- Not interrupting
- Reflecting back
- Mirroring
- Allowing silences
- Clarification, owing confusions or lack of understanding
- Checking out to confirm understanding
- Paying attention to body language
- Being able to be wrong
- Not defensive
- Allowing enough time
- Open questions
- Patience
- Encouragement
- Supportiveness

Comments about how it feels to be listened to:

- Relief
- Not alone
- Realization
- Recognition
- Loved, valued, cared for, cared about
- Belonging
- Affirmed
- Respected
- Important
- Trusted
- Self worth
- Unburdened
- Wider view
- Different perspective
- Clearer understanding

- Challenged
- I sorted it out for myself, with your help
- Real
- Vulnerable
- Exposed
- Exploring

BLOCKS TO COMMUNICATION WITH CLIENTS

Be aware of self emotional response to a client who will not talk

When client will not talk with, it can set up to the interviewer the feelings of frustration, rejection or helplessness. The interviewer has to be careful to notice out her/his own feelings and not to become angry or punitive in response to a client who will not talk easily.

Feelings of frustration in helpers may cause a client to feel their anger and become frightened. If possible, the interviewer should find ways to reassure the client, and to let them know that s/he understands why they find it difficult to talk.

It may help to ask yourself some questions:

- Is the client frightened? If so, of what? How can you help them?
- Does the client understand that they can trust you? If not, what can you do to help build trust?
- Is the venue a good one for encouraging communication?
- Are there people present who are inhibiting the client from talking?
- Are you listening effectively? Check that you are using all the appropriate listening skills.
- Does the client have speech or language problems?
- Does the client have very strong emotions, which stop them from speaking about the events they have experienced?

Specific problems in communication

Emotions:

It is difficult for adults to express their emotions in words at the best of times. For a person (especially a child) who is suffering and distressed, it is very hard indeed to talk about feelings. If that client has been deprived of the love and care of a family, and possibly deprived of communication, they may be unable to identify the feelings that they have, and they may not have the words to express what they feel or even to tell their story.

Clients can show their feelings through drawing, and creative arts such as clay modeling, music, drama and the listener can use this medium to encourage communication with appropriate open questions.

In case of the interviews with children: Children may be willing to tell their story through hand puppets in the form of a play rather than tell their story directly to an adult.

The use of dance, and of musical instruments allow clients to express themselves and to show feelings, e.g. stamping feet in a dance, or banging a drum can help with anger, and an imaginary microphone can be used to sing or rap to tell a story, or to express feelings.

Cultural, religious or other societal taboos:

In some cultures, girls in particular could find it difficult to admit that they had been sexually abused because it will affect their social standing and also their chances of future marriage.

Boys, too, may find it very hard to admit that they have been abused or raped. They may feel that they are not as strong as men are expected to be in their culture.

The interviewer should be of the same sex as the client, if the client may find it easier to talk to someone of their own sex about what happened.

The interviewer should express no judgment of the client.

Anger:

A woman or a child may be very angry with persons that have hurt them and for failing to protect them. The interviewer may need to be able to hear and to take a lot of the client's anger and to be able to understand that this is not personal.

The interviewer cannot allow the client's anger to become violence towards the interviewer or others, and it should be contained, but if the anger is heard, it will lessen.

Key skills here are:

- Listen to the client's anger without judgment.
- Show to the clients that you understand why they are angry.
- Do not defend or to argue back.
- Do not respond back with anger or punishment.
- Give the client a way to express their anger safely with words, play materials, or other means e.g. allow them to punch a cushion or to kick a cardboard box and at the same time to say out loud why they are angry.

Things that make listening less effective:

- Tension, lack of trust
- Background noise, distractions, interruptions
- Physical discomfort
- Strong emotions in listener preventing good listening
- Speaker overwhelmed with emotions, feeling self-conscious, embarrassed
- Listener pre-occupied with other things
- Moving away, turning away
- Fiddling with hair or pen
- Making notes
- No eye contact

- Changing the subject
- Standing or sitting at different levels
- Language problems or cultural differences
- Inappropriate body language or posture
- Impatience
- Trivialization, or scorning
- Being patronizing or dogmatic
- Sarcasm
- Arguing, not accepting the other's experience or feelings
- Personality conflict between listener and speaker
- Provocation
- Humoring
- Reassuring
- Labeling and diagnosing
- Moralizing
- Advising, teaching or preaching
- Inappropriately talking about yourself
- Directing and leading
- Using 'trigger' words to turn the conversation
- Jumping in before the speaker has finished
- Explaining or over-interpreting
- Faking attention
- Falling asleep, yawning
- Lack of interest, boredom
- Automatic responses, or too much repetition
- Lack of emotional and psychological connection
- Summing up too soon

SKILLS AND QUALITIES OF AN INTERVIEWER

LISTENING AND GOOD COMMUNICATION

Those who interview women/girls and children need to have patience, and the ability to communicate effectively.

AN UNDERSTANDING OF CLIENT DEVELOPMENT

Interviewers need to develop effective communication with clients of all ages. To achieve this they need an understanding of client development and of age appropriate language.

AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE NATURE AND EFFECT OF CLIENT ABUSE

Those who interview women/girls and children need to understand the types of abuse to which clients might have been exposed, and the potential effects of abuse on the clients concerned and their families.

OPENNESS TO THE CLIENT'S EXPERIENCE

Interviewers must be non-judgmental, and value the client, being open to the feelings and experiences of the client.

BUILDING RAPPORT

Creating the feeling in clients that their thoughts and feelings are understood, giving them a chance to make their own decisions, at their own place, and demonstrating a real interest in helping the client.

FACILITATION

Assisting clients to communicate, listen, express emotions and concerns.

RECORDING AND SUMMARISING SKILLS

Interviewers may need to record facts and the client's feelings, creating summaries and records of interviews.

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Realizing the effectiveness of verbal expression, gesture and body language in communicating with the client and others and using them appropriately.

MANAGEMENT OF THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

Able to put together a variety of skills, provide a structure for the interview, and keep control of the process.

UNDERSTANDING AND EMPATHY WITH CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

Those who interview children, need to be at ease with the children with whom they work. They need to understand how children of different ages might think, and how children of different ages might express themselves.

UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES

Interviewing women/girls and children necessitates an openness and awareness of other cultures, religions, and ethnic difference. Interviews may be influenced by cultural taboos on gender, venue and the use of facilities.

UNDERSTANDING OF SITUATIONS AND PEOPLE

Has experience with people, some understanding of various different kinds of behavior, the necessary substantive knowledge of the issues, and a familiarity with relevant rules or guidelines.

ABILITY TO LEARN FROM EXPERIENCE

Willing to build on knowledge, self-awareness and understanding of others.

GENUINENESS

Honesty knowledge of one's strengths and weaknesses.

OPENNESS TO OTHER PEOPLE

Respect, understanding of differences, and an awareness of own prejudices.

IMPARTIALITY

Is concerned about outcomes for both sides and has the ability to demonstrate that to the parties.

SELF AWARENESS

Pays attention to own feelings and behavior, so as not to treat the parties unfairly without realizing it.

FLEXIBILITY

The ability to maintain professional standards but also to respond to the needs of each individual client and to change the interview process in order to meet their needs and the requirements of each new situation.

BALANCE

Interviewers need the ability to be aware of their own feelings, and to balance them with the needs of the situation. They may need to match the need for support and empathy with appropriate keeping of boundaries to keep the client safe, matching authority and control with a concern for the client.

COMMITMENT TO EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

A willingness to build an understanding of how race gender, culture and religion play a part in the client's experience, to be aware of different cultural needs and to work with a diversity of women/girls and children and colleagues in a non-discriminatory way.

CREATIVITY

Interviewers need the ability to come up with ideas trying different ways of working with women/girls and children where necessary, and being flexible to meet the needs of changing situations.

PROFESSIONALISM

Takes work seriously, is prepared and on time, is respectful to clients and adults at all times.

Psychosocial Counseling Techniques

What is counseling?

It is an approach by means of which practitioners help others improve their well-being, lessen their pain, ease their bouts, and enhance their problem-solving and decision-making capacity.³

The counselor enables and facilitates psychological development, helping the others pinpoint and make better use of their inherent resources and capacities so as to find new ways to help themselves.⁴

³ A. Ivey, 198.

⁴ G. Eagen, 1982.

Counselor's roles and functions

A counselor should be able to:

- Be empathetic with the clients
- Confront the clients with their protective behavior
- Help the clients articulate their feelings and ideas
- Teach the clients the fundamental principles of self-help
- Teach the clients new skills and behaviors

The initial stage/preparatory stage of the counseling services

A large number of people receiving counseling are not used to receiving unconditional support or assistance. In some cases, during the early stage of assistance people reveal irritating and dismissive behaviors. They cannot believe that this assistance is provided with “no costs” entailed, i.e. without anything being asked in return. Some women and children are used to being unable to fight or protest against the way they have been treated, and to being punished through failure to observe the rules of people with authority in their lives.

Anger is a normal response coming from a person who has been ill-treated, abused, and betrayed, and who has consequently lost the fundamental sense of trust in others. As a result, some people may manifest incomprehensible enmity towards those wishing to help them out, as well as towards rules and procedures, including those they are faced with, for instance, while in the shelter. Shortly after their arrival in the accommodating environment (as the shelter is), where people are treated **respectfully**, and where they receive different assistance services, their desire to obtain information, and to take part in reintegration-focused activities increases significantly. Given that a small number of them have ever had access to social and psychological support, it is critical for a gradual and careful approach to be applied in the beginning of the counseling sessions.

Hence, during the early stages of the assistance-focused program, effective and properly managed counseling is critical for ensuring that the person opens up, and accepts the medium- and long-term plans of treatment.

Individual-oriented counseling models

The person-oriented model

Overall, people are initially reluctant to recognize, and discuss about their problems in the past. They also find it difficult to share their stories with others.

Receiving an empathic and unconditional reply from the counselor, while sharing their painful experiences, helps reduce the internal discomfort of the person, as well as their negative perceptions of themselves, which is further reflected in how the people unfold their situation and their expectations for the future.

Within this supportive environment, people start to feel more free (willing and capable) to open up, and explore their beliefs and feelings, and at the same time, to recognize the problems and their frustrations, and begin to look for ways of how to address (or, at least, of how to cope with) them.

Solution-specific focus in the short-term support

When asked what they “*want or expect*,” automatically women reply, “*they do not want*”; their values have been distorted to such a point that they cannot even imagine any positive developments in their life. They tend to have short-term plans in which “*what should be avoided*” only come out clearly.

In the course of counseling, the people are assisted in building a coherent and practical system to meet their targets. Hence, they are primarily assisted in identifying a goal, then organizing a well-based action plan, and finally, in recognizing the benefit of this way of thinking and doing. In this aspect, the people receive confirmation\positive affirmation concerning their “*targeted behavior*”, and acquire a new sense of their skills. Short-term therapy is one of the counseling methods, which have proved to be an effective way in facilitating such a modification in thinking.

The principles at the bottom-line of the short-term therapy, including focusing on positive solutions and the processing of purposes, facilitate the person’s ability to alter their orientation from being obsessed with their problems to being open to positive developments. This enables them to gradually reformulate their choices and desires. At the same time, they develop a different perception of their problems, and set about finding more realistic solutions to them.

Even though this process cannot restructure the whole personality of the person, it may assist her/him in viewing her/his problems and difficulties from another perspective, in assuming a sense of responsibility, and in activating new behavioral approaches.

Metaphor stories

Metaphor stories are also techniques that have been employed with a view to promoting the person to find new perspectives, and start out on the process of resolving their problems. A number of the people are reluctant to acknowledge a change in their life. Given that this technique is not designed to exercise a direct influence on the person’s decision-making process, it helps reduce the resistance of their internal protective mechanisms. Stories offer a model with which the people may identify themselves. Listening to these stories, the person may find a correlation to their own personal problems, feeling no threat to their existing system of values and beliefs.

If, for instance, in an effort to positively change her life, a young woman doubts in the chances of success, this technique furnishes an example, a story “*For Daring to Risk*,” and a model to positively change her perspective of the problems. Such universal and known stories bring about acceleration of the remedial mechanisms of the unconsciousness.

Relaxation techniques

Employing the relaxation techniques, the clients learn to progressively release their musculature, focusing on the breathing process. While the client gradually calms down, she becomes capable of reducing her own anxiety, and replacing it with a state of peace and quietness.

Group-work as Art, Faith, and Science

Short Guidelines

- Make the time to reflect on your personal identity, attitudes and values;
- Have a clear idea of what your roles and functions are in the group, and communicate them to the members;
- Have a clear idea of the type of group you are designing;
- Avoid undertaking a project that is beyond the scope of your training and experience;

- Be able to express the purpose of the group to the clients;
- Tell group members what is expected of them;
- Give them the ground rules that will govern group activities;
- Protect the members' right to decide what to share with the group and what activities to participate in;
- Point out to the members the psychological risks involved in group participation;
- Emphasize the importance of confidentiality to members;
- Develop a rationale for using group exercises, and be able to verbalize it;
- When it is appropriate, be open with the group about your values, but avoid imposing them on clients;
- Respect your clients' capacity to think for themselves, and be sure that members give one another the same respect;
- Encourage participants to discuss their experience in the group;
- Assist members in applying to their daily life what they are learning in the group process;
- Anticipate frustrations and disappointments;
- Exploring misconceptions about group;
- Be aware of the danger of meeting your needs at the expense of the members' needs;
- Relate practice to theory and remain open to integrating multiple approaches into your practices;
- Instill faith in group counseling
- Keep yourself informed about research findings on group process, and use this information to increase the effectiveness of your practice;
- Be alert for symptoms of psychological debilitation in group members;
- Develop methods of evaluation to determine effectiveness of the procedures you use;
- Schedule follow-up sessions so members are able to see how others in their group have done.
- Learn from one's own experience and from the experience of others