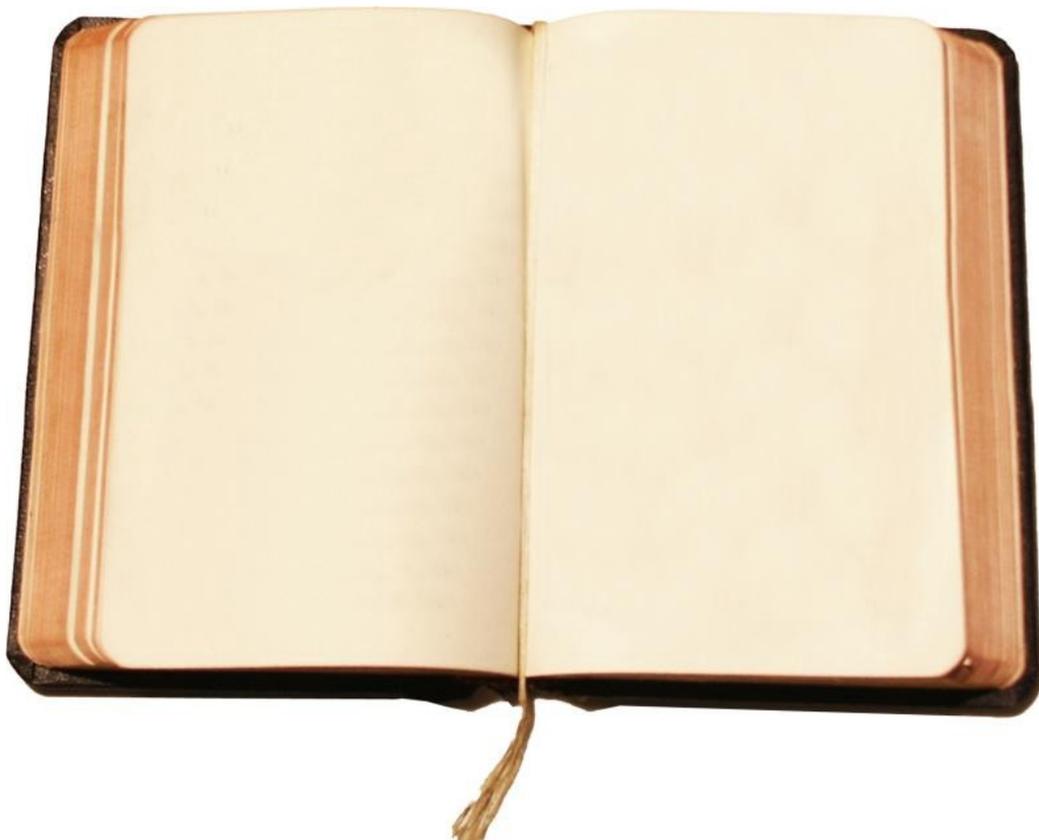


Institute InBrief

50th Commemorative Edition



Produced by the Australian Institute of Professional Counsellors

Introduction

E-newsletters, electronic newsletters, or simply eZines, have gained popularity in the past decade as an efficient tool to disseminate content using the internet as a platform. They're convenient to readers, whilst enabling writers to distribute their content at low cost and with great efficiency.

With that in mind, we created Institute InBrief in 2003. It was a great way to keep in touch with our students, whilst providing articles, news, updates and other valuable information to anyone interested in the counselling industry. What started as a shy experiment became a priority task for our education team – and since 2003 we've been devoting time and energy to produce high quality content to our readership.

To celebrate the arrival of our 50th Edition with over 12,000 subscribers, we've decided to create this eBook – a compendium of top articles we've published since 2003. Here you will find a variety of topics, from human emotions to therapeutic techniques.

We hope you enjoy the reading and we encourage you to forward this to your friends, colleagues, family or anyone you think may enjoy and benefit from it. If you have suggestions or comments, please write to ezine@aipc.net.au.

Enjoy your 50th Edition gift – and we'll see you soon!

Kindest Regards,

Sandra Poletto

Sandra Poletto
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Institute of Professional Counsellors



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Part I

Building Your Counselling Practice

- Setting Up a Counselling Practice
- Effective Marketing in Counselling



Setting Up a Counselling Practice

In this article, we'll discuss the basic rules of engagement in business: how to effectively start and maintain a counselling practice from legal, ethical and managerial perspectives. If you have the tools, get ready to step into the business world with the right knowledge.



Out of School, Into the Office

It all commences with the mindset. Transiting from a student lifestyle to a working lifestyle (or from a student/working lifestyle to a working lifestyle) requires a change in the person's mindset. In the case of building a business, it gets even more serious. As a student, the consequences of a bad assignment or being late to a class are engrossed by the student.

In a counselling business, bad planning or service delivery will affect the counsellor and the clients: there is more responsibility, thus the need for more accountability.

It is common that recently graduated counsellors are highly motivated to build a successful practice. It is important that such drive and motivation are directed to a precise framework of action. Such a framework will be based on the fundamental needs of a business, along with other particular requirements of the profession.

Legal and Accounting Matters

Before going into practice, whether it is on a full time, part time or voluntary basis, counsellors should seek appropriate accounting and legal advice. There are basic requirements which any business must observe, and they can be vastly different according to each country and respective industry regulations.

In Australia, most cities have Small Business Advisory Groups which are government-sponsored and which are established expressly for this purpose. In many cases the advice given is free or very inexpensive.

There are many questions which need to be asked prior to starting a business. Following are some of them, most applied to the Australian business context:

- Should I register a Business Name and if so, how do I do it?
- Should I form a Trust or a Company and if so, why, when and how?
- Should I register for an Australia Business Number (ABN)? If so, how?

- Should I register for GST (tax) and if so, how do I do it?
- What kind of accounting format do I need?
- Am I required to register under Workplace Health and Safety Regulations?
- Do I need insurance (indemnity or other) and if so, what?
- What if I employ someone. What procedures must be observed?

There are many issues which must be sorted out before going into business. "First-timers" who are completely unaware of most of these requirements should get appropriate advice in order to avoid very problematic outcomes. Such advice, in Australia, can be sought through the Internet on governmental websites such as www.business.gov.au (ABN, GST and PAYG registration) and www.asic.gov.au (company registration). It is imperative the counsellors make use of these services while they are in the planning stages for their practice.

Moving to the accounting side of things, keeping records is a fundamental practice to any business. Keeping appropriate financial and taxation records are just as important as keeping good client records. A visit to an Accountant prior to setting up a practice is essential as he/she can provide advice on such matters as GST, maintaining cash flow records and taxation policies and procedures. The Accountant should also balance Income and Expense Statements on a regular quarterly basis.



Good accounting and financial advice is essential to the success of any business.

Whilst arguments which suggest that 'small business is top heavy with red tape' may well be valid, we cannot use this as justification for non-compliance. When going into business and providing a service to the public, counsellors take on the responsibility to ensure that their business is operating legally and ethically from all perspectives.

Advertising and Promotion

Advertising in a local newspaper to promote a counselling service is a common practice for counsellors. The Yellow Pages is a popular place to advertise and a recommended 'investment'. There will be times when a local newspaper will run "Health and Wellbeing" features or similar supplements.

A good strategy is to contact the newspaper for a schedule and advertise in alignment with it for good exposure (and positioning).

Counsellors must advertise in the “professional services” section of the paper, not in “personal” or “entertainment” sections as they may prejudice the image of the business (bad positioning). Finding out about “specials” like three days for the cost of two and effective distribution days can also provide a benefit in cost and delivery.

Finally, if you are going to try Letter Box flyers, it is important that your flyer is professionally designed and presented and is delivered to houses that meet your demographic market.

The Office Setting

Setting up the Professional Rooms correctly is extremely important and must be carefully planned. The room setting will enable one of the most important aspects of a counselling session, which is providing a safe, relaxing and comfortable environment for the client. It will also reflect the professionalism of the counsellors and play a decisive role in the client’s decision-making process in whether to return for another meeting or to look for another practice. So what are the major aspects which need to be observed?

The **colours** used to paint both the room background and the décor should be modest, comfortable, settling and non-aggressive. Ideal colours would be soft pastel shades including green, blue, lilac or cream. Bright unsettling colours such as lemon and hot, aggressive colours such as red are unsuited to the supportive counselling environment. The **décor** should be conservative and not include primary colours or items which are attention getting.

There is no need for the counselling room to be either overly *large* or *small*. Think in terms of there being three people in the room each needing his or her own “space” and yet allowing for a close comfortable supportive environment. If the room is too large there may be a need to use a partition to create the required area.

Seating should be comfortable and arranged in a circular plan. Lounge type chairs are preferable and it is important that the counsellor sits at the same height as the client(s). It is most inappropriate for the therapist to sit higher than those who seek support as this may be interpreted as threatening.

Smoking when with a client is unprofessional and even illegal in some states across Australia and the world. There is no need for the counsellor to offer **refreshments** (such as tea or coffee) during a session, but it is wise to have a jug of water and glasses handy.

People often become dry in the mouth when they are stressed and a glass of water can be very settling (not to mention that it would avoid the need to interrupt the session). Having a box of tissues is handy too.

Finally, **seeking counsel** is a common practice in counselling. If the counsellor is working with someone and would like a second opinion, he or she should inform the client of such decision. If counsel is obtained, make sure not to disclose the client's personal information (such as their name).

Maintenance Tasks and Service Quality

Keeping records of interviews and counselling sessions is not an indispensable activity, but it is recommended for reference and backtracking. If the counsellor decides to keep records, there are some basic rules he or she should follow.

First, the counsellor should always let the client know that he or she wants to use a recorder and if there is any expression of disagreement or displeasure by the client, the counsellor should not go ahead or even try to convince the client that he or she should. With taping however, it is often a better practice if a recorder is used to make notes immediately after the session. It is usually helpful to make brief written notes during the session and then develop these more fully immediately after the client is gone.

Prior to taping, the counsellor must record the verbal permission of the client at the beginning of the first tape. This can be done by simply turning the recorder on and saying 'we're ready to start now (name) and as you know we will be recording our sessions so we can later go back and see how much progress we've made. Is that ok?', or something along those lines.

Preparing a numbered Tape Register so that the tapes are arranged according to each client is desirable. One way to do this is to use an Alphabetic Card Index System.

Price Point

Finally, we take a look at the counsellor fees. In order to find out how much to charge per session, the counsellor should do some local marketing research (e.g. calling other practitioners in the area and ask). Despite where the counsellor works, he or she will discover that the capacity of people to pay will vary greatly, and it could therefore be wise, especially in the developmental stages of a practice, to take some work for whatever fee the client can afford to pay.

Many very successful counsellors still give time each week to do volunteer work at Community Centres, Aged Care Homes, Hospitals and the like (good networking as we discussed in last edition's publication).

Communication and Motivation

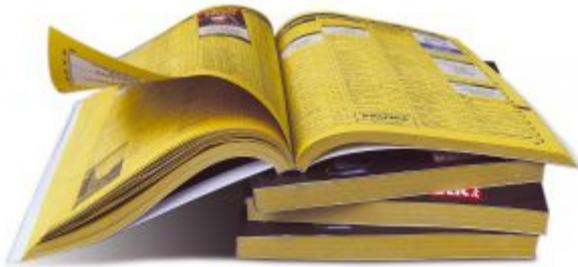
Effective communication is fundamental to the success of any business, and in professional counselling its importance is disproportionately high. The basis for effective communication is trust, and it is with this in mind that counsellors proceed and hone this special skill.

Effective communication implies both the ability to speak and listen well. Effective listening (especially in counselling) means listening in a caring way to what is being said, accepting the other person has a point of view, and accepting the right of the other person to have an opinion which may be different from the counsellor. Therapists need to be careful not to judge others for whatever reason and through non-judgement offer the best possible advice.

Last, but not least, the most intrinsic factor of all: motivation. All these guidelines will not be effectively implemented unless the counsellor is willing to build a successful practice. That means a practice which is ethical, legally compliant, supportive to its clients, and with a well defined framework of tasks. In the end, it takes that one extra yard, that motivational boost, that additional drive, to succeed in the world of business.

As Henry Ford used to say "if you think you can, you can. If you think you can't, you're right". What you think?

Effective Marketing in Counselling



Professionals in the health and allied industries, including doctors, nurses, psychologists, counsellors, social workers, etc, **often work from their own self-employed businesses.**

A considerable section of the industry is self-employed, whilst many other professional counsellors who have not yet become their own bosses, aspire to do so.

In this article, we discuss one of the most critical aspects of starting and perpetuating a business: marketing. You will learn how counsellors can gain exposure and build a positive image for their business, whilst developing a good client base – despite their theoretical orientation or experience with self-employment.

Marketing and Counselling

We begin with a basic question: what constitutes marketing? Many counsellors and small to medium business owners believe marketing is simply advertising. This is a HUGE error. Marketing is so much more than just your advertising. Advertising is simply one method, medium or process by which to communicate your product or service to prospective clients.

Marketing however encapsulates:

- Strategy; mindset;
- Planning; capital;
- Branding; products and services;
- Product packaging; positioning;
- Pricing; business location;
- Communication; market drivers;
- Business models; innovation;
- Distribution channels;
- Policies and procedures;
- Guarantees; relationship building;
- Sales processes;
- Goals and objectives;
- Business philosophy; and more...



Marketing encapsulates everything that influences the CHOICES of your prospects and clients. And the choices of your prospects and clients relate to:

- their perception of your business, products and image;
- whether they purchase or not;
- whether they continue using or re-use your service;
- whether they refer your service;
- whether they pay;
- how much they are willing to pay;
- whether or not they endorse;
- and much more.

As you can see, there is a lot more to effective marketing than just running an ad. How effectively a company undertakes marketing is the primary determinant of its level of success. Marketing is WITHOUT DOUBT the most leveragable process in your business. It is also the most overlooked, and hence the reason for the majority of business failures. Being a qualified counsellor with great experience and a well-established practice won't help unless people know about it!

Networking for Exposure

In the counselling industry, one of the most powerful ways to build your business image is networking. Counselling clients can be derived from varied sources, particularly community networks – it is very important that counsellors recognise that factor in order to get the appropriate exposure which their businesses require.

Following are some suggestions that can be helpful:

Talk to your family Doctor and let him or her know what you are planning (or about your recently established business) as you may have to make referrals to him/her.

Many counsellors get referrals from Doctors and this is usually the result of establishing a meaningful trust relationship.

Likewise, **discuss your plans with your family Pharmacist** as he/she may also be able to help building your professional profile.

Talk to your local Naturopath/ Homoeopath/ Physiotherapist/ etc. and suggest an exchange of business cards. Explain that you would like to have someone specific to make referrals to and maybe he/she may care to reciprocate.

Contact Support Groups and Agencies in your area explaining the service that you offer. Maybe you can offer to help them out from time to time, even on a voluntary basis. Voluntary work is an excellent way to gain experience and create links with both the community and other professional in health care industries. You can offer your voluntary work in places such as hospitals, aged care facilities, community centres, etc.

One of the best ways to promote your business is by word of mouth, and one of the most effective ways to ensure that this happens is to run group activities such as Grief and Loss discussion groups.

Building Your Profile

As a counsellor, recognition of your knowledge, experience, qualifications and competence are very important. How can you effectively build a positive profile within your prospects and current clients? That is a pertinent question in a counsellor's career.

As we've cited previously, marketing activities such as networking and volunteering play a major role in building the counsellor's profile. Primarily, it is a way for the counsellor to validate his/her skills and qualifications throughout working directly with clients and other professionals. Secondly, maintaining a meaningful trust relationship with other professionals and volunteering will help creating the image of a 'contributor of the community', which is a premise for building trust and rapport with prospective clients (a very important aspect of any counselling relationship).

Another effective strategy to build a professional profile is to educate others. Creating and distributing informational flyers, writing a newsletter or eZine, conducting workshops and attending discussion groups are all good examples of such activities. Through this process, counsellors position themselves as specialists in their area – thus, attracting prospective clients. The cited activities are also useful for professional development and efficient in keeping the counsellor up-to-date with industry developments, counselling theory and practice.

Improving Marketing through Delivery

A very common way service professionals achieve a differential position in the market is the interesting - and potentially risky - art of over-delivering (and under-promising). But what exactly is over-delivering? Over-delivering is providing a level of service over and above that expected or anticipated for the service provided.

Over-delivery is providing a level of service beyond what you've promised your client in your marketing message. An example of service over-delivery would be to provide your client with a surprise complimentary gift after the first session. The gift may be in the form of a tele-coaching session, a seminar, a book, or perhaps a voucher to the movies or a massage session.

Many astute counsellors actually provide services of other business professionals in order to provide their over-delivery. For example, in the case of a free massage above, you may be able to do a deal with a health spa that is willing to provide a complimentary session to your clients in the anticipation that your client will continue to use their service in the future. This type of arrangement is a powerful win to all parties - You are able to provide your client with an added benefit, the health spa gets a potential long term client for low cost, and your client gets a free massage.

The intention of service over-delivery is to build goodwill with your clients. It's intended that this goodwill will translate into business benefits for you. Those benefits may be longer client contracts, increased referral and stronger product endorsement.

Generally your perceived gain from over-delivering your service would be greater than your cost to provide the additional benefit to your client. (In the above example your cost is actually zero). Clearly it's very important that you take into consideration the cost of over-delivery in your financial planning. When engaging in this process, you must be aware of the cost/benefit relationship that will arise from it, ensuring that for every cost involved, there is a mutual benefit.

However, every investment requires a systematic approach in order to be successful - and over-delivering is not different. You'll need to establish goals in order to measure the outcomes of your efforts, and also to avoid having financial problems due to an ill planned promotion. You can include the following points in your over-delivery strategy:

Establish primary objectives

List each advantage of over-delivering in a priority order. Referrals, networking and partnership possibilities are all reasons for this type of promotion. Your primary objectives will also be parallel to your current position in the market: whether you have just started your business, included a new service, found a new niche, etc.

Find a target market

The main objective of over-delivering is to provide more satisfaction to customers. For this reason, look for groups that can offer a great deal of options for your business, such as networking possibilities. Once you've established the right target, you'll be able to refine your promotion and possibly calculate the most likely outcomes of each interaction.

Choose your gift

Now that you've decided what your target market is, you need to decide on what you are going to offer. You may provide extra services of your own, or negotiate with a local service provider to exchange vouchers for referrals. There are many options to choose from, but the most important thing is to ensure that whatever the gift is, it will have some value to the client.

Create protocols

You are going to face a constant trade-off between the amount of extra time you are going to spend with 'give-aways' and how much you can actually spend. Creating protocols will help you to balance this equation and ensure you'll neither go too far on over-delivering, nor too low. It will also give you enough flexibility to deal with various opportunities that may arise throughout the process.

It is important for the counsellor to realize that marketing is an ongoing process - and to ensure that the service delivered is of the highest possible quality. With the appropriate training, the passion to help people and the dedication to get a business practice on its way - your career is likely to become a success!

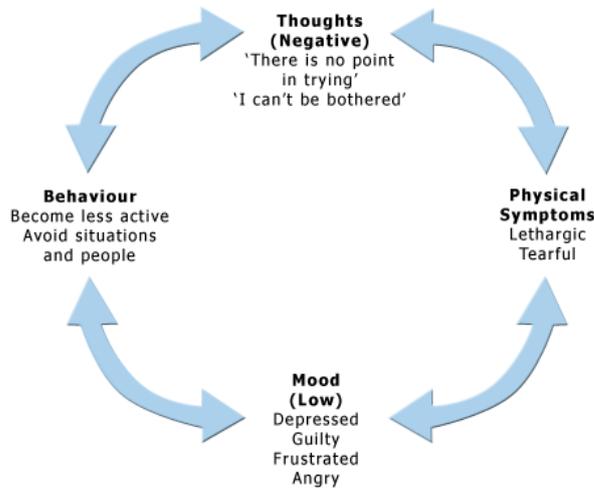
Part II

Counselling Theory and Contexts

- Cognitive Behaviour Therapy
- Gestalt Therapy
- Lifespan Development
- Professional Ethics
- Ethics in Counselling: An Overview
- Therapy and Counselling
- Communication: Principles
- Diversity in Counselling
- Dealing with Groups
- Personality and Behaviour
- The Challenge of Change



Cognitive Behaviour Therapy



Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) is a well known therapy that is studied extensively in the Diploma of Professional Counselling. How much do you know about it?

CBT emphasises the recognising and changing of negative thoughts and maladaptive beliefs.

The following are some concepts referred to in CBT:

Arbitrary Inferences: refers to making conclusions without supporting and relevant evidence. This includes "catastrophising", or thinking of the absolute worst scenario and outcomes for most situations.

Selective Abstraction: consists of forming conclusions based on isolated details of an event (and ignoring other information).

Overgeneralisation: is a process of holding extreme beliefs on the basis of a single incident and applying them inappropriately to dissimilar events or settings.

Personalisation: is a tendency for individuals to relate external events to themselves, even when there is no basis for making this connection.

Labelling or Mislabelling: involve portraying one's identity on the basis of imperfections and mistakes made in the past and allowing them to define one's true identity.

The approach of CBT is based on the theoretical rationale that the way people feel and behave is determined by how they interpret their experience. It proposes that change occurs by adjusting the client's thinking about the experience. Thus, counsellors work with clients in changing distorted thinking to enable the client to interpret the experience more realistically.

Gestalt Therapy

Gestalt Therapy is a well known therapy that is studied during Unit 10 of the Diploma of Professional Counselling. How much do you know about it?

Gestalt proposes that change comes about by the client being aware of what he/she is experiencing and resolving the situation.

Some basic concepts of the Gestalt approach include:



Holism: all nature is seen as unified and as a coherent whole, and the whole is different from the sum of its parts.

Field Theory: the organism must be seen in its environment, or in its context, a part of the constantly changing field.

The Figure-Formation Process: it describes how the individual organises the environment from moment to moment. The figure-formation process tracks how some aspect of the environmental field emerges from the background and becomes the focal point of the individual's attention and interest.

Organismic Self-Regulation: The figure-formation process is intertwined with the principle of 'Organismic self-regulation', a process by which equilibrium is 'disturbed' by the emergence of a need, a sensation, or an interest.

Gestalt therapists direct the client's awareness to the figures that emerge from the background during a therapy session and use the figure-formation process as a guide for the focus of the therapeutic work.

Gestalt promotes direct experience and testing in order to adapt to the environment; express different behaviour; and instigate awareness of action and further responsible recognition of the results.

Lifespan Development



Lifespan development researchers study people of all ages in a wide range of situations, from the gender-typed play behaviours of children to the adjustments faced by elderly people.

Although humans develop in similar ways over the course of the lifespan, it must be understood that everyone also develops in individual ways.

Significant research in this field is guided by a broad range of theories, each grouped in certain categories according to its properties:

Psychological theories emphasise behavioural characteristics and include such elements as personality, cognition, self-esteem, motivation, and feelings.

Among the psychological theories of most importance for counselling are the psychodynamic, cognitive-developmental, behaviouristic, social learning, humanistic, and ecological perspectives.

Sociological theories emphasise how growth and development occur against the backdrop of society. Such theories focus on a wide assortment of issues, such as roles, relationship interactions, and family dynamics, and can be applied to any number of topics related to the lifespan: from peer dynamics to vocational involvement.

Biological theories of lifespan focus on the complex physiological processes that occur over the course of the life cycle. Biological theories are geared more toward the study of later life aging processes but are important to recognise throughout the entire lifespan.

Among the more prominent biological theories are the wear-and-tear, cellular, and immunity perspectives.

Professional Ethics

" Ethics and ethical principles extend to all spheres of human activity. They apply to our dealings with each other, with animals and the environment. They should govern our interactions not only in conducting research but also in commerce, employment and politics. Ethics serve to identify good, desirable or acceptable conduct and provide reasons for those considerations. "

National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans, 1999

Have you ever found yourself involved in an ethical dilemma?

Even if you are not a counsellor or mental health professional, it is most likely that at some stage of your life, you have been directly or indirectly involved in a situation in which ethical conduct was to be considered.

The growth and standardisation of service industries, as well as the increasing awareness and obligation imposed by Privacy legislation, has led to the development of codes of conduct designed to protect both sides of the professional relationship - particularly the interests of clients. In counselling, ethical conduct is not only expected, but in many cases, is required by legislation.

So how does ethical conduct apply to the counselling relationship? Basically, ethics in counselling is comprised of two areas: confidentiality and professional ethics.

Confidentiality

"For counselling to be maximally effective, the client must feel secure in the knowledge that what they tell the counsellor is to be treated with a high degree of confidentiality. In an ideal world a client would be offered total confidentiality so that they would feel free to openly explore with the counsellor the darkest recesses of their mind, and to discuss the most intimate details of their thoughts." (Geldard & Geldard, 1998)

It is recommended that counsellors discuss confidentiality issues with clients before the counselling relationship is established. In most cases, the counsellor will tell the client that their relationship will be relatively confidential.

Relative confidentiality is required in order to improve the quality of the service, as on many occasions, the counsellor may have to: discuss session details with supervisors, exchange valuable information with other professionals, or maintain notes and formal records of every session that has occurred.

Furthermore, there are legal issues involving confidentiality: if a court order is issued, the counsellor must release personal records in order to comply with legislation. This can be a very sensitive matter, especially when the counsellor acquires knowledge that a client is dangerous and may put other lives at risk. These dilemmas are faced by many counsellors working in prisons, or with aggressive and potentially dangerous clients.

"While I worked for Drug Arm as a Project Officer for a programme called HART (Home Assessment Response Team), my role was to visit people in their own homes, who were affected by substance misuse challenges. Sometimes their home was within the confines of Community Correction Centres. Because confidentiality was stretched sometimes at certain stages of their imprisonment, I would strongly recommend to my clients that it would be preferable for them not to mention names or dates so that I would not have that unnecessary information (and evidence) to cause them harm should there ever be the need to have my duty to report or disclose some evidence of a particular situation, challenged." (Kathleen Casagrande - Counsellor)

Due to such situations, some counsellors even affirm that promising absolute confidentiality is unethical. The following are common aspects of a counselling relationship which prevent counsellors from providing absolute confidentiality to their clients:

- Keeping records of sessions and client's personal data;
- Release of information to Supervisors;
- Protection of third persons from endangering situations;
- Court orders or similar law enforcement issues which require information disclosure.
- Etc...

Professional Ethics

Because counselling is not a regulated profession in many countries (including Australia), the use of a professional code of ethics is a method of guiding the quality of the services provided by counsellors, the quality of training provided to counsellors, and protecting clients.

These codes provide conduct guidelines for professionals and are an effective way to provide practice standards to many counsellors lacking experience or knowledge of the industry. It also serves the purpose of structuring the counselling industry, providing common professional descriptions, definitions and service boundaries according to each type of counsellor.

The Australian Counselling Association is one industry association in Australia that provides ethical guidelines and a code of conduct for counsellors. The ACA's Code of Ethics and Code of Practice are part of the Code of Conduct - which can be accessed from their website at www.theaca.net.au/docs/code_conduct.pdf. An excerpt from this Code is:

Counsellors will:

- *Offer a non-judgemental professional service, free from discrimination, honouring the individuality of the client.*
- *Establish the helping relationship in order to maintain the integrity and empowerment of the client without offering advice.*
- *Be committed to ongoing personal and professional development.*

Complying with ethical guidelines is one of the most important aspects of being a professional counsellor. Creating awareness in both counsellor and clients of the boundaries of the services provided will lead to a better development of the profession, and overall improvement of industry standards.

Counsellors are responsible for keeping up-to-date with professional codes of ethics, confidentiality guidelines, and other relevant information.

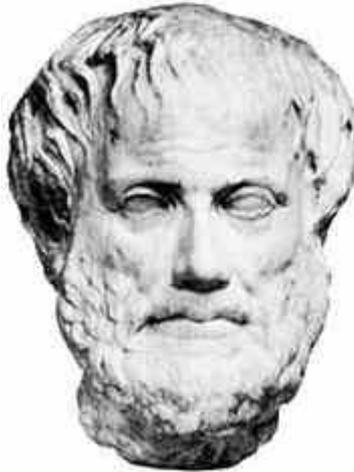
Ethics in Counselling: An Overview

Ethics and History

“Ethics (from Greek, meaning "custom") is the branch of axiology, one of the four major branches of philosophy, which attempts to understand the nature of morality; to distinguish that which is right from that which is wrong. The Western tradition of ethics is sometimes called 'moral philosophy'". ([Wikipedia](#))

The origins of ethics are related to the introduction of moral behaviour in early societies.

The application of concepts such as 'right' and 'wrong', and the definition of these concepts in different environments, induced the need for a formal approach to social behaviour - an attempt to create commonality and organisation in a society.



In this context, codes of behavior were created, and different forms of behaviour enforcement adopted.

As societies developed, and increasing importance was placed in structural thinking - such as the advent of sciences - meta-ethics became an eminent topic of discussion. Meta-ethics refers to the investigation of ethical statements, an actual analysis of ethics itself. Names such as Hobbes, Kant and Nietzsche were prominent in this period.

Nowadays, ethics is still a main topic of discussion. As societies evolve, the relationships between individuals become more complex, and so do the etiquettes and codes of conduct. The development of business relationships has raised many ethical dilemmas, and ethical counselling is one of them.

“Men acquire a particular quality by constantly acting a particular way... you become just by performing just actions, temperate by performing temperate actions, brave by performing brave actions.”

Aristotle

Ethical Counselling

Because counselling is not a regulated profession in many countries (including Australia), the use of ethical standards is a method of guiding the quality of the services provided by counsellors, the quality of training provided to counsellors, and of protecting clients. These standards provide conduct guidelines for professionals and are an effective way support many counsellors lacking experience or knowledge of the industry. It also serves the purpose of structuring the counselling industry, providing common professional descriptions, definitions and service boundaries according to each type of counsellor.

There is a wide range of issues comprising the field of ethical counselling - which are also part of common guidelines for the practice of therapy. According to Daniluk and Haverkamp (1993), "the main ethical framework referred to in many discussions of therapy is one based on the concepts of autonomy, fidelity, justice, beneficence, non-maleficence and self interest".

Law and Counselling

The need for professionalisation has created a common link between ethical behaviour and legal conduct in the therapy fields. Legislation was provided to primarily protect clients from misguidance, and ultimately to provide guidelines for the profession. However, as cited previously, in most countries ethical conduct in counselling is not yet part of the legal framework - which outlines the importance of professional and industry peak associations in providing guidelines and codes of conduct for affiliated professionals.

Bad Practice

The issues of privacy and power in a counselling session can be prejudicial in terms of unethical practice. The private nature of a counselling session leaves a 'gap for unsupervised practice', and therefore it is quite difficult to be assessed. For instance, fairly recent explorations of unethical practice in therapy have shown the emerging problem of sexual abuse of clients. This issue is augmented by the power relationship between client and counsellor, in which the therapist could take advantage of their position of power to practice unethical behaviour.

Training and Professional Recognition

As cited before, counselling is not regulated in most countries. In order to standardise the industry, and ensure that counsellors have the necessary skills to professionally practice, training and recognition must be accentuated. In Australia, the ACA plays a role in coordinating industry efforts, providing information to the public and maintaining records of counsellors in practice. That system protects clients from bad practice, and supports training standards for organisations that provide counsellor training.

The [Australian Institute of Professional Counsellors](#), as an example, is recognised by the ACA - which means that AIPC complies with industry standards defined by this peak organisation.

Safety and Negligence

These concepts are utmost concerns of counsellors in practice. A counsellor-client relationship is a very delicate encounter of an individual seeking help, and a professional providing advice.

Primarily, it is the counsellor's responsibility to provide a safe environment for the counselling session - particularly because physical and psychological safety is a premise for the counselling therapy to succeed. Negligence is closely related to the concepts of breach of confidentiality and safety. Observing principles for duty of care is part of ethical behaviour in counselling.

Complying with ethical guidelines is one of the most important aspects of being a professional counsellor. Creating awareness in both counsellor and clients of the boundaries of the services provided will lead to a better development of the profession, and overall improvement of industry standards.

Counsellors are responsible for keeping up-to-date with professional codes of ethics, confidentiality guidelines, and other relevant information.

Therapy and Counselling

"Therapy or treatment is the attempted remediation of a health problem, usually following a diagnosis."

([Wikipedia](#))

In the context of mental health, therapy has vastly changed over time. Long before the scientific approach to the treatment of mental health prevailed, attempts to discover the underpinnings of the human mind produced a wide range of therapies and theories. For many centuries, the therapeutic approach to the human mind was mostly based on supernatural and religious beliefs.

This approach began to change when Phillippe Pinel, in 1793, introduced his methods in Paris. Pinel believed that switching from a commonly violent and



Philippe Pinel

medicine-based treatment to a strictly non-violent and observational approach could produce a better outcome for patients. At this point, the history of the counselling therapy had begun to be shaped.

Therapy in Counselling

The general concept of therapy has its differentiations from the counselling approach to therapy. In counselling, providing therapy does not mean providing a cure to a patient's illness.

Counselling's general objective is to help improve the client's quality of life, and in many instances that could mean to simply explore a relationship issue or the perception towards oneself.

The varied types of counselling therapies reflect many approaches to solve similar issues - and these approaches can work differently depending on the individual. In order to better understand this concept, we've gathered some information about some counselling treatments used nowadays.

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy

CBT is an insight-focused therapy that emphasizes recognising and changing negative thoughts and maladaptive beliefs.

The approach is based on the theoretical rationale that the way people feel and behave is determined by how they perceive and structure their experience.

CBT proposes that change comes about by changing the client's thinking about the situation. Once the client has converted his/her point of view, the problem-perception switches to a clearer context.

Arbitrary Inferences: refers to making conclusions without supporting and relevant evidence.

Selective Abstraction: consists of forming conclusions based on isolated details of an event (and ignoring other information).

Overgeneralisation: is a process of holding extreme beliefs on the basis of a single incident and applying them inappropriately to dissimilar events or settings.

Personalisation: is a tendency for individuals to relate external events to themselves, even when there is no basis for making this connection.

Labelling or Mislabelling: involve portraying one's identity on the basis of imperfections and mistakes made in the past and allowing them to define one's true identity.

Holism: all nature is seen as unified and as a coherent whole, and the whole is different from the sum of its parts.

Field Theory: the organism must be seen in its environment, or in its context, a part of the constantly changing field.

The Figure-Formation Process: it describes how the individual organises the environment from moment to moment.

Organismic Self-Regulation: The figure-formation process is intertwined with the principle of 'Organismic self-regulation', a process by which equilibrium is 'disturbed' by the emergence of a need, a sensation, or an interest.

The Gestalt Therapy

An existential/phenomenological approach based on the premise that individuals must be understood in the context of their ongoing relationship with the environment.

Gestalt proposes that change comes about by the client being aware of what he/she is experiencing and resolving the situation.

Gestalt promotes direct experience and testing in order to adapt to the environment; express different behaviour; and instigate awareness of action and further responsible recognition of the results.

Person-Centred Therapy

Client

Person-Centred Therapy is "an approach to helping individuals and groups in conflict. A clearly stated theory (developed by psychologist Carl R. Rogers), stimulated a vast amount of research on a revolutionary hypothesis: that a self-directed growth process would follow the provision and reception of a particular kind of relationship characterised by genuineness, non-judgemental caring, and empathy." (Corsini 1995)

In Person-Centred therapy, the focus is on the client. The objective is to achieve progress by self-directed growth, emphasizing on the 'here-and-now' of the individual's life. This emphasis on the present replaces the diagnostic perspective in counselling. Here, individuals are not products of their past experiences.

Solution-Focused Therapy

Solution

This therapeutic focus is on exploring the client's perspective towards a problem. The client is assisted to develop a different perspective towards the future, and through that perspective, work on their current situation.

The goal-driven process is similar to coaching - the counsellor's role is to build initial rapport and then use questioning techniques to direct the process of therapy (in order to enhance the client's understanding of his/her strengths and successes in already overcoming his/her problems).

The solution-focused approach can be defined in five different stages: describing the problem, developing well-formed goals, exploring for exceptions, end-of-session feedback, and evaluating client progress.

Communication: Principles

"The colossal misunderstanding of our time is the assumption that insight will work with people who are unmotivated to change. Communication does not depend on syntax, or eloquence, or rhetoric, or articulation but on the emotional context in which the message is being heard. People can only hear you when they are moving toward you, and they are not likely to when your words are pursuing them. Even the choicest words lose their power when they are used to overpower. Attitudes are the real figures of speech."

Edwin H. Friedman

Introduction

Communication is one of the fundamental necessities of our relationships with other people, whether it is a stranger, work colleague, family member, child or life partner. While our interpersonal relationships can be rewarding, many of us find ourselves in situations of mis-communication and communication breakdown, often leading to interpersonal conflict.



Do you find that people often misinterpret what you are saying or your intentions? Have you ever felt that you have totally missed the meaning of what someone else was communicating to you? Do you have difficulty expressing what you would like to say?

Rest assured that many of us are confronted with situations like this in our relationships with others! We are left feeling like we are not being heard and our relationships suffer. In the end, our most developed societal tool is also one of the most productive conflict factories in the history of mankind.

In order to tackle two problems with a single solution, we've devised a comprehensive article on communication - and how improving it can not only improve your personal relationships, but also ensure that your professional life is on the right lane.

What is communication?

Body language, sign language, verbal language, writing, gestures, broadcasting - you name it, it is part of the process of communication. Communication is a broad concept and its history can be traced from a wide variety of pathways.

Gesture and body language are the most primitive forms of communication, being practiced even before humans were able to produce 'sound' verbal language. Verbal language is possibly the most prominent human form of communication (albeit not the most used - it is perceived to be only 7% to 11% of communication). Some philosophers affirm that our capacity to verbally communicate with each other is the link which separates humans from other animals in the evolutionary scale.

Written language, another particularly prominent and advanced form of human communication, was initiated not so long ago - around 3,000 B.C. when the Egyptian civilisation created their first set of hieroglyphics.

The complexity of human communication evolved analogously with the human capacity of learning, invoking major evolutionary changes in the brain structure and resulting in our capacity to improve (or arguably complicate) the way in which we communicate to each other.



Egyptian hieroglyphics

For the purpose of this article, we'll focus on verbal communication and body language.

Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication can be defined as the transactional process of creating meaning through mutually responsive entities - or less formally, transmitting and receiving messages to and from other individuals. When people are communicating, they're being bombarded with information which, in most cases, they vastly fail to perceive. Why? Because people are not aware of the manner in which others perceive the world and themselves.

They may have a rough idea, and even share some commonalities, but being able to predict interpretation of meaning to its full extent is impossible. However, it is possible to recognise some general trends.

Interpersonal communication has a core structure: sender, receiver, message and context. When the first 'message' is produced, a receiver will interpret that message according to his personal background (values, culture, experiences, knowledge and more) and according to the context in which the message was produced (situation, relevance, sender characteristics and more).

To effectively communicate, people need to be able to align each individual's background information to the verbal or cultural significance of the message being transmitted. Relationships are based on that common level of understanding, and the more people fail to communicate to each other, the more they develop personal assumptions that could lead to conflict.

Barriers to communication



Do you find that people often misinterpret what you are saying or your intentions? Have you ever felt that you have totally missed the meaning of what someone else was communicating to you?

Considering its complexity, understanding the core challenges to interpersonal communication can vastly improve the process of interpreting people's messages, and helping them understand how to interpret yours.

According to Bolton (1993) there are twelve major communication spoilers, listed in three different categories:

BOLTON'S 12 COMMUNICATION SPOILERS

Judging

Criticising: making a negative evaluation of the other person.

Name-calling: stereotyping the other person.

Diagnosing: analysing the other person's behaviour.

Praising evaluatively: making excessive positive judgments.

Sending Solutions

Ordering: commanding the other person to do something

Threatening: controlling the other person's actions by warning.

Moralising: telling what the other person should do in a given situation.

Inappropriate questioning: using close-ended questions in excess.

Advising: giving the other person a solution to a problem.

Avoiding the Other's Concerns

Diverting - "pushing" a solution to the other person's problems.

Logical argument - attempting to convince the other with an appeal to logic.

Reassuring - trying to stop the other person from feeling negative emotions.

Improving Communication

There are many effective strategies to help improve interpersonal communication. Effective communication does not only involve the transmission of a message, but also ensuring that the other person is devoting enough attention and that the environment is appropriate to transmit the message (controlling the 'noise' and 'interruption' levels).

Attention is the major skill that needs to be 'practised' during the communication process. The more attention devoted to a dialogue, for example, the better a communicator can recognise body language and voice trends. Furthermore, understanding the context of each message and aligning that to the other person's cultural and emotional background plays a key role in creating reliability in the interpretation.

Counselling and Communication

Being able to effectively communicate is a counsellor's intrinsic role. The counsellor's job during a session is to provide support to clients, and it commences during the client's initial assessment.

In most cases, the client's emotional state will become a barrier for him or her to effectively communicate with the counsellor - at this point, it is the time to observe the client's body language in order to recognise what is occurring 'between the lines'. It is not an assumption game, but rather an analysis based on behavioural tendencies. It is reasonable to affirm that the counsellor's main focus in the communication process is to focus on the client's expression, and if needed, encourage that expression.

The Counselling Setting

There are aspects of a counselling setting that will contribute to improved communication.

- ✓ **Comfort** - a comfortable setting improves client expression of feelings.
- ✓ **Security/Privacy** - providing the client with security during a session.
- ✓ **Noise control** - ensuring that noise does not affect communication.
- ✓ **Stimuli control** - a neutral environment (light colours and decoration).
- ✓ **Supportive environment** - a space in which the client feel comfortable.



But what are the requirements for good listening?

In essence, there are no requirements - in practice, there are several guidelines which tend to improve the client's confidence in expressing his/her issues, improve the counsellor's ability to capture the messages which are being given, and encourage positive feedback from the client.

Basic Communication Skills

Once the appropriate counselling setting has been provided, it is time to apply basic communication skills to help improve the client's expression of emotions and formulation of thoughts. Such rules are beneficial for any communication process, but particularly important during a counselling relationship.

- ☑ **Listening well...**
Valuing the client and demonstrating interest for the conversation.
- ☑ **Observing...**
Observing body language, voice tone and emotive expressions.
- ☑ **Acknowledgement...**
The recognition for the client's initiative to state his/her issues.
- ☑ **Awareness...**
Ensuring that the counsellor's body language is appropriate for the context.
- ☑ **Thinking...**
Reasoning about what is and what is not appropriate input to the process.
- ☑ **Verbal expression...**
Ensuring the use of the appropriate tone, rhythm and volume of voice.
- ☑ **Reflecting...**
Clarifying and verifying what the client has expressed to the counsellor.

Diversity in Counseling



One of the foremost challenges facing counselling professionals is to understand the complex role that client diversity plays in their work.

In counselling, each client's needs and objectives need to be considered and used to guide the counselling process. These needs vary for each individual according to factors such as personality, culture, gender and age.

Counselling with Difference

It is vital that counsellors working with issues of difference recognise the unique needs of their client and plan intervention accordingly. The counsellor must decide on the approach that will provide better responsiveness from the client, and therefore lead to a constructive outcome.

The Impact of Prejudice on Self-Esteem

Clients affected by systems of inequity in our culture are frequently subjected to acts of discrimination and prejudice. Counsellors need to understand the impact of such in order to analyse the depth to which a client may be culturally traumatised.

The impact of prejudice on self-esteem may evoke imbalances in a client's wellbeing. They may experience feelings of being left out of the larger group, feelings of powerlessness, loneliness and hopelessness.

Furthermore, the risk of developing hatred against 'opposing' groups of the society can perpetuate negative behaviour - a kind of traumatic response to what has been perceived as a threat to the individual. Recognising value in the individual is part of the process of developing the client's self-confidence through providing a supportive environment during counselling sessions.

A Case Study: Applied Stress Management

When working with clients with disabilities, counsellors usually face varied challenges according to each particular case. For this purpose, case studies provide valuable information about tools and strategies that have been used with a client.

In a recent case study of Applied Stress Management, a client with a disability was facing several stress problems, triggered by both internal and external factors. The client had a moderate intellectual impairment and cerebral palsy. He had good expressive and receptive language skills relating to familiar concepts. He also used a wheelchair to mobilise independently and worked in a supported employment setting on a full-time basis.

The client's increasing stressful condition was related to the abusive behaviour of his flatmate; overweight issues affecting his self-esteem; and the ramification of these two main triggers into several other problems (inability to move over long distances due to fatigue, irritation due to mental impairment, incapacity of responding to the environment, etc).

Within the Cognitive Behaviour Therapy Approach, the following strategies were applied to help the client cope more effectively with the identified internal and external stressors:

- (a) **Relaxation Training**
- (b) **Affirmations**
- (c) **Creative Visualisations**

Due to the client's intellectual impairment the following strategies were also adopted to assist him to understand the process, goals and guidelines of counselling; and to learn and retain stress management skills:

Visual language systems

Such as using sign language or other symbols to convey shared meaning

Audio taping

For learning and repetition of concepts and skills.

Rehearsal and Role Play

To allow for practice within the safety of the counselling environment.

Modelling

To demonstrate how a specific skill or technique may be utilised.

The client showed competence at using the visual calming system (a set of images used to diverge his attention from stressful situations) independently and reported reduced stress levels as a result of the system. After this, the client's improvement was monitored in follow-up and discussion sessions.

This is a classic example of the impact specific tools/strategies provide when applied by counsellors in order to assist clients with mental and/or physical challenges.

Conclusion

Effective counsellors develop a comprehensive awareness of their clients' circumstances. This not only means becoming aware of the client's immediate concerns, but also conceptualizing those concerns into the broader context of the client's social and cultural environments.

"A human being is a part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feeling as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty."

Albert Einstein

Dealing with Groups

I + I = II + I = III + ...

Group counselling is a challenging and dynamic form of counselling that requires all-round professional skills from counsellors. It implies that any challenges a counsellor may find in helping an individual can potentially duplicate, triplicate, or vastly multiply - however, the more intricate the challenge is, the higher the rewards.

In this article, we define the basic elements of group counselling and provide several guidelines - after all, the core prerequisite of understanding group dynamics is not only part of the counsellor's professional framework, but part of a much larger perspective: the framework of life.

The Importance of Groups

“The ubiquitousness of groups and the inevitability of being in them make groups one of the most important factors in our lives. All day long we interact first in one group and then in another. We live in a dwelling as part of a group, we learn in groups contained in the same classroom, we work in groups, we interact with friends in groups, and we spend much of our leisure time in groups. Our family life, our leisure time, our friendships, and our careers are all filled with groups. In fact, if a being from outer space conducted a study of the people of Earth, group membership would probably be the dominant characteristic noted.” (Johnson & Johnson, 1997)

There is no uncertainty in the fact that our personal identities are intrinsically related to the groups we have been involved with throughout our lives. For this reason, it is important to comprehend the concept of group dynamics, and the relevance that group relationships has in each individual's lives. Investigating group dynamics is a measure to better understand individual behaviour - or like an old proverb implies: "Tell me who you walk with, and I will tell you who you are."

Groups and Dynamics: Basic Elements

“Since content and process must be balanced to have productive group dynamics, a question that arises is 'How?'. One answer is to think of the group as a system, a set of elements standing in interaction. Each element in the system is affected by whatever happens to any other element. Likewise, the system is greater than the sum of its parts.” (Gladding, 1999)

Similar to mathematics theory, the dynamic interactions which occur within a group, along with the external influencing factors upon that group, pose challenges to controlling and interpreting group outcomes. When dealing with groups, the primary objective (whether a group is formed to develop a project or a group united by the need to tackle an analogous problem) is to ensure that the group is healthy and productive. As such, core communication skills which are based on interpersonal communication theory are applicable for groups - promoting good communication between group individuals creates a safe and productive environment for the group to work.

For counsellors, planning prior to conducting a group session is essential. Planning ensures that the counsellor is considering: (a) his/her audience's socio-cultural background; (b) the communication needs of the group individuals and; (c) the type of interaction which is most effective for his/her audience. Pre-planning also diminishes the possibility of communication flaws, which may result in interpersonal conflict - the most undesirable (and awfully propagating) element in a productive group.

Groups and Counselling: A Matter of Approach

There are several definitions of groups which vary from a sociological perspective, according to common goals, interdependence, interpersonal interaction and other criteria. In many occasions, groups may be formed by undemanding circumstances.



What does that mean? It means that dealing with groups does not only involve acknowledging the group behaviour as a unit, but also identifying each individual's response to that group behaviour. This concept is important, particularly in counselling.

According to Smith (1945) "we may define a social group as a unit consisting of a plural number of separate organisms (agents) who have a collective perception of their unity and who have the ability to act and/or are acting in a unitary manner toward their environment (p. 227)."

Counsellors as group leaders and/or facilitators need to adopt a structured approach in their relationship with group individuals. For this to happen, they'll need to follow certain communication rules which are basic requirements for conducting group counselling sessions.

Here are some guidelines in a nutshell:

- **Use selection procedures** - sometimes it is simply not appropriate to put individuals together in a group, simply because they share a particular behaviour pattern or problem.
- **Adjust group size** according to manageability. Adopt a co-facilitator, if required.
- **Establish group rules** and expectations early in the formation stage of the group.
- **Maintain a strong element of flexibility** and be prepared with a number of contingency plans.
- **Know your group.** Acquire an understanding of your group prior to developing your program.
- **Enjoy the journey** of group work - the highs, the lows, the setbacks and the accomplishments.
- **Reflect on your group work skills** and allow each group to be your teacher.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has"

Margaret Mead

Groups and Counselling: Counsellor Insights



"Group counselling for me was in the form of support groups for users (U) of substance misuse and also their significant others (SO).

One particular time when I was facilitating the 'U' group or 'Users' of illicit substances, this girl who claims she could not relate to people, had special relationships with mice. She turned up one particular day with a mouse crawling around the inside of her clothes and poking its face out of a sleeve one minute and then a neckline the next. The other members of the group didn't notice until one girl let out a huge scream when she turned to this girl to ask her something only to come face to face with the mouse.

We were then obliged to include this change of event for participating members in our group to the mouse. There were ten people present and eight stated they couldn't care less, however, two stated that if she insisted on carrying the mouse on her then they would not be able to attend. It was decided that the owner could bring the mouse along in a separate container and keep it next to her on the floor so other members would not be alarmed at it poking its head out at inopportune times.

The group successfully continued with other members becoming more involved with the care and maintenance of this girl's pet mice. However, it was later discovered that she had approximately 30 living at her home and each week she would bring a different one as a special 'outing' for a treat."

(Kathleen Casagrande - AIPC Education Adviser)

"I remember an experience I had with an anger management group for eight-year-old boys. Fresh out of university, naive to the energy and tenacity of primary-school aged children, I designed a structured and detailed anger management program to facilitate in a local State School.



Armed with extensive worksheets, individual activities and group work exercises, I self-assuredly arrived at the school. Directed by the School Principal to collect the children straight from their classrooms, I made my way from one Grade Four class to the next, until I had collected all six of my group participants.

My participants had been selected by their teachers and School Principal to be included in the group due to "challenging behaviours".

I learnt very quickly that facilitating a group of "challenging" eight-year-olds was not as simple as I had first imagined.

As I set about conducting an ice-breaker exercise, I had one child tip over his table, another pretend to faint as he fell to the floor and yet another throw pencils into the ceiling fan!

I knew this was about testing the boundaries but it was much more than I had anticipated! It took several sessions to build rapport and establish rules with this group of eight-year-olds.

We didn't complete every group activity or worksheet I had planned.

Sometimes we'd start the session with a run around the oval, sometimes we'd play bingo under a tree, but we worked together to finally establish an effective group process and the participants established great friendships amongst themselves.

As the weeks progressed, the group became more and more focused on the tasks at hand. Participants slowly became interested in offering their input, sharing their story and sometimes even offering help to each other."

(Karyn Offenhauser - AIPC Project Officer)

Personality and Behaviour



Life is a learning experience. The complexity of human behaviour is finely related to the several mechanisms which define how, what and when we learn about the world.

People devote varied levels of energy to observe, memorise and recount the ongoing stimuli around them - and that focus is the magical touch which produces the fascinating ambiguity of mankind.

In the realm of behavioural science (and also common sense), there is one word which is vastly used to define such effect: personality.

What is Personality?

'Personality' is a word originated from the Latin persona, which means 'mask'.

"Significantly, in the theatre of the ancient Latin-speaking world, the mask was not used as a plot device to disguise the identity of a character, but rather was a convention employed to represent, or typify that character."
(Wikipedia)

Personality is a broadly used term which meaning can be sought through popular knowledge. Most people use the word as a reference to the collection of characteristics which define how a person sees and acts upon the world - something like a mix of their thought processes and behaviour.

In psychology, it could be defined as the emotional, cognitive and behavioural patterns unique to an individual, learned and incremented through experience, and relatively consistent over time.

Overview of the Personality Framework

The study of personality has developed relatively parallel to the evolution of psychology as a science. The perspective on human nature has been floating between nature and nurture throughout the years, with researchers constantly finding evidence to support and validate both determinants. Thus, many theoretical concepts of personality were based on the perspective that psychologists and behavioural scientists had of human nature at a certain period in time.

"Over the years, numerous personality theories have been proposed, and they can be classified within several major approaches, each assuming its own model of human nature. Personality psychologists within each approach emphasise different aspects of personality, favor different research methods, and use different standards to evaluate sufficient explanations." (Peterson 1997)

Understanding personality involves not only analysing the individual as a whole, but considering individual behaviour in a particular social context. Culture plays a major role in defining the variants between individuals. For instance, western civilisations tend to encourage individuality - which increases the incidence of people that present unique behaviour with the aim of standing out.



Being distinctive in our society is normally a social benefit. In other societies - such as Japan and China - uniqueness can play a divergent role: standing out is not socially sanctioned and therefore not admirable.

Theories of Personality

"The major theoretical approaches to personality are akin to great schools that dominated psychology throughout the early part of the twentieth century". (Peterson 1997)

Psychodynamic Theory



Sigmund Freud

Encouraged by Freud's psychoanalytic approach, psychodynamic theories emphasise motivation and emotion as the major dictators of personality, along with the presence of unconscious divergences of individuals. In such theory, libido (defined by Freud as a 'psychological energy') is the primary determinant of our behaviour.

This perspective concentrates on the conflict between an individual's biological motivation (instincts) and the social rules which guide common individual behaviour.

In the psychodynamic theory, the structure of personality is described in terms of the conscious, preconscious and unconscious (id, ego and superego). Other major contributors of this theory were Carl Jung (collective unconscious), Alfred Adler (compensation for inferiority) and Erik Erikson (psychosocial development).

Freud's Components of Personality*

Id: it contains our primitive drives and operates largely according to the principle of pleasure, whereby its two main goals are the seeking of pleasure and the avoidance of pain.

Ego: unlike the Id, the Ego is aware of reality and hence operates via the reality principle, whereby it recognizes what is real and understands that behaviours have consequences.

Super ego: the Super ego contains our values and social morals, which often come from the rules of right and wrong that we learned in childhood from our parents and are contained in the conscience.

*source: changingminds.org

Trait Theory



Gordon Allport

The trait approach is derived from Darwin's theory of evolution and the emphasis on individual variation within a species, defining the function of that individual in the social setting. This theory is mainly concerned with the heritable traits which determine behaviour and result in particular characteristics and types of individuals. Such theory began with Gordon Allport around 1937. Allport defined a trait as "a neuropsychic structure having the capacity to render many stimuli functionally equivalent, and to initiate and guide equivalent (meaningfully consistent) forms of adaptive and expressive behavior." (1961)

The Big Five is a model of personality that describes five defining personality traits. They were originally described by Warren Norman (1963) and consist of: neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness.

Phenomenological Theory

The Phenomenological approach stresses the importance of the cognitive side of human behaviour - therefore - what and how people think.

Phenomenological theory dictates that conscious thoughts and beliefs are the major determinants of personality. This approach puts individuals in the role of scientist: analysing the world and themselves within a social context to reach conclusions about the formation and display of personality traits. George Kelly, a clinical psychologist, developed the concept of 'personal constructs' which refers to the "categories with which we interpret our experiences" (Peterson 1997). The personal construct theory suggests that our interpretations of the world around us create our personality. Therefore the concept of personality is a flexible one.



George Kelly

Phenomenological theory was further developed by Carl Rogers' self-actualisation concepts. According to Rogers, the drive towards self-actualisation (familiar to the Maslow's hierarchy of needs) was the major determinant of an individual's personality. This humanistic and optimistic approach was also the basis for Rogers' client-centred therapy.

Social Learning Theory

Finally, the social learning theory focuses mainly on the influence of social dynamics and learning.

This approach is based on behaviourism and it stresses the importance that the human learning process has in the formation of personality traits. In social learning theory, the most important psychological process is learning. The pioneering theorists of this approach were John Dollard and Neal Miller, authors of the book *Personality and Psychotherapy* (1950). According to



them, people learn behaviours that decrease their physiological drive.

Albert Bandura (photo) also played a key role in the development of this theory. Bandura affirmed that people learn through modelling, and such modelling becomes the main determinant of personality. The concept of self-efficacy, the belief that one can perform a given behaviour, creates an immediate

mechanism in which people modify behaviour in order to improve performance in life.

The Human Perspective

Personality is not only part of the realms of scientific research and behavioural studies. In order to better understand the world, we tend to create patterns - to classify everything we can into groups based on common characteristics. This learning process seems to work effectively with our brain structure, and also to improve the interpersonal communication process and to define roles in a social setting. It is normal that we analyse other people's behaviours and physical appearance based on predefined ideas which are enforced by our experiences, culture, inherited traits and social setting.

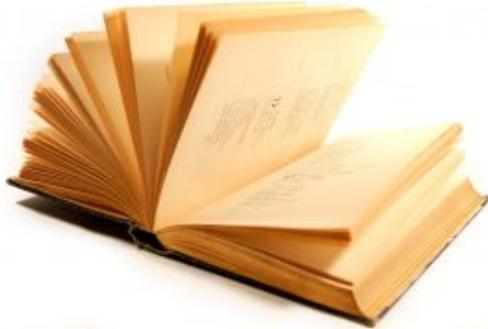
A common example of such effect is found in the perspective towards personality: there are hundreds of popular measurements of personality available through varied media and in different formats. Horoscopes, personality and intelligence tests, amongst others, are all part of our own way to view the world and to place individuals on common ground. It seems almost natural to categorise ourselves and others in an attempt to make sense of the world. Perhaps this evidence indicates that Kelly's argument is particularly accurate: in a social setting, aren't we all scientists?

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The Challenge of Change



Change is a certainty in everyone's life. The manner in which people deal with change also changes. Through learning and life experience, individuals develop varied levels of flexibility towards transition, and these levels commonly dictate the person's ability to productively cope with life's challenges.

Thus, readiness and ability to change are popular topics in therapeutic contexts such as counselling, life coaching and mentoring.

Essentially, change takes center stage in the counselling relationship – a governing factor by which all effort is contingent upon. What dictates a clients' readiness to change, and how does that affect the process of goal achievement in counselling? How to evoke change in someone's life, and at the same time, make sure the process is self-directed and not imposed? What are the strategies and techniques which enable counsellors to motivate their clients towards change? In this article we attempt to answer these, and many other questions, which hopefully will bring about positive change in your life, and the lives of others.

Changing with a Purpose

Fundamentally, change is simply shifting from one state to another. But change per se is not the objective of most individuals, and neither is it the objective of counselling. Positive change, or optimization, is the outcome we're after.

Any process of optimization requires goals, motivation and a touch of discipline. Individuals who are willing to change their lives will have a reason for such, whether it is to impress others, to feel better about themselves or to make things simpler or more complicated. There is always a reason, thus a motive.

Furthermore, positive and meaningful changes in life require careful planning and execution. It is much like running a business: things do not happen overnight, there must be progressive development and constant verification of goals and objectives.

Benefits of Positive Change

Most people, despite culture or orientation, are reserved about changing their habits. Old habits can be challenges to proposed ones, and getting out of the comfort zone may not be a pleasant activity. But change can have its bright side.

Positive aspects may be overlooked as a result of negative thinking patterns, but they are the primary motivators for the individual, who can take advantage of any opportunity to visualise his/her own goals. Life is a dynamic, cyclical balance of negatives and positives, and focusing on the positives is a necessary task for optimization. So what are some of the major benefits of change?

Novel opportunities: without change survival would be impossible. Culture, agriculture, education, business would all fail. You don't have to like all aspects of change (there may be some disadvantages or even teething problems with some changes) but there may be useful or interesting benefits as well. Studies of some communities that have denied change of any sort and prevented the flow of people and information, and development of any new ideas, have been found to be totally unsustainable and have survived no more than a few generations before breaking up.

Maintaining flexibility: avoiding getting set in ways and trying to be open to new ideas and ways of working and living is a major competitive advantage in the road to success. New approaches may not always work, but there is usually a lesson to be taken from each attempt.

Building self-confidence: change, personal growth and development have been well established in research findings. Being in one's own comfort zone can lead to some contentment for a while, but as time goes on you lose confidence and don't acquire new abilities or skills. You become out of touch. This can lead to social isolation and feelings of marginalization or alienation.

Education: the most obvious area is learning from research and how this can lead, for example, to exciting and important new scientific and medical advances, or lead to understanding healthier ways of living. In the extremely globalized world we live, learning new things supports communication skills and adaptability.

Counsellor Outlook: Evoking Change in a Client

There are several therapeutic approaches which are useful to improve clients' readiness to change. It is important, however, to realize that all these strategies are based on the same suggestion: motivation to change is elicited from the client and not imposed from without.

Using coercion, persuasion or constructive confrontation will achieve little if the client is simply "unready" to change. It is the client's task to articulate and resolve his/her own ambivalence in relation to change.

Stages of Change

Prochaska & DiClemente (1983) proposed a framework which comprised various stages of change. Putting such stages into the counselling perspective may help the counsellor understand the challenges within the process of change. Six stages were proposed, along with particular characteristics and techniques to support the client in moving forward:

Pre-contemplation: the client is not yet considering the option of changing his/her life. Useful techniques in this stage include: validating lack of readiness; encouraging re-evaluation of current behavioural patterns; encouraging self-exploration and progressive thinking; understanding the risks and limitations involved in the process of change.

Contemplation: the client is undecided about changing. Immediate change is unlikely to occur, however, it could occur within a month or so. Useful techniques in this stage include: clarifying to the client that the decision is his or hers; encouraging evaluation of benefits and disadvantages; promoting accountability; visualising positive outcomes.

Preparation: change begins to develop, and the client is testing the environment in order to 'get a feel' of the whole process. Useful techniques in this stage include: assisting problem-solving and identification of obstacles; developing supportive networks through family, friends and others (particularly if the process of change is radical); verifying the client's skills towards change; encouraging self-reward and gradual development.

Action: this is the critical phase in which the client will change or return to his/her old habits. It usually lasts between 3-6 months. Useful techniques in this stage include: assisting the client in become more effective in the changing process and in conducting the behaviour; assisting the client overcome feelings of loss and nostalgia, whilst underlining the long-term benefits of the process.

Maintenance: this stage refers to the continued commitment to sustaining the new behaviour. It is the classic period where new habits develop into routinely tasks. Useful techniques in this stage include: follow-up and motivational support; overview of values and benefits derived from new behaviours; discussing coping with relapse.

Relapse: in this stage, old habits and behaviours resume which may affect the client's self-confidence and beliefs. This usually involves a trigger, such as meeting an old friend from the period prior to change, or doing an activity which is perceived to have been part of the 'old lifestyle'. Useful techniques in this stage include: evaluating with the client was triggered the relapse; reassessing motivation and establishing further goals and motivational sources; planning more effective coping strategies.

Motivational Interviewing

Motivational interviewing is a recent technique which aims to improve the client's motivational levels, with an explicit focus on encouraging accountability and action from the client. This technique's desired outcome is to make the client proactive and decisive towards change.

Five general principles of motivational interviewing include: expressing empathy, developing discrepancy, avoiding argument, rolling with resistance and supporting self-efficacy. By using these principles, the counsellor aims to develop the client's self-confidence and ability to cope with the process of change.

This is done both through the development of micro skills (similar to the coaching process) which are aimed to create efficient and effective behaviours, and the development of emotional awareness which well support the client in overcoming challenges as a result of change.

A crucial aspect of this technique is keeping constant focus on the positive side of things. Once this becomes a routine task, it is easier for the client to develop a positive mindset in order to achieve pre-set goals.

Client-Centered Approach

Developed by Carl Rogers (photo) in the 1940s, this approach has proven useful for effective and constructive communication. It focuses on the client's capacity for growth and change, using unconditional acceptance as a motivator (which encourages the client to also develop unconditional positive regard).

“The primary technique of client-centered counselling is to actively listen and reflect the client's statements in a non-directive, nonjudgmental manner, thereby providing a safe environment for the client's self-exploration.

Client-centered counseling hinges on the development of a counselor-client relationship based on unconditional regard, often over multiple hour-long sessions. This relationship enables the counselor to clarify the client's feelings without imposing external assessments or values.” (Sheon, 2004)

One of the aspects of this kind of counselling relationship is the perspective that the client and the counsellor are partners, moving together towards a common goal.

This perspective of a partnership in the therapeutic process is a popular approach in life coaching and it has direct benefits to the client's motivation and the relationship's rapport building.

Client Outlook: Invoking Change from Within

To invoke change is to recognise that positive change in itself is, undoubtedly, possible. The majority of individuals who aim for improvement are held back by negative thinking patterns, which often result in inaction and an awful amount of excuses.

If one wishes to improve oneself, one must first and foremostly recognise that all change stems from within. The ability to modify thoughts and behaviours is within everyone, but change can only be determined at the individual's personal rate of evolution (or readiness for change).

Think for a moment of the people you hold in high regard. They may have certain enviable behaviours, or have attained an admirable state of being. The vast majority of those people have developed their behaviours through awareness and cognitive determination.

They recognised who they wanted to be or what they wanted to achieve and willingly aligned their thoughts with their objectives. High level performance in individuals rarely transpires as an occurrence of chance.

People cannot keep doing the same things and expect a different result. It all begins with a positive mindset which results into effective action and the central component of this entire process is a very familiar one: **it's YOU.**

So if change is inevitable, try use it to your advantage and you may be amazed with the results.



Part III

Counselling Techniques and Microskills

- Dealing with Stress
- Dealing with Trauma
- Method and Effective Counselling
- Applications of Self-Disclosure
- Narrative Therapy in Counselling
- The Problem of Burnout
- Building Rapport with Clients



Dealing with Stress

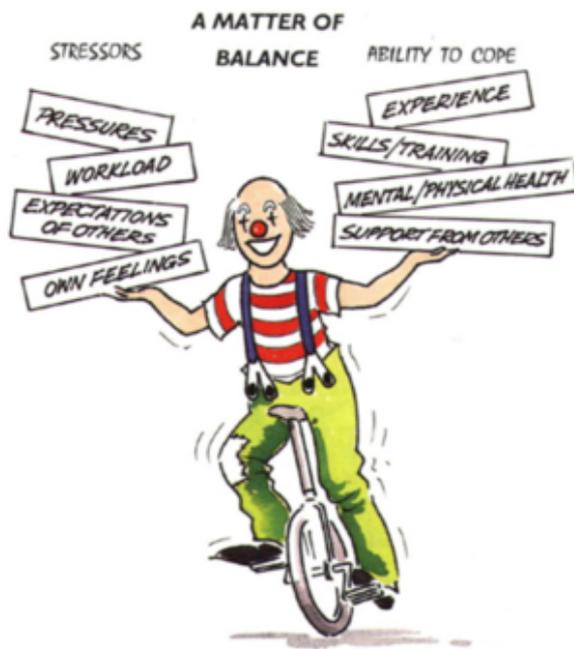


Image source: [City University London](http://www.cityu.edu.hk)

In fact, stress is a major evolutionary advantage of the human body, enabling individuals to quickly react to endangering situations - and most likely improve the ability to evaluate, assess and cope with the 'danger'.

Primarily, the Hypothalamus (region of the brain responsible for controlling the Autonomic Nervous System) identifies a stressor (which could be any event - such as a noise) and automatically prepares the body to react to that stressor.

This is done through sending signals to both the ANS and the Pituitary Gland (limbic system) - which in turn, activate a 'response mechanism' by stimulating body organs to change their regular activity.

This response mechanism is identified by: increase of blood pressure, heart rate, sugar levels and re-direction of blood flow to major organs. The body also improves respiration by dilating air passages, stopping digestion in order to direct focus (energy) to 'relevant' parts of the body and increasingly produces adrenaline (epinephrine).

All this process occurs in a few seconds - and it was particularly 'designed' to increase survival chances either by challenging the situation, or by escaping from it. All these biological features are commonly expressed (or perceived) as emotions. For instance, you may experience fear or excitement in a 'biologically endangering' situation.

Stress is a term used to describe a pattern of physiological responses which are directed to specific events in our lives.

It is also a term that has fallen into fashion in recent years, particularly when referring stress to the context of work, productivity and health.

Common perception affirms stress as an undesirable and unhealthy issue. However, this affirmation is quite imprecise.

You may also experience the stress positively or negatively. In positive instances, we comply with our biological reactions, using increased awareness and body conditions to our own advantage. In negative instances, stress is commonly associated with anxiety - and the outcome is having difficulty in dealing with the situation. A very common example is a student who, even though had intensively studied for an examination, cannot perform during the exam.

The role of perception is extremely important in determining the health issues associated with the incidence of stress. Primarily, although stress is a natural and desired response to particular situations - it is also supposed to be temporary. The human body is not capable of sustaining a stressful environment for a long time without damaging cells, organs and other components of the system.

Therefore, recurring stressful situations are an actual threat to our body. Recurring stress can cause brain cells to be damaged or destroyed, and induce problems related to blood pressure and heart rates. Coronary Heart Disease (CHD) was identified as one of the major causes of stress-related death.

The concept of cognitive appraisal comprises the two steps an individual usually undertakes when faced with a stressful situation: first, an evaluation of the threat and secondly, an assessment of the resources available to deal with that threat.

The worse a threat is perceived, and the lowest the available resources are accounted for - the more an individual will be distressed and emotionally affected. It is a logical human response: the more you can control your environment, the more confident you'll feel to face any challenges. For this reason, equal stimuli may have disparate responses by two different people. In this content, confidence and personal balance plays a big role in defining the emotional effect a stressful moment will cause.

One of the strategies for 'combating' stress refers to the ability of moulding our emotional responses in order to better adapt to stressing situations: "When an animal can learn a coping response that allows it to avoid contact with an aversive stimulus, its emotional response will disappear" (Carlson & Buskist, 1997).

By controlling our perception of an event, we are able to shorten stressful periods, and furthermore, reduce psychological harm from stressful events.

Stress Management in Counselling



“When Mozart was composing at the end of the eighteenth century, the city of Vienna was so quiet that fire alarms could be given verbally, by a shouting watchman mounted on top of St. Stefan’s Cathedral.

In twentieth-century society, the noise level is such that it keeps knocking our bodies out of tune and out of their natural rhythms. This ever-increasing assault of sound upon our ears, minds, and bodies adds to the stress load of civilized beings trying to live in a highly complex environment”

Steven Halpern

Counsellors are constantly dealing with stress from both personal and professional perspectives. The manner in which counsellors deal with stress commonly defines how they'll approach a client's stress-related situation. When considering stress and its effects, it is important that we think in terms of 'association or relationship' between the cause[s] and the effect[s] of the stress.

To think of either of these (that is the cause or the effect) in isolation will not give appropriate answers, as it is the overall picture - the relationship between the cause and the effect - that we are interested in.

This relationship between the cause and the effect is known as the stimulus and response association.

Self Exercise

Take a little time and write down some words or phrases which you would use to describe the feelings or symptoms of what you would describe as 'stress'. Consider the causes and effects of these feeling and symptoms that signify stress to you.

Stress and Performance Outcomes

Stress, with its associated physiological, mental and emotional states and changes, is an interesting and complex issue. There are times when stress makes us feel bad and we perform unsatisfactorily, and there are times when the right degree of stress can be good for us as it sharpens our focus (as mentioned in the previous article). The relationship between stress and performance is such that:

- The right amount of stress can be performance enhancing as it facilitates the availability and release of motivational energy when and where required.
- Too little stress 'does not get the blood flowing' and reduces the availability of motivational energy.
- Chronic stress such as boredom can produce an entropic effect which draws upon and reduces the store and availability of psychoemotional energy.
- Shorter term stress can temporarily reduce access to and the flow of motivational energy, while acute stress can virtually short circuit the mental schema and effectively block access to motivational energy, or alternatively, impel us to an abnormally high level of activity, albeit uncontrolled.

Given the relationship between stress and emotional performance, it is noted that constant boredom and being unable to find outlets for our mental and creative energy can also be another common cause of stress. The effects of boredom leave us feeling similar to the way we do when experiencing other forms of chronic stress. Boredom also adversely affects performance and general wellbeing.

Life situations where there is too little stress are very common; indeed they may be more common than situations of overstress. Almost all environments, including those of marriage and the workplace, can eventually lead to diminished opportunity for creative expression and boredom if something active is not done to counter this natural entropic process.

Dealing with Trauma



The word 'trauma' originates from the Greek 'wound', and it refers to both psychological and physiological aspects. Trauma occurs as a result of a serious event and it has deep roots in various levels of the human mind and behaviour.

What causes trauma?

Psychological trauma is a broad concept, and its origins are correlated with two well-known mechanisms of the human mind: stress and memory.

Although commonly associated with negativity, stress is an evolutionary advantage. The stress triggering mechanism allows most people to react to dangerous situations prior to consciously detecting it - also known as 'fight or flight' response. The level of a stress response generally dictates the intensity of psychological trauma in an individual.

Memory and trauma are interrelated processes - without the memory of a traumatic event, psychological trauma is non-existent. In addition, memory also plays an active role in the incidence and intensity of stressful responses. Once stress is triggered by an event (a stressor), several processes instigate the assessment of the situation by higher functions of the mind (prefrontal cortex - responsible for decision-making).

If the situation does not constitute danger, the stressing mechanism will gradually shut down and the body will return to normal functioning. If the situation reflects danger, the individual will need to decide what to do - and in that process - the amygdala (a part of the limbic system which plays a key role in human emotions, particularly fear) directs the hippocampus (a central region of human memory) to imprint that information differently from other events. This long-term storage of the memory is explained by its emotionally-attached significance.

Such a mechanism is another 'smart' human feature. Next time the same stressor (or similar) is identified, that memory will be instantly retrieved in order to assist in the individual's reaction. At a subconscious level, there will be an overstressed response to the event. At a conscious level, comparison and previous experience will induce better decision making.

Trauma and Health

Trauma is inevitable in our lives. From the birth of a child, to all stages of its development - traumatic events are common and also part of the 'human experience'. However, the level of trauma caused by an event dictates the short and long-term effects of that occurrence.

For instance, trauma can be related to several mental illnesses. Conditions such as Schizophrenia, Depression, and Bipolar Disease can be triggered by traumatic events. One condition in particular, is directly related to trauma and very common in the counselling context: **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) occurs when an individual develops a set of behaviours and reactions based on a traumatic event. The traumatic experience interferes with normal functioning, causing the affected person to present avoidance behaviour.



This condition can occur at any age and traumatic stress can be cumulative over a lifetime. Responses to trauma include feelings of intense fear, helplessness, and/or horror. This condition has roots in the relationship between stress, trauma and memory.

It is perceived that PTSDs are originated from a 'defect' in the brain's memory processing functions. As previously described, emotionally attached events are stored differently (at a 'deeper' level). These memories include stressful and traumatic events, particularly those which resulted in some kind of harm and emotional distress to the person.

Upon the identification of the same stressor (or similar) that caused a reaction for the previous situation, the body would instantly trigger an overstressed response. However, in most cases, the new event will not constitute a threat. For instance, a noise could be a stressor from a situation in which a person ended up being assaulted.

The same noise, or something similar, could occur in other situations which are harmless. Unless that stressor is reinforced (results in danger over time), your brain will adapt to the stimulus and gradually reduce the stressful response. This process is called 'extinction' (Pavlov's Theory).

If extinction fails to take place, the individual will continue to react (stressfully) to the original stimulus, or similar ones. This is the case for PTSD sufferers. Because the human body is not prepared to maintain stressful status continually, side effects will appear. These effects are both physiological (Coronary Heart Disease, ageing acceleration, etc) and psychological (fear, avoidance, etc).

This explains the occurrence of PTSD in war veterans who were exposed to stress over a long period of time and accident survivors who have been exposed to a highly stressful and traumatic situation.

Trauma and Counselling

The effects of trauma may vary greatly among people. The extent, frequency and intensity of each event are presented according to each person's mindset and previous experiences.

And because traumatic events are cumulative over life, it can be quite difficult to provide a treatment that comprises all problems derived from separate traumas.

Most people adapt to trauma in their lives, and through the extinction process, do not experience much psychological harm derived from past events. However, for patients with PTSD, and other stress-triggered conditions, the situation requires further attention.

Currently, counsellors use three major treatments to combat PTSD. These treatments are largely based in psychotherapy, introspection and conditioning. The following table summarizes three mainstream treatments to combat PTSD:

Approaches to Combat Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) is a form of psychotherapy that focuses on modifying an individual's behaviour by changing their thinking. Therapists believe that by focusing in the individual's perspective, it is possible to bring about behaviour change, and therefore, cope with the trauma.

This form of treatment is recommended by the World Health Organisation and it is widely used to combat PTSD symptoms.

Debriefing

Debriefing is single session-based treatment which occurs shortly after the traumatic event. The debriefing process evolves on the 'traumatised' individual's verbal expression of the event.

It is suggested that by 'letting out' those memories and feelings, the person is more unlikely develop suppressed emotions, which reduces the effects of trauma. Debriefing is widely used for professionals that deal with traumatic events on a daily basis (e.g. paramedics).

Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing

Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing is a technique based on a psychophysiological approach. According to the theory, the overload of emotions derived from traumatic events interferes with the individual's information processing episode.

That interference, at a physiological level, produces 'flawed' pathways of memory retrieval, which in turn, results in the non-logical perception of the event. For instance, a victim of rape, albeit aware that the fault was of the perpetrator, continually invokes self-blame for the incident.

The process of desensitisation and reprocessing would serve to reprogram those pathways, resulting in the extinction or partial extinction of negative symptoms.

Method and Effective Counselling

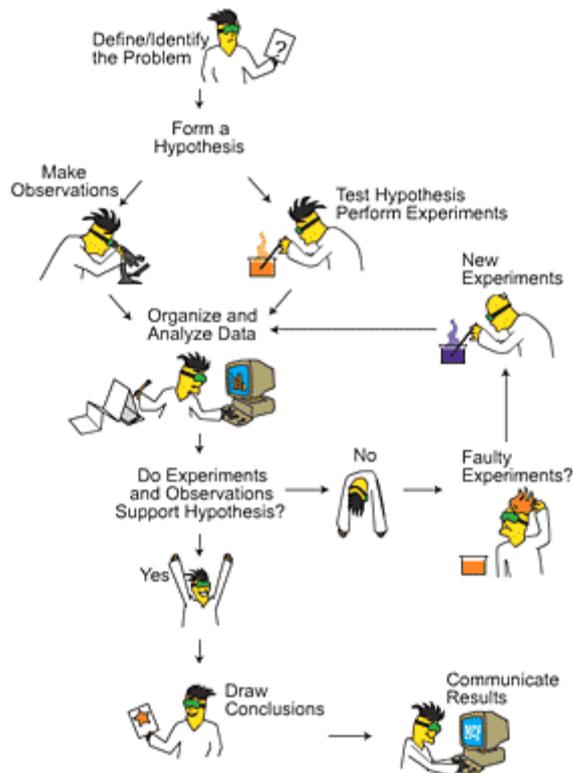


Image source: [NASA SCI Files](#)

Most people tend to be compassionate. Perhaps it is a human evolutionary trait, or simply the manner in which we have been trained to understand and act upon our emotions. Or it could stem from the need to help others in order to achieve a sense of belonging.

In modern society - represented by large conglomerates of human beings living collectively - people have daily opportunities to help others, and also varied motives to do so. These motives can be a response to social pressure, redemption, responsibility or simply the adrenalin rush of helping someone.

Does that sound familiar? Many individuals become professional counsellors with that foundation - the determination to help others. But is that enough?

A Differential Support

There is a strong ethical component in any health-related profession, particularly the ones which deal directly with consumers - in the case of counselling, the client.

One of the most prominent aspects of becoming a professional counsellor lies in understanding the ethical guidelines of the profession, which in turn requires prospective counsellors to be able to differentiate between 'friendly advice' and professional assistance.

This is a challenging proficiency as it not only involves the process of learning which is intrinsic to any professional development (or training), but also remodelling the manner in which people naturally respond to a call for help: emotional and inevitably inclined feedback.

In order to cater for those needs, counsellor training involves a great deal of ethical background theory and practice which aims to develop the objective 'eye' - a demanded skill for counselling sessions.

Such a methodical approach to interpreting human behaviour and individual needs is rooted in the development of early behavioural sciences.

Method in Counselling

What is 'method'? Method (from Greek *methodos* or *met hodos* meaning "way across") is a word which entered English in 1541 via French and Latin, and is defined as 'a series of steps taken to complete a certain task or to reach a certain objective'. The methodical approach was induced by the need to share common guidelines in the observation and analysis of events, laying grounds for the advent of the scientific method - the central component of any modern science.

In the 19th century, the scientific method served to 'unleash' psychology from its bonds with philosophy - and the consequence was the advent of the original behavioural science. Counselling was derived from this original science, and therefore inherited many principles of the scientific method - such as objectivity, analytical approach and critical interpretation.

From that point, the last group (the ones that derive the adrenalin rush from helping people) was deemed to undertake a series of particular events in order to become their vision: compassion was not sufficient, training was required.

Becoming an Effective Counsellor

According to Meier & Davis (1997):

“In no other profession does the personality and behavior of the professional make such difference as it does in counseling. Beginning counselors need to work at increasing their self awareness as well as their knowledge of counseling procedures.

Your willingness to be open to supervision, to accept clients' failures and criticisms, to participate in counseling yourself when appropriate, and to acknowledge your limits will contribute to your eventual success and satisfaction.”

Acknowledging Values

The client-counsellor relationship is fundamentally a relationship between two human beings. Obviously there are two different roles in the relationship but both counsellor and client have a history of experiences that have shaped who they are, how they view the world and what are their values.

An effective client-counsellor relationship does not ignore the "human" side of the professional. To establish trust, a client needs to sense that the counsellor is genuine and sincere in their communications. But when a counsellor begins to suspect their own biases, conflicting values or judgements are influencing their work with a client, it is critical that they reflect upon this behaviour and seek to rectify it. Critically reflecting in supervision, through journaling or personal inner work is required to establish an appropriate plan of action.

Recognising Limitations

It is easy for inexperienced counsellors to fall into the trap of feeling solely responsible for their client's progress. Counsellors do not possess a magic wand to solve all of life's problems and it is important to remember that ultimately it is the client that makes choices in their own life. Counsellors can assist clients to think through options, explore motivators and hurdles, set goals, formulate plans of action and so on. A client, however, must assume the responsibility for taking actions in order to accomplish progress in his/her life.

There are many moments in the counselling relationship in which it is important to recognise the limitations of counselling. When progress seems "stuck", some of the best plans involve tolerating ambiguity, sharing responsibility with the client, re-establishing the role of the counsellor and/or sharing information with a supervisor.

Drawing the Line

Maintaining a critical perspective towards the counsellor-client relationship is essential in order to avoid emotional burnout, misjudgement and unproductive distribution of power. "A common mistake for beginners is to worry too much about clients.

There is a danger of incorporating clients' neuroses into our own personality. We lose sleep wondering what decisions they are making. We sometimes identify so closely with clients that we lose our own sense of identity and assume their identity. Empathy becomes distorted and militates against a therapeutic intervention" (Corey 2001).

Applications of Self-Disclosure



Image Source: [Twain Quotes](#)

Are you a very important person? Sure you are.

The reason for this answer is the same for almost everyone: we like talking about ourselves, we enjoy being listened to, we praise our achievements, and we are very much into introspection. Although we are ultimately social beings, most humans are both consciously and subconsciously determined to improve themselves, and to derive meaning to their existence.

In this context, we are faced with the everyday challenge of balancing our own needs for fulfilment and recognition with the need to co-relate with others, to promote altruism and to help people in need. This paradox takes centre stage in counselling sessions in the form of self-disclosure - as a counsellor, how much of yourself should you reveal to your clients?

Human Behaviour and Effective Counselling

It is undeniable that many people are more interested in themselves than things happening with others.

Generally, people like to talk about themselves (thus listening is such an important part in interpersonal communication), to listen to topics which have relevance to their lives, to participate in groups they can derive benefit from, and to be part of a system which values them. It is the basic need for belonging that drives people to behave in this way.

Most people also strongly defend their opinions and perspectives. We like to make sure that once we believe in something, we are able to reasonably explain that way of thinking, and possibly prove to the other person that we are correct in our opinions.

Think about it: who likes to be incorrect? So when we talk about ourselves or about issues which are pertinent to our lives, we like to explain each aspect of that topic and by doing so, validate our opinion or experience. Self-denial occurs when we give up that right in order to focus the attention to someone else's problem, issue or situation. The capacity for self-denial is one of the most important characteristics of a good counsellor.

Curiosity, comfort with conversation, empathy and understanding play a major role in creating a safe environment which allows a client's emotional expression. Emotional insightfulness, introspection, tolerance of intimacy and comfort with power are characteristics which help the counsellor maintain a clear perspective of the situation and at the same time, not prejudice the relationship by being judgemental or condescending. Energy, flexibility and self-awareness facilitate the counsellor's drive and focus in the relationship's objectives and outcomes.

The Word: Self-Disclosure

We've briefly discussed some of the underpinnings of human behaviour and the characteristics which define an effective counsellor. The importance of understanding such concepts is that, on many occasions, self-disclosure requires counsellors to act in a paradoxical manner - that is, communicate a common message in a tailored way, with a different objective, and an external focus. Self-disclosure can be a challenging technique because it defies our natural 'self-centred' dialogue.

Self-disclosure is defined as "a conscious, intentional technique in which clinicians share information about their lives outside the counseling relationship" (Simone, McCarthy, & Skay, 1998, p.174). The role of this process is to "facilitate client disclosure through modeling and the establishment of trust" (the dyadic effect; Jourard, 1968). In other words, the counsellor discloses information about him/herself in order to establish a connection with the client, thus creating rapport, trust and improving interpersonal communication.

Self-disclosure is a useful strategy used by the majority of counsellors, regardless of theoretical orientation. In many instances this process is almost a requirement to obtain valuable information from a client in order to help them see through a situation. It is often perceived as an ethical and valuable technique.

A Two-Edged Sword

Self-disclosure can be as helpful as it can be damaging if not properly conducted. Why? Primarily because the act of self-disclosure exposes the counsellor and it could undermine the balance of power in the relationship with a client. If the client sees vulnerability in the counsellor, the trust could fall apart.

At the same time, this vulnerability could improve the relationship between the counsellor and client by creating more intimacy as the client 'sees' the counsellor in the 'same level' of him or her. Therefore, the outcomes of using self-disclosure as a strategy to build trust and rapport will depend on the counsellor's actions and how those actions will reflect from the client's perspective (based on the client's personality variables). It is important for counselling professionals to observe these issues and adjust their approach accordingly.

The benefits or advantages of self-disclosure include: helping the client to not feel alone, decreasing client anxiety, improving the client's awareness to different viewpoints, and increasing counsellor genuineness. Some disadvantages of applying self-disclosure include: moving focus from the client, taking too much counselling time (and thus reducing client disclosure), creating role confusion (who is helping who?), possibly trivialising the client's issue by implying everyone goes through it, and interfering with transference.

Guidelines for Use of Self-Disclosure

According to Gladding (2006) there are some guidelines which can help counsellors to effectively implement self-disclosure strategies. Such guidelines are basically communication skills which can be used to avoid common pitfalls of this process, such as losing rapport or focus in the situation.

Primarily, the counsellor should be direct, brief, focused and relevant. This will ensure the self-disclosure process does not lead to time wastage and loss of focus in the client's situation. Self-disclosure should also not be used frequently (more self-disclosure is not necessarily better) and should not add to the client's problems and negative outcomes in a situation.

In essence, the purpose of self-disclosure should be clear to both counsellor and client and the process should only be used after considering other options, envisaging that there is a risk of miscommunication and an effect on the balance of power. But as stated before: if used in an effective manner, self-disclosure can be a useful strategy and a common process in the counselling setting.

Case Study: A Briefing of the Technique

A young man wishes to move out of his family home and seeks a counsellor for help. The young man is very distressed by the possible change and the effect it could have on both his parent's and his own life. In the counselling setting, he briefly describes his motives for moving out; however, he attests that he does not want to cause emotional strife to his parents.

In that context, he asks the counsellor to help him come up with a way to tell his parents without hurting them. A solution to that situation would relieve the young man from his personal anxiety.

The counsellor and the client explored all available options and at the end of the counselling session, the young man is still very emotionally affected by his decision and its possible outcomes. At that point, self-disclosure was used as a strategy to help the client move into a positive frame of reference.

The counsellor disclosed that her son left the family home only last year, and even though it was a very emotional situation for the family, they understood his decision and moved forward. Nowadays, they regularly meet and have a very positive relationship.

At the end of the counselling relationship, the client felt comfortable with the knowledge that a similar situation had ended with a positive outcome, and was able to move forward with his decision without distress.

This example showed the effective use of self-disclosure and how this technique can be beneficial to clients. It was observable that in that scenario, the following benefits were achieved: helping the client to not feel alone, decreasing client anxiety and increasing counsellor genuineness.

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Narrative Therapy in Counselling



“A narrative or story is anything told or recounted; more narrowly, something told or recounted in the form of a causally-linked set of events; account; tale, the telling of a happening or connected series of happenings, whether true or fictitious” (Denning, 2006).

Your life is a narrative, counted and recounted from many different perspectives, and by diverse people. There are settings, themes, characters and plots – just like in any movie, book, historical account or legendary fable.

In this article we review the approach of Narrative Therapy and how it can be effectively used by counsellors to assist individuals improve their lives.

Fundamentals of Narrative Therapy

The Narrative Therapy is an approach to counselling that centres people as the experts in their own lives. This therapy intends to view problems as separate entities to people, assuming that the individual’s set of skills, experience and mindset will assist him/her reduce the influence of problems throughout life.

This therapeutic approach intends to place the individual in both the protagonist and author roles: switching the view from a narrow perspective to a systemic and more flexible stance.

Systemic and flexible stance? Yes. The aim is to help clients realise what forces are influencing their lives and to focus on the positive aspects of the 'play'.

In many events of our lives, we tend to focus on particular things and ignore others. Analysing our lives as a play, or a system, helps us understand the different forces and roles that are influencing our behaviour. This in turn gives us flexibility to invoke the necessary changes for improvement.

"The products of our narrative schemes are ubiquitous in our lives: they fill our cultural and social environment. We create narrative descriptions for ourselves and for others about our own past actions, and we develop storied accounts that give sense to the behavior of others. We also use the narrative scheme to inform our decisions by constructing imaginative "what if" scenarios. On the receiving end, we are constantly confronted with stories during our conversations and encounters with the written and visual media. We are told fairy tales as children, and read and discuss stories at school." (Polkinghorne, 1988)

Merging a familiar set of events (one's life) to a familiar structure (a narrative story) is a useful strategy. The emotional, cognitive and spiritual perspectives of a person are usually combined in order to derive meaning to an event. In many instances, one or two perspectives will prevail over the other(s), and this will depend upon the particular scenario and the individual's personality traits.

As an example, we can compare the perspective of two people who have different levels of emotional intelligence. According to Coleman (1998)

"Intellectual and emotional intelligence express the activity of different parts of the brain. The intellect is based solely on the workings of the neocortex, the more recently evolved layers at the top of the brain. The emotional centers are lower in the brain, in the more ancient subcortex."

Thus, individuals that are more 'emotionally intelligent' will draw different conclusions, and behave differently in certain situations. This is only an example of possible disparities in perception and decision-making. It is the protagonist responding to the setting, the characters, the theme and plot.

Techniques and Objectives

“The techniques that narrative therapists use have to do with the telling of the story. They may examine the story and look for other ways to tell it differently or to understand it in other ways. In doing so, they find it helpful to put the problem outside of the individual, thus externalizing it. They look for unique outcomes: positive events that are in contrast to a problem-saturated story.”
(Sharf, 2004)

Externalising the Problem

In Narrative Therapy the problem becomes the antagonist of the story. Certain behaviours are based on particular ‘unhealthy’ or ‘undesired’ characteristics – such as lack of patience, aggressiveness, etc. Thus, they are approached as not a part of the client but as an opposing force which needs to be ‘defeated’.

An example would be a child that has a very bad temperament and tends to be aggressive to other kids at school and his parents. The child might feel guilty for his temperament and blame it on himself (“I don’t know... it is the way I am...”). The counsellor will work with him towards isolating that undesired trait (aggressiveness) and placing it as an external trait – not a characteristic of the individual.

This strategy helps clients re-construct their own stories in a way which will reduce the incidence of the problem in order to eliminate negative outcomes and reinforce personal development and achievement. The protagonist becomes the author and re-writes the story constructively.

Unique Outcomes

If a story is full of problems and negative events, the counsellor will attempt to identify the exceptional positive outcomes. When exploring unique positive outcomes in the story, the counsellor will assist the client in redeveloping the narrative with a focus on those unique outcomes. This assists the client in empowering him/herself by creating a notion that those unique outcomes can prevail over the problems.

Think about this analogy: you are a novel writer. You were given a novel to review and publish the way you prefer. You have read it and found it generally poor, but there were some interesting ideas which you liked. You selected these ideas, and re-write the novel around them. You can make a flawed story become a bestseller.

Alternative Narratives

The focus of Narrative Therapy is to explore the strengths and positive aspects of an individual through his or her narrative. Therefore, the main objective of this therapeutic approach is to improve the person's perspective internally (reflective) and externally (towards the world and others). Alternative narratives are a simple way to relate to this concept. This technique works in combination with unique outcomes.

How? The individual will reconstruct a personal story using unique outcomes, therefore, focusing on the positive aspects of a previous story in order to achieve a desired outcome. This process is based on the premise that any person can continually and actively re-author their own life.

By creating alternative perspectives on a narrative (or event within the narrative) the counsellor is able to assist the client in bringing about a new narrative which will help combat the 'problems'. This is similar to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy as it aims to create a positive perspective of an event.

Boundaries of Narrative Therapy



Image source: nataliedee.com

Narrative Therapy has certain boundaries or limitations.

In many occasions, diverse clients may expect the therapist to act as the expert, instead of having to 'conduct' the conversation themselves.

For this reason, Narrative Therapy can be challenging when the individual is not articulate. Lack of confidence, intellectual capacity and other issues could also undermine the expression of the individual through a narrative.

Another common boundary of Narrative Therapy is the lack of recipe, agenda or formula. This approach is grounded in a philosophical framework, and sometimes can become a particularly subjective or widely interpretative process.

The Leading Role

The most important aspect of Narrative Therapy is to empower the client. Placing the client as an expert, and understanding his/her story instead of attempting to predict it, indicates the therapist's mindset.

The idea is to emphasise the therapeutic relationship, in particular the therapist's attitudes. This standpoint encompasses many of the important aspects of good interpersonal communication, such as: demonstration of care, interest, respectful curiosity, openness, empathy, and fascination.

Once this collaborative relationship has been established, the counsellor and the client can move forward and work on how to improve the outcomes of the narrative:

“Once upon a time... there was an optimistic, content and productive person...”

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The Problem of Burnout



Self-care is an intrinsic, continuous and highly important activity performed by any professional, particularly those involved in health care.

Also called the 'inner therapy', this practice aims to ensure that both mental and physical health of the professional is in good shape.

So why is self-care for Counsellors important? Essentially, Counsellors have a clear responsibility: their clients. If a Counsellor is not mentally and physically healthy, his/her ability to provide support to clients is limited.

So what are the strategies for self-care in the counselling profession? There are many strategies which vary according to each person's state of mind. Irrespective of the strategy being used, a Counsellor's self-care activities are in place for a single purpose: that is, ensuring daily work stress does not result in burnout.

The Problem: Burnout

Burnout is the consequence of excessive work, stress and other related factors. Although the concept of burnout can also be applied to other contexts, for the purpose of this article we'll stick to the work environment. Many people suffer from burnout for various reasons, and usually the problem is related to several prominent areas of an individual's life: happiness, health, success, and others.

"Burnout is not simply excessive stress. Rather, it is a complex human reaction to ongoing stress, and it relates to feeling that your inner resources are inadequate for managing the tasks and situations presented to you. The signs and symptoms of burnout are similar to those of stress, but burnout includes an emotional exhaustion and an increasingly negative attitude toward your work and, perhaps, your life." (Help Guide Mental Health - Australia)

This concept is well-known in mental health disciplines, particularly counselling. For this reason, many counselling courses include the topic in their training schedule: a measurement to ensure that each prospective professional is aware of their own limitations.

Burnout in Counsellor Training: The Principles

According to Corey, "burnout manifests itself in many ways. Those who experience this syndrome typically find they are tired, drained, and without enthusiasm. They feel unappreciated, unrecognised, and unimportant, and they go about their jobs in a mechanical and routine way." (Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy)

Counsellor education generally introduces the concept of burnout to students, aiming to provide sound theoretical material that will help future counsellors to prevent, understand and act upon such a problem. The material commonly refers to the causes, remedies and prevention methods of burnout.

Causes

As cited previously, burnout is the result of a complex human reaction to stress. Such reaction can be so diversified among people that it would require highly advanced mathematical algorithms to actually derive all the possible cause combinations of burnout, and the influence of each of these causes.

However, despite the unpredictability of individual responses to stress, there is a set of causes which are common to most people:

- Performance of repeated activities over time which seem to be insignificant;
- Lack of appreciation for a certain task or overall effort at work;
- Strong pressure to perform at work;
- Excessive conflict in work relationships;
- Lack of opportunities for expression and improvement; and
- Presence of unresolved personal conflicts outside of the work environment.

Recognising such causes is the first step to understanding a series of events that may lead to burnout. The next step would involve the person's particular responses to mental stress and their capability to recognise certain physical traits that could indicate over-stressed responses from the body.

Remedies

Burnout remedies for professional counsellors will vastly diverge between individuals. Resembling the causes, remedies are effective according to individual traits, particularly when referring to the level of stress each person can deal with.

Some people prefer to deal with their stress-related problems by increasing or decreasing certain individual activities, such as increasing the amount of time exercising and/or decreasing the amount of time working in the office.

Interactive individuals may prefer to work through their issues with others, such as participating in workshops, consulting with their supervisors or simply allocating time to talk to a friend or colleague. Many Counsellors would mix individual and group activities to reduce incidence of stress and attempt to eradicate burnout.

Counsellors may also diverge in their perspectives towards stress and burnout. Some people are naturally passive and tend to surrender to their own circumstances, generally putting themselves in the position of victims. This assumption leads to feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness, which increases the difficulty of dealing with stressing factors, resulting in either a delay in eliminating burnout, or increased intensity.

However, there are also Counsellors who are proactive towards stress. Such people have a different perspective towards stressful events - they recognise the individual traits which are affecting them, and actively attempt to resolve them through a mix of introspection and scenario analysis. This approach - or active stance - is desired in order to improve stress management skills and avoid burnout.

In an industry where human relationships are so intrinsically related to work, it is sometimes inevitable to experience distress and burnout. On these occasions, it is important that Counsellors effectively remediate burnout in order to invoke balance in both professional and personal lives.

Prevention

It is better to prevent rather than remediate - this saying illustrates the need for preventing burnout before it happens. Most people ignore the first signs of excessive stress, and by doing so, become vulnerable to further pressure from work.

At some point, Counsellors may find it very difficult to attend counselling sessions, to get to work, and to perform in several other areas of life. Preventing burnout is simply a necessary task to anyone aiming for a balanced and fulfilling career (and life).

There are several burnout prevention principles which can be divided into three categories: physical, mental and strategic.

Physical

Stress is a pattern of physiological responses which are caused by specific events in people's lives. Such responses include an increase in blood pressure, heart rate, sugar levels and re-direction of blood flow to major organs.

With such a complex set of events, it is reasonable to assume that maintaining good health will reduce the incidence of 'undesired' stress (distress). In fact, it is more than reasonable.

Because stress causes such 'explosive' reactions in the body, a healthier body is vastly more capable of dealing with excessive amounts of stress than an unhealthy body.

How do you improve your health? Exercising will play the leading role in improving and maintaining a 'healthy status', allowing your body to be ready for the energy boost caused by stress.

A balanced diet will ensure that the body has all nutrients necessary to perform daily activities, including regular stress-related responses. A balanced diet includes avoiding excessive intake of particular stress-related substances, such as caffeine and sugar.

Mental

Relaxation techniques such as imagery, meditation and breathing can at first conjure up feelings of inaction and stasis. Music and introspection are also a good combination for improving the state of mind of a person.

These are commonly used techniques, however any mental exercises that draw attention away from stressful events, and provide a 'relaxed' state to the individual, are useful. Such exercises will depend on the personal preferences of each Counsellor, and the resources that are available at the time.

Furthermore, the role of perception is extremely important in determining the health issues associated with the incidence of stress.

Sometimes Counsellors perform a kind of mental 'self mutilation' in which they take responsibility for anything that goes wrong in a counselling session, or with a client. In this context, feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness will remain obstacles and can perpetuate to the Counsellor's personal life.

In these instances, the Counsellor needs to re-assess their perception towards certain events: you may call it a self-directed cognitive behaviour therapy.

Strategic

Probably the most prominent cause of burnout in a workplace is the inability of an individual to meet certain deadlines and achieve particular goals which are simply impossible to achieve in the first place. Applying strategy as a form of burnout prevention means ensuring that goals are achievable.

This way, Counsellors will not put themselves under unnecessary pressure. Furthermore, strategic thinking also allows individuals to recognise their personal and professional limitations, and work effectively with those limitations in order to achieve a balanced (and successful) counselling career.

The First Steps: Shaping a Career

In the beginning of their counselling careers, most individuals are much more sensitive to burnout than experienced Counsellors. Why is that? Because their levels of anxiety are peaking as they are about to find out whether this profession is really for them, and if they can handle their clients and support them by effectively applying the theoretical concepts they have learned.

Dealing with the normal anxieties of the first few sessions is part of the process of inner development that the counselling profession requires from all its peers. The fact that it deals with human beings, which can be vastly unpredictable, will affect the Counsellor's confidence to some extent.

The nature of a counselling session, which can have a major impact in a client's life, also evokes doubts in the Counsellor's mind.

It is important for the Counsellor to simply recognise such doubts as a normal part of their own behaviour, and to understand the feelings which are associated with them. Beginning Counsellors can be so overwhelmed by their anxieties that they will fail to really 'see through' the situation. This inability to deal with a client could result in stress and possibly burnout.

Professional Insight: Strategies from Counsellors

There are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of strategies that can help a Counsellor with self care. Each individual differentiates in the strategies used, and the need for them. Thus, we've decided to get a first hand insight on burnout by asking two experienced professional Counsellors what were their opinions and strategies towards the problem.

"If there are challenges at work, talking with somebody (anybody) immediately after is called de-briefing, and may result in problematic issues not manifesting within the body and causing frustration, anger, hurt, and even illness. For difficult clients, supervision is imperative to access a mind to break the difficulties into manageable parts.

Outside of work, personally, what works for me is to have a regime of care for my body. Because of Yoga, I have learned the art of switching off in a meditative mode very quickly, so the minute I walk outside of work I am in another area of life (i.e. the going home mode)."

Kathleen Casagrande

"To function effectively as a Counsellor we need to be in good shape personally - physically, mentally and emotionally. Given that, just like everyone else, we will have times of difficulty in our own lives, it is particularly important for us to recognise the danger signals and take action to deal with any undue stress quickly.

Like many of my colleagues I have a number of tried and tested remedies for keeping my life in balance. A quick fix which I can use anytime and in any stressful situation is to concentrate on my breathing rhythm and deliberately make it slower and deeper.

Listening to music is a sure-fire way for me to de-stress, as are walking on a beach, playing tennis, being out on the water or getting involved with a good book.

On the subject of reading, I work on maintaining and upgrading my skills and knowledge - having confidence in one's ability is an important element in avoiding workplace stress. "

Wendy Mead

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Building Rapport with Clients

In previous articles of this eBook we've discussed the 'business-side' of counselling: marketing tips and business guidelines which can help counsellors build a successful practice. Many therapists possess an innate desire to help others, and because of this emotional involvement, sometimes it can be challenging to convert the potential into practical results.

Whilst we've tackled the basic premises which can help counsellors enter the market and attract clients, there is still one aspect of the counselling relationship which is indispensable for a counsellor's success: client satisfaction.



But isn't that a matter of competence and an intrinsic part of being a counsellor?

Yes, it is. Being able to progress clients through to the achievement of their counselling goals has plenty to do with the counsellor's ability to perform his/her services at the most basic level. However, it is exactly that logical assumption that induces many counsellors to oversee basic communication needs and counselling skills which will be the key for their success as a professional counsellor.

The Counselling Setting

Prior to engaging in the interpersonal communication process, there are basic requirements which will influence the client's ability to express him/herself, and to make decisions regarding the relationship. These aspects refer to the counselling setting, which in the initial meetings can cause a significant impact in the client's perception towards the counsellor. In a nutshell, the counsellor should observe the following:

- ◆ **Comfort:** a comfortable setting improves client expression of feelings.
- ◆ **Security/Privacy:** providing the client with security during a session.
- ◆ **Noise control:** ensuring that noise does not affect communication.
- ◆ **Stimuli control:** a neutral environment (light colours and decoration).
- ◆ **Environment:** a space in which the client can share in their own pace.
- ◆ **Facilities:** Office facilities (e.g. amenities) are relevant aspects.

Rules of Engagement

There are certain 'rules of engagement' which dictate the likelihood of a counselling relationship being constructive, and these rules apply to any context. For example, if you have just been introduced to someone at a social event, you should initially avoid asking personal questions as that is perceived to be intrusive. These rules are inherited by particular social groups, and following them is the basis for creating a positive profile and developing a receptive attitude from other group members.

In the counselling setting, there is much more necessity in applying such rules. The client is there for a specific purpose, which requires a particular approach to the situation. The client is also likely to be "uneasy" or unsure about what to expect, which increases the 'risk' of making a bad impression or not developing good rapport. Finally, there are more urgent ethical guidelines which must be complied within the counselling room, but would be of little relevance in a social setting.

In order to encourage the client to engage in a formal relationship, the counsellor must first avoid the common pitfalls which can make communication difficult. The first and foremost issue to consider in this scenario is the elusive impact of 'first impressions' in the eyes of a client. Trust and rapport are emotional keywords in a client's subconscious, and once they have been negatively 'red-flagged' for any reason; it is very unlikely that relationship will move forward. So what can make this occur?

Dodging the Pitfalls

The standard communication pitfalls found in any relationship cover most potential problems of the first couple of meetings. They relate to a range of conscious and subconscious thinking patterns which could create communication gaps between the client and counsellor.

These patterns are based on the each individual's education, relationships, attitudes, motivational targets, self-confidence levels and a range of other factors. Because the initial stages of a counselling relationship tend to be open and unpredictable, a good strategy to move forward is engaging in prevention: aiming to reduce the probability of communication pitfalls. To prevent this, counsellors must be aware of the common mistakes, or negative patterns, of good communication:

Judging: Criticising, name-calling, diagnosing and praising evaluatively

Sending Solutions: Ordering, threatening, moralising, and advising

Avoiding the Other's Concerns: Diverting, logically arguing, reassuring

The probable outcome of avoiding such pitfalls is establishing grounds for a productive relationship through good rapport and developing a certain level of trust and openness.

The Mindset of the Client

When it comes to interpersonal communication in therapy, being flexible and responsive is one of the most beneficial skills a counsellor can have. Different mindsets and emotional states require a particular approach; and the counsellor's ability to adjust to a client's needs is likely to dictate the success of that relationship.

In order to better exemplify the diversity of mindsets which clients may approach counseling with, there are five generic profiles of clients – and respective strategies -to help improve the relationship and enhance client-counsellor rapport.

Profile 1: an emotionally unstable client

The client is emotionally unstable and finding difficulty in expressing him/herself. Emotionally unstable clients normally require a client-centred approach which enforces the need to establish rapport and trust, and to ensure the client is aware that he or she is in a safe and friendly environment. The client will normally have difficulty in expressing him/herself because he/she is unable or not ready to deal with emotions.

Counselling strategies to establish rapport would include: using self-disclosure to relate to the client's situation and create an emotional link; creating goals and accountability in order to encourage action from the client; providing transparency and positivity through communication.

Profile 2: an involuntary or skeptical client

The client has been forced to attend to counselling (e.g. legally mandated).

This type of client may be difficult to deal with in the early stages of the relationship. Normally, he or she will be skeptical about the process, and may not acknowledge any need to change. It is important for the therapist to gain respect from the client, and use that respect to establish trust.

One of the most common strategies to gain respect and create responsiveness from the client is to outline the process of counselling: what he or she is there for; what is the structure of the relationship; what are the rights and duties of the client; what might be the expected positive outcomes.

Solution-focused strategies are a good way to create a sense of accountability and need for change.

Profile 3: the child

The client is a young child or adolescent.

Dealing with children is always challenging as there is a perceived 'bigger' communication gap. The goal for the counsellor is to establish trust using humour; engaging in activities such as games; encouraging a collaborative approach; using self-disclosure and role-playing. These are all common strategies to help improve communication with young clients.

Profile 4: the uncommitted client

Lack of commitment can be a challenging problem in the counselling setting. Normally, a client with little or no commitment has a specific agenda which justifies their attendance at a counselling session (an example would be a husband who was asked by his wife to attend counselling in order to preserve their marriage).

Framing and re-framing are good tactics to re-model the way the client perceives the counselling relationship: shifting from the 'helping' mode to the collaborative approach. Creating goals and structuring will also motivate the client to go through the necessary stages for change, collect the rewards, and move on with his/her own life.

Profile 5: the demanding client

A demanding client will normally believe that the counsellor will provide answers to his/her problems. They will come to counselling without much resolve to act upon their current situation, and will normally create very unrealistic expectations regarding the counselling relationship and the counsellor.

Again, encouraging accountability, managing expectations and establishing well-planned goals is a good approach. The client should be encouraged to realise that change can only occur from within. Using role-playing, narrative therapy skills, and/or a solution-focused approach to empower and encourage the client may be the key for deriving motivation.

Hopefully, the above strategies assist with providing a firm foundation to establish the client-counsellor relationship.

Part IV

On Being Human: Emotions and Behaviour

- Living with Fear
- Living with Anger
- Inside Love



Living with Fear

"Neither a man nor a crowd nor a nation can be trusted to act humanely or to think sanely under the influence of a great fear." (Bertrand Russell)



Myrmecophobia, phalacrotophobia, hobophobia, acrophobia, pentheraphobia, hypengyophobia, venustraphobia, ailurophobia, gamophobia, ophidiophobia, arachnophobia, hydrophobia, alektorophobia, philophobia, logophobia and testophobia*. Do you have symptoms for any of these? If you do, you are likely to be a normal human.

Fear is a common and dictating aspect of human behaviour. It is such a common reality to be afraid, that we have literally hundreds of words describing a particular fear which someone has reported suffering from. There are enough words to create a Phobia Dictionary. In this article, we will analyse the underpinnings of fear, an impressive (and often disconcerting) human emotion.

What is Fear?

Fear is mainly a physical response. The hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) system in the human brain is loaded with dopamine and adrenaline, which are chemical messengers from the body.

In a 'danger situation', the HPA releases these messengers along with a hormone (cortisol) which in turn activates the amygdala (an area of the brain responsible for emotional responses, including fear conditioning).

This reaction results in increased blood pressure, sugar availability, and an energy boost that allows humans to perform quite amazing displays of strength, reaction, and awareness in confrontational situations.

Because these chemical reactions occur before we have had the opportunity to consciously interpret the event, at times it can negatively impact upon our life. For instance, you may be walking in a dark street at night, and hear a loud noise. Before you actually evaluate the situation and assess the danger, your brain will access data from the hippocampus (brain area responsible for memory) and determine instant readiness to the situation.

In this scenario, you may take an impulsive move, or make a bad decision. Thus, fear is seen (particularly by males) as a sign of weakness and a negative trait.

The Foundations of Fear

The causes of fear can vary to a surprising extent. They may be originated from a stress response which is related to a traumatic event from the individual's past; it can be a socially-motivated fear; or it can be a biologically-induced one. An example of a traumatic event would include a stressor, which is mainly a noise or image associated to an event that has incurred a personal trauma.

Thus, people who are afraid of snakes will usually react with fear when they hear a noise which resembles a snake (naturally this interpretation will depend on the context).

A socially-motivated fear can be caused by a relationship between an event and its outcome. For instance, during the 19th Century in Britain, dying poor and helpless, was considered one of the most common fears. Early in the 20th Century, this shifted to the fear of being buried alive. During the 1st World War, bombs were much more 'scary' than during the 2nd World War.

Finally, biologically-induced fear refers to predispositions in our genes, due to evolution, which makes us prone to fear something. There have been studies which relate xenophobia and racism to behaviour from the Stone Age period, explaining why people naturally tend to shun outsiders.

Fear Counselling

As we've previously stated, fear seems to be a negative trait perceived from the eyes of common sense. But is it really? Although we cannot change the way our body physically responds to a threat, we can change the way we emotionally respond to our body. This becomes a strategy to avoid trauma, distress and bad decision-making when faced with the adrenalin pump that fear creates.

The basis of exploring the positive side of fear is changing conditioned behaviour. The inability to react positively in a state of fear is due to a memory associative process, in which the individual cannot see past negative outcomes which could occur.

For example, a person who has a fear of heights will not be able to climb a tree because they will constantly enforce the idea of free-falling and getting badly hurt (or even dying). The problem is not in the sensation of fear, but in the association of the emotion and a negative outcome.

Cognitive restructuring techniques such as Thought Stopping and Rational Emotive Therapy are common methods used by counsellors to alleviate fears and barriers. Creating awareness and willingness to change is a crucial part of the counselling process, and can determine the turning point for the client - the moment of surpassing fears, and approaching success.

* Fear of... ants, becoming old, beggars, heights, mother-in-law, responsibility, beautiful women, cats, marriage, snakes, spiders, water, chickens, falling in love, words and taking tests.

Living with Anger



It is Friday. You woke up, went to the kitchen, and poured some orange juice into a glass. Your week has been very productive so far, and today's weather is particularly conducive to a good mood. To enhance that positivity, tomorrow the weekend will begin and you have some interesting travelling plans. You walk towards the door and grab the latest edition of the newspaper from your footpath. Ten seconds later, your facial expression has changed, your muscles have become tense, and your head feels a bit radiated. You have read that an innocent young man was murdered last night without any particular motive. You feel angry.

What is Anger?

Anger is a common part of our lives. Everyday we experience varied sorts of frustrations which derive both from ourselves and from external sources. In the previously cited scenario, feelings of anger would have been developed for many reasons, but they are all common to the fact that it was a situation that opposed your core convictions.

Although you did not burst into tears or destroy the glass of orange juice sitting on the table - the emotion was there. You may ask yourself: "But I don't know this person, so why do I care?"

The answer to this question is not as clear as the emotion you felt, and nor is it simple - but there are some leads. Let's take a journey into the complex psychological mechanisms that produce this controversial (and mostly misunderstood) emotion.

The Physiological Framework

Fear, stress and anger are closely related processes. In previously published articles, we've discussed several mechanisms that create stress, and their natural purpose. In a nutshell, the Hypothalamus (region of the brain responsible for controlling the Autonomic Nervous System) identifies a stressor (which could be any event - such as a noise) and automatically prepares the body to react to that stressor.

This is done through sending signals to both the ANS and the limbic system – which in turn, activate a ‘response mechanism’ by stimulating body organs to change their regular activity. The outcomes are increased blood pressure, sugar levels, heart rate and redirection of the blood to selected organs. This is the process which creates stress, or the ‘stressed physical state’. Both fear and anger are based on the incidence of stress.

In general, once the body has reached its stressed (‘ready for fight or flight’) condition, it is our interpretation of the event which will denominate the emotion of fear or anger. The pre-cortex, responsible for decision-making, will send messages to other parts of the brain and the following reactions will be based on its decisions.

For this reason, some researchers attest that every state of anger is a result of fear. In detailed physical terms, anger invokes a reaction in which the skin temperature and electrical conductance are increased (the ‘firing sensation’) whilst the opposite occurs when fear is established (the ‘cold sweat sensation’).

All these body responses are biologically designed for survival. There is no evidence that anger per se is hazardous to the human body – the problem lies in the expression of anger, and how easily people get angry (it has been previously stated that excessive stress causes physical harm to the body).

The Sociological Framework

The perspective on anger has changed over time. The initial societal approach to analysing this issue originated in the principles of several different religions and their particular codes of conduct. In three religions - Buddhism, Islam and Christianity - the view towards anger and violence were never favourable.

Buddhists consider it one of the five major negative states (also known as hindrances or nivarana) which directly oppose the way to enlightenment. The Islamic religion believes anger is a sign of weakness and an undesirable feeling, whilst early Christianity considered it one of the Seven Deadly Sins.

Science has also played its role in defining the perspective on anger. Before Sigmund Freud, most scientists believed that there was no direct biological disposition for the expression (and emotion) of anger. At the end of the 19th century, Freud proposed that individuals were born with an innate aggressive instinct - which when neglected would instigate hostility and aggressive behaviour.

This proposition was disregarded in 1988 when the American Psychological Association and the American Anthropological Association reviewed several research papers and concluded there was no clear indication that anger was genetically predisposed. After the **human genome** was mapped and other scientific advances were accomplished, such perspective towards anger began to shift again.

Nowadays, despite the biological or sociological premise of anger, the expression of this emotion is regarded as a highly negative trait in most societies. People that are prone to 'explode' are less capable of forming healthy relationships with others, and usually develop a 'bad image'. Workplaces and social environments commonly object to violence and are intolerant to rage.



However, there are some cultures in which violence is a common part of people's lives - usually in developing countries where there is a significant gap between social standards which cultivates hatred between different layers of society.

Most researchers agree that violent expressions of anger commonly result from 'behaviour modelling processes'. Children from violent domestic environments tend to behave like their violent parent(s) - and, most of the time, this occurs because they assume it is the appropriate or 'normal' way to express their angry emotional state.

Violence and anger are also related with situations where being aggressive results in power and social recognition (or perceived respect). Many bullies (particularly male children) act violently upon others to gain status as the alpha male of the group, or simply to express their fears and frustrations by shifting attention and blaming external sources for their personal problems.

As previously stated - anger and fear are closely related emotions.

The Bright Side of Anger

If anger is a natural response of the body, why should we oppose it? Being angry is a synonym of being healthy and lively - as much as stress works in the same way. People that express no anger are usually incapable of standing up for themselves, achieving important goals or surpassing difficult obstacles. Anger is not only part of human nature, but also beneficial to the existence of humanity.

Put yourself in the first scenario again: imagine if you felt nothing when you read that newspaper. Anger enables individuals to quickly create an emotional scale which is directly related to their ethical principles and to the avoidance of pain and particular experiences which have resulted in negative outcomes in the past. It is similar to stress defensive mechanisms.

If we are completely numb towards something which is totally opposite to our ideals, we are likely to accept it, and as a result, not develop drive and passion towards our most desired goals in life.

The presence of fear, anger and stress helps create the alertness and readiness required to react to the environment. But the decision-making process plays a very important role in how anger will reflect in our behaviour. Most people tend to associate anger with the actual aggressive responses that may follow it. Being angry does not necessarily mean attacking someone or breaking something. Generally there are two types of behavioural responses to anger:

- (1) **Active responses** (fighting, screaming, breaking objects, etc) and;
- (2) **Passive responses** (retreating, sulking, showing hostility or tension, etc).

The actual response cannot really be classified in terms of good and bad - but the intensity and duration of the response, along with the individual's anger threshold (how easy it is to make a person angry), are the main determinants of an unhealthy anger-responsive behaviour.

So if you often get angry with minor problems or situations, or you are unable to control your 'temper', or you often get extremely angry about something but simply 'take it' and walk away (and then develop hatred) - you may want to consider anger management.

Furthermore, the propensity to experience anger can also be increased in particular (and inevitable) situations such as: menopause, PMS, birth, withdrawal (physical), bipolar disorder, etc.

The Dark Side of Anger

If you fit the description in the last paragraph, or know someone that does, there are many options for controlling anger responses in order to have a productive and healthy life. Anger Management has become a popular topic in the last decade. If you type in 'Anger Management' on Google, you will find over 31 million pages on the subject and, along with them, numerous strategies and approaches to combat this 'dark side of the force'.

It is important to note that anger and stress directly affect both psychological and physical health in a normal person - therefore it needs to be considered as a 'real' threat. Furthermore, it also has a very negative effect in the societal bonds that an individual may have, or could potentially gain.

Counsellors use various approaches in helping clients manage anger. The goal of anger management is to reduce both emotional and physiological arousal that anger causes. Like previously noted, you cannot constantly avoid or change every person, thing or situation which causes anger, but you can learn to control the reactions to them. 'Letting it out' or 'releasing the bad energy' is not a practical way to get rid of the problems which arise from anger: imagine if a person punches someone or something every time they are angry? This is a practice that is not physically or socially acceptable.

One of the main strategies used by counsellors is relaxation. Relaxation techniques such as imagery, meditation and breathing can assist with controlling feelings of anger and a tendency to violence. Cognitive restructuring provides the client with the opportunity to create a positive mindset towards the world.

Using rational thinking and logic, clients aim to 'defeat' anger and replace explosive and anti-social behaviour with reflective actions. If you do not believe, ask Anthony Robbins: "Using the power of decision gives you the capacity to get past any excuse to change any and every part of your life in an instant". Simple, yet effective.

Various other strategies include: changing the environment (when it is really inappropriate), using humour (silly humour can be a great substitute for anger), avoiding certain situations (there are some avoidable situations which can be, well, avoided), and improving communication (sometimes the core source of anger is plain miscommunication).

In the end, the objective is to provide the individual with tools he or she will use to become a person who can manage their anger - from their perspective and within the social context.

Inside Love



"Love is many things: the protective love of a mother for her child, the passion of a couple newly in love, the deep love of long-term companions and the divine love of God, to name just a few. Some cultures have 10 or more words for different forms of love, and poets and songwriters always find myriad aspects of love to celebrate. Is there anything universal behind all this diversity? As Pope Benedict recently asked in his first encyclical letter: Are all forms of love basically, in its many and varied manifestations, ultimately a single reality?"
(New Scientist - 29 April 2006)

There are many kinds of love which are induced by a varied collection of motives. Romantic love is probably the most intricate of them all, and there are many reasons for that.

First, romantic love does not seem to follow many of our decision-making rules: you can fall in love with anyone, at anytime, and without any precedents. Second, the concept of romantic love has been developed, propagated and nurtured, becoming to some extent intrinsically related to the very meaning of human life. Third, and maybe most important of all, love generates an astounding rush of adrenaline - a rapturous sensation of being out of control, like endeavouring in a great and unique experience.

Love seems to derive from a blend of environmental and genetic factors. Before the scientific study of love originated around the 70s, much of our perspective on the concept was based in the work of poets, artists and philosophers. Although love remains a complex matter, there are some cues as to why it is such an appealing one.

Romantic Love and the Western Civilisation

Human societies have idealised love for a long time. The historical development of the concept of love in western societies has followed some kind of periodical fashion throughout the centuries. Greeks and Romans perceived love as some kind of interesting force which had no connection with marriage.

Courtly love, in the pre-renaissance period, promoted the idea of romance and it included particular concepts which were unique to a man/woman relationship.

Such love was considered as a challenge and virtue by knights, but still there was no relationship with marriage. With the development of the church, romantic love was restricted and lust viewed as a transgression for the society.

With the Renaissance period, the idealisation of a woman as the object of love was the starting point for a shift of perspective, and the first concepts of love in marriage developed. Classic literature played its role in finding a reciprocal meaning in the relationship (Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet was written in this period).

In the age of reason, around mid-18th century, emotional love fell out of fashion among the upper classes and intellectuals - a new approach based on reason, objectivity and productivity was formed. Later on, seduction and flirting took place through mythical characters such as Don Juan de Marco and real characters such as Giovanni Jacopo Casanova.

Modern romantic love developed through the balance of couple relationships, the concepts of free marriage and equal rights, and the idea that romantic love could be possible in any relationship. Dating started around the 1920s as an innovative approach to partner selection and premarital relationships became more open, intimate and practical.

Romantic love was vastly promoted through books, novels, movies and the television. From the 1980s, love hit the internet - whilst dating and flirting became part of social dynamics in almost every instance. Nowadays, romantic love is practically a part of anyone's life goals.

The Beautiful Chemistry

Scientists have devoted some time in investigating the neurochemical pathways that regulate social attachments, particularly the study of hormones and neurotransmitters which could be involved in the expression of love.

The prairie vole - a small rodent that is perceived to be part of nature's exclusive list of mammals which are fond of monogamous relationships - became an object of study for this matter, and it produced some impressive results.

These animals not only spend their whole lives with the same partner, but they also seem to enjoy spending time with one another: observation showed that prairie vole couples groom and protect each other, nest together, and become affectionate and attentive parents.

The leading motive of choice is appearance and body language (55%), whilst style of speaking (38%) and the person's actual speech (only 7%) are the other less influential criteria. Laughing together, gazing into each other's eyes and sharing emotive experiences also seem to fit in the love recipe.

Fisher and the Love Stages

Helen Fisher, a researcher at Rutgers University, suggests that love can be divided into three overlapping but separate stages: lust, romantic love and long-term attachment.

Lust would constitute the sexual craving highly induced by hormones and neurochemical reactions in the brain - a cocktail of oxytocin, vasopressin and endogenous opioids.

Romantic love derives from the attraction and sharing of feelings between couples. Affection, idealisation, change in behavioural patterns and reciprocal responses in this stage derived from a mix of neurochemical influence and social needs.

Fisher argues that romantic love is unstable - but the final stage known as attachment is the basis for long-term relationships and the process of building a family. Such stage invokes feelings of social comfort, security and emotional union. Because all these stages are perceived to be independent, they can occur simultaneously and with different intensity in men and women.

Delis and the Passion Paradox

Dean Delis offers an interesting insight on love in his book "Passion Paradox". According to Delis, one partner is more in love - or emotionally invested in the relationship - than the other. The more love the loving partner wants from the other, the less the other feels like giving.

"The more in love partner is in the one-down position, whilst the less in love partner occupies the one-up position. Men and women can occupy both positions at various times." (Delis)

The author affirms that virtually everyone experiences love's two sides in the same way (pleasure and pain). It does not matter whether your past experiences moulded you to be a particular person - no one, even the emotionally healthy person, is exempted from the pain of love when it tips out of balance.

In this context, love relationships would produce a paradox: 'one-downs' try harder as they feel insecure and want to get back in control. They attempt to enhance their attraction power. The goal of such effort is to gain emotional control over the relationship as to avoid the nightmare of rejection (that means winning his or her love). But the catch is: if you prove too appealing to the one you want - to the point where the other person is clearly more in love with you - the relationship will fall out of balance.



When such an event occurs, you have become the 'one-up' or, if you are frightened by your partner's distance, you have become the 'one-down'. It would seem that the very urge to attract someone, to bring another person under emotional control, contains the potential for upsetting the balance of the relationship.

This is due to the fact that the feeling of being in love is biochemically linked to the feeling of being out of control. Once you feel completely in control or sure of another person's love, your feelings of passion begin to fade: vanishing the challenge or excitement of the relationship.

"The passion paradox is one of the most familiar experiences in working with couples. One person wants more sex, more time talking, more commitment than the other. A study of male-female relationships done at Yale University found that in 19% of relationships both partners were "equally involved" in the relationship in general. In 36% of partnerships the woman was "less involved" and in 45% of partnerships the man was "less involved".

This imbalance is partially due to a personality difference between people who enjoy connecting and people who enjoy being separate. The research shows that there are slightly more men who enjoy being more separate, but the difference is not huge. Whichever way the paradox runs, the result is often quite painful for both partners."

([NLP Weekly](#))

No Pain, No Gain

Pleasure and pain are part of love. Can you recall a single love history which did not have a touch of suffering? It is hard to find one. Love and pain are interrelated concepts in many aspects. When you love someone, you become emotionally vulnerable to that person (that is the reason people say that you have “fallen in love”). Such vulnerability varies between different people and relationship, but it is always there to some extent.

What are the main causes of pain in love? Delis’ passion paradox plays a role: when a partner recognises being in the ‘one-down’ position of the relationship, he or she is likely to face emotional struggles which will primarily affect self-confidence and the individual’s general emotional balance. When reaching this state of mind, a lover tends to believe that the world is against them, that naturally there is some kind of plot against the relationship.

In his book *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*, Roland Barthes mentions the term *Tutti Sistemati*, which in his words occurs when “the amorous subject sees everyone around him as “pigeonholed”, each appearing to be granted a little practical and affective system of contractual liaisons from which he feels himself to be excluded; this inspires him with an ambiguous sentiment of envy and mockery.” (Barthes, 1978)

Such sentiment is a result of social rejection. People commonly have great difficulty in emotionally dealing with social rejection. This issue [was recently studied](#) by a group of American mental health professionals, which suggested in their research that there is a direct relationship between the cognitive mechanisms which cause physical pain and the emotional pain originated from social rejection. In other words, being socially rejected literally hurts.

So, with so much pain involved, why do we still search for love? Because we can get a great deal out of it. From the lover’s perspective, love is a powerful self-learning experience. Love allows us to better understand our emotional and behavioural patterns, and at the same time, it provides a load of emotional rewards. Like previously stated, it makes us feel good. At the same time, love is also a constant goal in terms of human nature: we look for love because it fulfils many of our natural emotional needs. Carl Rogers illustrated this idea in his concept of Unconditional Positive Regard.

According to Rogers, mental illness is often caused by the absence of love or by a defective kind of love the individual received as a child. In other words: love is a pill for our emotional pain, but it comes with its own side effects. Are we willing to risk it?



About the Institute

Overview



The Australian Institute of Professional Counsellors (AIPC) specializes in providing high quality counsellor education, with a particular focus on external and distance education. AIPC is the largest provider of counselling courses with over sixteen years experience in delivering counsellor education programs. Institute courses are recognised by the Australian Counselling Association, a peak national association of counsellors and psychotherapists.

We are proud to have helped thousands of people pursue their personal and career interests in counselling. In fact, over 55,000 people in 27 countries have enjoyed our counselling courses.

Counsellors have a unique opportunity to create a rewarding career helping others gain a higher level of fulfillment in their lives. As an Institute-trained counsellor, you will undertake an enjoyable journey of self-discovery as you achieve satisfaction in assisting others attain emotional wellbeing.

Becoming a qualified counsellor with an Institute course is the ideal way to gain employment as a counsellor; establish your own counselling practice; develop exceptional skills to assist in your current employment; or simply for personal insight and development.

Diploma of Professional Counselling



Our Diploma of Professional Counselling is an internationally-acclaimed and world-class counselling course featuring several popular counselling theories along with the fundamentals of human behaviour and practices of counselling.

The Diploma has received worldwide recognition for its contribution to the counselling industry and will provide you with an excellent platform on which to pursue your career in counselling.

The Diploma of Professional Counselling:

- ✓ Allows you to study from home, increasing your study flexibility to suit your lifestyle
- ✓ Allows you to maximise your investment. By studying from home, online and at your own pace, you will save thousands off traditional classroom or distance education programs because you are not paying for expensive campus facilities.
- ✓ Includes a variety of payment methods, including a regular payment plan, so that you can select the payment method that best suits your needs.

Your course includes 22 Workbooks that contain all the activities that'll assist you master your skills as a professional counsellor. Each workbook has been specifically designed to maximize your learning and assist you develop your skills at your own pace.

Your Books of Readings contain all the underpinning theories and information necessary to build your knowledge. The Readings contain the teachings and methodology used by 56 of the world's leading and most respected counsellors and psychologists.

Course Recognition

As a nationally recognised training program in Australia, you are assured of our Diploma's quality, status and integrity. Because of this official recognition, you are ensured that the content and standard of the course are appropriate to Diploma level education and that the course and its methods of delivery fulfil the purpose for which it was introduced.

Australia's system of recognising training organisations and qualifications is one of the most stringent in the world. As a training organisation, we are required to implement a variety of systems and processes that ensure the quality and accuracy of the training we provide.

These systems and processes include, but are not limited to: business management, course and program development, course delivery, assessing students and marketing of our courses. Subsequently, you are assured of the quality of our course and our integrity as a reputable training organisation.

Our Diploma of Professional Counselling has been developed to meet with a very high standard of education. We utilise the resources of leading authors and texts in the counselling field from around the world. As such, our Diploma examines most of the prominent counselling models and approaches used by specialists today.

Our Diploma is also recognised by the Australian Counselling Association, a national peak association of counsellors and psychotherapists.



Study Support System

Since 1990, we have been proud to set the benchmark for service and support in external counselling studies throughout Australia. We are the only counselling educator in Australia to offer a complete external study support system that has been developed over many years of research and through continual feedback from students.

Study Assistance with Degree-qualified Education Advisers

As a student you have unlimited access to the Institute's Toll Free 1300 Study Assistance Line. Our Degree-qualified Education Advisers are available between 9am and 5pm EST Monday to Friday to provide you with friendly academic support. Their main focus is to support you throughout your studies so that you are able to graduate in the time frame you set. This includes answering questions on assignment topics, personal coaching on assignment writing, and giving hints and tips on specific concepts. The Study Assistance Line is there if you feel you need the extra guidance.

Practical Experience

The structure of the Diploma of Professional Counselling ensures you graduate with a sufficient level of practical skill so that you can apply your counselling knowledge and skill with confidence. The course includes a number of compulsory practical components that cover a range of topics including Stress and Stress Management, Communication, Counselling and Interview Skills, Practical Application of Counselling Therapies and Group Counselling.

Because we have students who live anywhere in Australia, and indeed the world, we have a variety of options available to enable timely and effective completion of the practical components. Seminars give you the opportunity to apply the theory you have learned in contemporary counselling scenarios. It is also a great chance to get together with fellow students and participate in casework sessions under the guidance of a qualified Lecturer. To help facilitate your learning, our seminars use case scenarios relating to everyday, contemporary issues and provide a wonderful forum for group discussion and interaction. Seminars are held regularly in most capital cities throughout Australia.

Students are also able to complete their practical components by recording their demonstration of skills on video tape and sending in to us. We have detailed guidelines available to assist students compile their videos and develop effective role plays to demonstrate their skills.

Tutorials

Tutorials are an optional study support service that is available at many Student Support Centres. Tutorials provide you with specific support with each written subject. They are conducted as a two-hour mini-lecture and will assist you in understanding theory, provide you with tips on how to structure your study timetable, help you successfully compile your assignments and give you the opportunity to ask any questions you may have.

If you are unable to attend a tutorial, you are invited to call our Toll Free Study Assistance Line and have your questions answered over the phone.

Institute Website

The Institute website contains an Online Resource Centre where you can access many study support and e-learning functions through. You can:

- Download your workbooks to complete your activities and upload for marking,
- Contact an Online Education Adviser for study assistance,
- Access a Knowledge Base of the most commonly asked questions for particular activities and concepts
- print out Study Hints and Tips for every Unit, and
- See when the next seminar in your area is on.

Unique Resources to Expand your Learning

The Institute has developed a range of unique resources to help you expand your knowledge and practical skills through your studies.

As a student, you automatically receive a complimentary subscription to 'The Professional Counsellor' newsletter. This newsletter is an industry-first publication and is full of practical case studies and counselling scenarios to test your skills and broaden your knowledge.

You also have the choice of linking into the monthly audio program, 'Counselling Talkback'. This audio series reviews many topics covered in the Diploma and helps you apply them in a real life counselling situation. Some of the topics include Creating Empowering Affirmations, Strategies for Building Self-Confidence, How to Cope with Grief, How to Lead a Counselling Group, Learning to Live with Midlife Crisis, and many more.

We also have a large reference list of books and resource tools available for students who wish to broaden their reading. This list covers the areas of Counselling, Psychology, Sociology and Behavioural Science.

Advanced Study Majors

The Diploma of Professional Counselling is supported by a number of optional Advanced Study Majors. Advanced Study Majors allow you to study and gain advanced knowledge and skill in the specialised counselling area of your choice. The Advanced Study Major Program involves the completion of one or more optional Advanced Study Majors in addition to the Diploma of Professional Counselling.

The Majors provide you with the opportunity to specialise in any of the following highly relevant fields of counselling:

- [Abuse Counselling](#)
- [Relationship Counselling and Conflict Resolution](#)
- [Career Counselling](#)
- [Grief and Loss Counselling](#)
- [Child Development and Effective Parenting](#)
- [Workplace Counselling](#)

The Majors are specifically designed to provide you with a higher level of practical and theoretical knowledge in a specialised field of counselling. You are able to enrol into an Advanced Study Major at the time of your enrolment into the Diploma of Professional Counselling, or at any subsequent time. The advantage of early enrolment in an Advanced Study Major is that studies can be completed concurrently with your Diploma. There is also no limit on the number of Advanced Study Majors you can undertake.

The Advanced Study Majors can be completed by either a home-study or face-to-face mode of study. Studying your ASM via the traditional home-study option follows a similar process as to completing your studies for the Diploma. Students are sent a workbook and readings for the ASM and submit their assessment for marking.

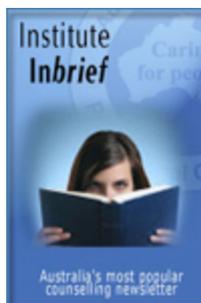
Alternatively, students are also able to complete their ASM by attending a workshop. Many students enjoy the interactive, practical workshops because they are a refreshing change from the traditional external study method and provide the opportunity to meet other students. Students also have the flexibility to change into this mode of study even after selecting the home-study option.

Resources

In the early 1990's, the Institute started its activities with the 'Professional Counselling' course, a pioneering course in the counselling industry. Fifteen years later, the Diploma of Professional Counselling has evolved into a flexible, responsive and comprehensive course.

But the Diploma is not alone in its evolution. During recent years, AIPC has instigated a range of learning tools to augment the counselling studies of AIPC students, including:

Institute InBrief Newsletter - www.aipc.net.au/eZine



AIPC's fortnightly ezine is Australia's most popular electronic counselling magazine. Regularly delivering informative and useful articles on counselling, the latest industry news, and what's happening at the Institute, *Inbrief* is an easy way for readers and students to keep in contact with the Institute.

The AIPC Article Library - www.aipc.net.au/articles



This easy-to-access online library contains articles featured in the Institute's various publications. Apart from a wide range of articles from several counselling areas, you can also take advantage of the practical format which allows YOU to be automatically notified of every new publication FRESHLY in your PC or laptop.

Counselling Therapies DVD - www.aipc.net.au/video



This educational DVD is ideal for students of counselling and contains a series of role plays demonstrating the key counselling techniques for five respected therapies. Each role play is approximately 12 minutes in length and includes captions of the specific skill as it is demonstrated.

The Life Effectiveness Guides – www.aipc.net.au/eguides



AIPC's Life Effectiveness Guides provide people with information, strategies and skills to deal effectively with complicated situations they face in life. They are professionally presented in an easy-to-understand format with diagrams, case scenarios and personal exercises to help the reader understand their feelings and comprehend what to do to cope with the situation.

Counselling Connection – www.counsellingconnection.com



The Counselling Connection Blog was designed to enhance communication with you and to encourage networking between industry participants. How? Each section contains up-to-date content that is highly relevant to anyone involved with the counselling industry. The content is reviewed weekly and updated by a dynamic Support Team.