Report 2

AIPC's Counsellor Skills Series

Client's Effectiveness & Conflict Resolution Skills

Australian Institute of Professional Counsellors

Caring for people

- Stress Management
- Relationship Management
- Time Management
- Wellbeing and Vitality
- Other Effectiveness Strategies
- Conflict and Childhood Attachments
- Values and Conflict Resolution
- Negotiation Skills
- Assertiveness Training
- Anger Management Strategies

About This Series

"AIPC's Counsellor Skills Series" is a 5-Part Series exploring a range of skills counsellors can utilise to assist clients in achieving optimal outcomes in life. These reports were professionally written for Counsellors, Mental Health professionals and other Counselling enthusiasts, and are completely free of cost.

We hope you enjoy this reading. We encourage you to forward this publication to friends and colleagues. If you would like to write feedback, email blog@aipc.net.au.

Kind Regards,

Sandra Poletto

Sandra Poletto
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Institute of Professional Counsellors

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You can download other AIPC free publications from www.counsellingconnection.com. Simply visit the URL above and search for the "Free Publications" section on the Right-Column of the Blog.

AIPC's Institute Inbrief
A compendium of best articles published in our official newsletter's first 50 editions, from 2003 to early 2007.
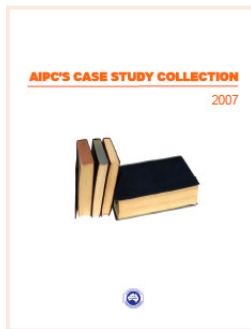
AIPC's Case Study Collection
A collection of 20 professionally-written Case Studies, divided into 5 Categories: Counsellor Microskills; Counselling Therapies; Family Counselling; Grief and Loss Counselling; and Stress Issues in Counselling.
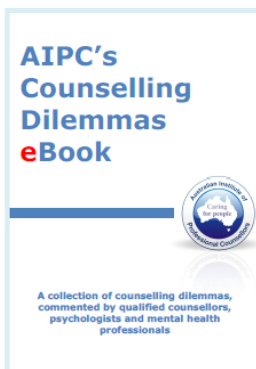
AIPC's Counselling Dilemmas
A compilation of 18 professionally-written counselling dilemmas, including comments, opinions and strategies from qualified counsellors, psychologists and mental health professionals.
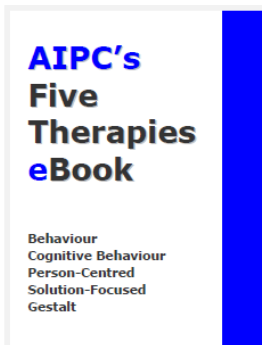
AIPC's Five Therapies
An exploration of counselling's five mainstream therapies' histories, key concepts, applications, benefits, disadvantages and processes.

Effectiveness Skills

WHAT ARE EFFECTIVENESS SKILLS?

Life can be challenging at times. How clients cope with these challenges has an enormous impact on their happiness and wellbeing. Relationship, family, emotional and financial circumstances all influence their level of stress and their ability to cope with situations in their lives.

Thus, teaching clients how to effectively cope with common life challenges, such as daily stress or relationship problems, is extremely valuable for the counselling process. In the first part of this series, we discussed a range of skills counsellors utilise to assist clients – with a focus on improving the counsellor/client communication process.

In this second report, we switch the focus from skills counsellors utilise - to skills clients can learn and **apply themselves**. Thus, we explore some common problem areas clients are faced with - and showcase skills and strategies counsellors can teach clients, with the aim of helping them improve their overall effectiveness.

STRESS MANAGEMENT

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.

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.

Daily management of stress - How do clients cope with stress? There are literally thousands of books, articles and websites that cover stress and stress management. However, the ancient and natural ways are probably still the best ways towards peace and serenity. The old adage, 'prevention is better than cure' is certainly true for stress management. Here are some tips that counsellors can recommend to clients:

Heave a healthy lifestyle: health is wealth. It cannot be stated emphatically enough. The only happiness that we can ever enjoy in this world is life, and having a great life starts with being healthy. Sometimes, people are ill equipped to face the stressors in their lives because their bodies cannot handle activities involving pain, endurance and strength. This means exercise and eating a healthy nutritious diet.

Exercise regularly: regular exercise is a great way to manage stress. You should do some form of exercise that causes you to feel puffed afterwards. A leisurely stroll to the bus stop is not enough! Have at least 20 minutes of exercise three times a week.

Eat well: a nutritious diet is important. Eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetable and avoid sweet and fatty foods.

Avoid conflict: avoid situations that make you feel stressed as much as you can. Avoid unnecessary arguments and conflict if you find them stressful (although ignoring a problem is not always the best way to reduce stress).

Relax: make sure you give yourself some time to relax each day and try to spend time with people who make you feel good about yourself.

Sleep: a good sleep routine is essential. Do something calm and relaxing before you go to bed, like listening to music, reading, or taking a warm bath if you have difficulty falling asleep.

Enjoy your life: stop to smell the roses. It's important to make time to have some fun. We get easily entangled with daily concerns. Our society seems to be heading towards self-destruction. We work all day; we even work many additional hours at our job just to get rich quickly or to help make ends meet and a lot of people forget to enjoy life in the constant surge of their businesses. Always remember that happy thoughts, and moments, make us joyful. It is good if you will learn to reward yourself from time to time.

Communicate: people who haven't learnt to say NO, people who are unable to admit to mistakes and weaknesses are highly stressed individuals. A simple misunderstanding between you and your boss or your teacher can really make or break you. Often times, it is the small things that are neglect in communication.

Prioritise: have a battle plan. Get your life in order! For a good many people it may seem hard to do this. However, the benefits to your levels of stress are huge. In financial matters, always weigh between needs and wants. According to Da Vinci, simplicity is still the ultimate sophistication.

RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

There are a variety of stages within a relationship, where in the initial stages the mixture of emotional excitement brought the couples together, six or sixteen years later the love that has evolved is very different. The various stages that transpire within a relationship are quite normal, and are necessary for growth and development.

Every relationship has its teething periods, but the problem really isn't 'what' happens but rather how clients handle and deal with those issues that matters. Conflict is to be expected in every relationship. Everyone has their own belief systems and personal habits which have been learnt from young and some of these may irritate the other person, no matter how much love there is. In healthy relationships, couples are able to settle their differences whether it be by compromising or acceptance.

For others, where there is no resolution, tension and frustration sets in, causing the couple to become detached within the relationship and leading emotionally distant lives. This is when couples are faced with a relationship breakdown situation, and at this point a decision needs to be made to either make the relationship work, or to end it.

Improving Communication in a Relationship

Communication is vital in any relationship. Understanding can be created and perhaps any hurt can be healed provided people can be kept in communication with each other. Therefore communication and problem solving are key areas to be considered when dealing with relationship counselling.

The counsellor's aim here should be twofold:

- To help clients acquire skills and practice in communication and developing and maintaining affinity and rapport.
- To help clients acquire skills and practice in dealing with conflict situations that are "getting out of hand".

Research has shown that openly expressed anger is not a factor in the deterioration of relationships. Instead it is **contempt**, **belligerence**, and **defensiveness** that bring about the deterioration. Where feelings and opinions are not openly and clearly expressed things go downhill.

Where there is a clear expression of feelings and opinions, even if this is done in anger, there can be a de-escalation of negativity (Gottman, et al, 1998). Furthermore, active listening is not necessarily an element in conflict resolution. Not surprisingly, couples find it difficult to paraphrase, summarise and validate their spouse's feelings in the heat of an argument. Active listening and the associated skills may be of most use in preventing conflict and maintaining understanding and affinity; a more specialised approach may need to be taken with conflict itself.

If a healthy expression of emotion can clear the air and lead to resolution of problems, then it would be of benefit to coach the couple, as needed, towards **assertion and the open communication** of feelings and needs.

Then as they progress into their relationship they have at least been given them a reference point, something they can look back on. And they can always see the counsellor again for a refresher course in these skills.

Having interacted with the clients by now on a number of occasions the counsellor will be in a position to assess their need for some coaching in relation to their speaking, listening and conflict resolution skills. What sort of listeners are they? In interviews with them, a counsellor could ask one to paraphrase what the other has been saying, then repeat this exercise with their partner. Has one of them drifted off? Have they put their own interpretation onto what they heard their partner say?

It might pay to look into how the listening style of each person developed. Were they listened to in childhood? How has this affected them in the present? Are they talking a lot to compensate for not being listened to when they were younger? In general is there a pattern in their communication, and is there anything that is either dysfunctional or that has the potential for future conflict?

What sort of arguments have there been between them, how did they begin and if they were resolved, how was this done? Are they bringing anything with them of note in these areas from their family of origin?

Poor Communication in Relationships

Lack of communication is a common problem and the one that probably needs most attention. One partner or sometimes both simply don't know how to put into words what they feel. They may have grown up in a family where personal feelings were never shared openly, and so they lack the confidence to be open with their partner for fear of looking silly or being rejected.

When problems arise in relationships, it is often as a result of poor communication. In order to communicate desires and needs to a partner, clients need a healthy sense of their own identity. A successful relationship is dependent upon there being two individuals with a strong sense of self and clearly defined, healthy, personal boundaries. An appreciation of their own qualities enables them to see and value them in another and increases their capacity for intimacy and commitment.

Increasing their understanding of who they are and how they have developed as well as learning practical skills in communication and problem solving, can lead to more satisfying and harmonious relationships, and to personal fulfillment (below are two communication drills that relationship counsellors can utilise to assist clients).

Client Resource #1 - Attending Drill

Have the couple sit facing each other in reasonably straight backed chairs. Tell them they are not allowed to talk, look away, or make gestures at each other, only that they should sit and maintain eye contact and 'be there' until they are told to stop.

One or both of them may go through varying degrees of discomfort doing this. The solution is to keep doing the exercise. It is not unusual for dormant emotions to be stirred by this exercise. In that sense it has a cathartic value, provided one continues with it. In time everything will settle down and the intrinsic discomfort will have disappeared.

Once there is a genuine ability to attend, a person's other communication skills will improve considerably. This is an excellent exercise for a couple. It can lead to them being much more stable and confident in being able to communicate to each other.

Client Resource #2 - Listening Drill

Once people have better attending skills, they can build up their ability to listen and interact with others. A counsellor can begin to address any communication deficiencies they observe in their clients by having them practice drills of this kind.

Have *Person A* take up an attentive listening position.
Have *Person B* talk about something they are interested in or concerned about.

A listens, uses minimal encouragers ("Go on", "Yes…?" etc) and open questions ("How do you feel about that?"… etc). When B has finished, A thinks over what was said, how it was said, body posture and facial expressions and thinks about how they feel about what was said.

Person A sums up what was said by Person B "I gather that… happened and that you are…" or something along those lines. Ask B how this felt.

Turn this around a few times. Let each of them practice listening to the other with good attending skills, then have them paraphrase what was said. The clients should keep in mind that attentive listening is a key. When this is done well, the rest of the skills should fall into place naturally.

If the person who is listening and paraphrasing is sounding a little formal, it may help to coach them towards simply clarifying what was said, with statements like "Did I hear you correctly" and "Is there anything more to that?" They may find that once the other person has fully conveyed what they want to say, it is easier to acknowledge them.

And an acknowledgement is mainly letting the other person know that they have been heard and understood, there is not really any need to elaborate on that.

There are some other basic principles and skills that are worth "teaching" clients and encourage them to consider and apply on their relationships:

- Be clear about what you want to communicate - if you don't know, they won't either
- Use "I" statements, stating what you want or feel rather than making "you" statements about your partner
- Don't blame or label your partner
- Choose a time when you have their attention and there are no distractions
- Take time to listen to what your partner is saying and resist the temptation to interrupt
- If you are unclear or upset about what they have said, check for accuracy before you respond
- Be encouraging and supportive
- Be willing to negotiate

In addition to the principles above, outlining other problem areas in a relationship can help clients develop more awareness in a range of situations:

Unresolved emotional differences - These can put a very firm brake on the development of communication and intimacy in a relationship. Anger, hurt or resentment of one partner by the other, along with a lack of trust or a sense of not being appreciated by their partner, are examples.

Practical difficulties - These can reduce the level of intimacy in some relationships at different times. Examples might be financial concerns, pressures at work, difficulties with children, or just being too busy to really connect with each other.

Childhood experiences - These are often at the root of some people's difficulty establishing intimacy. A person who has experienced a great deal of hurt as a child will often find it hard as an adult to trust their partner, however much they may be in love. Examples of childhood pain that affects adult relationships include long-term conflict between parents, physical or sexual abuse, or a loss or death that was never properly accepted and grieved.

Such experiences can lead to a child having poor self-esteem, a basic doubt about whether or not he or she is worthy of love. These doubts can be carried into adulthood, making it very difficult for the person to open up to someone else in case they are rejected and their doubts are confirmed. Intimacy does not happen by magic. It must be built up over time.

This takes some people longer than for others. Often the harder they work at intimacy, the more valuable and rewarding it is. The following are some client tips that may help.

1. Be positive about what you have in your relationship and let your partner know what you value about him/her and about the relationship.

2. Put it into words, don't assume they already know. Everybody likes to be told that they are appreciated and loved.

3. Create opportunities for intimacy - times when you can be alone together in a situation where you can focus on each other and on your relationship. The harder it is to do this because of the children, work or other commitments, the more important it is that you do it! Try to plan a regular evening, day or weekend for the two of you to be alone.

4. Practise making "I" statements about how you feel. This avoids putting your partner on the spot, and may help him or her do the same. For example "I feel hurt you didn't ask me before you decided" instead of "Why didn't you ask me first?" After an argument look at the deeper feeling behind the anger, hurt, anxiety, or sense of being let down. Talk to your partner about these feelings.

5. Achieving intimacy is not always easy, and sometimes help is needed. Try doing a course or workshop for couples. There are many courses available that combine activities couples complete together with opportunities to discuss important issues about their relationship.

Letting Go and Moving On

For some of clients, the best efforts are not enough, and their relationship comes to an end. Rebuilding their life after a relationship has ended can be a painful and challenging process. The end of a relationship can result in disruption to the extent that clients need to create a whole new way of life - often with a different place to live and with different relationships with family and friends. Finding our feet in these circumstances can be very difficult indeed.

Learning from relationship breakdown - A divorce, separation or, in general, any loss of an important relationship is a painful experience. Such pain can seriously diminish their peace and happiness. Clients can, however, use this inner discomfort for their spiritual benefit. If they are thinking of separating, there are many lessons they need to examine before they can come to the conclusion that they must separate from someone. But if the other leaves them, or if this separation has already happened, they might be able to benefit from the following.

Robert Najemy, author, lecturer and founder of the Centre for Harmonious Living suggests that the first lesson is to examine behaviour to see how that might have contributed to the problem. Only in this way can individuals create a new, healthy relationship if they choose to:

- They may have been seeking constant affirmation in ways that may have been tiring for the other.
- They may have been over-critical, complaining, rejecting or otherwise causing the other to feel unaccepted.
- Their fears may have been causing them to be over sensitive and annoying.
- Perhaps they were playing games of power, who is right or who is more successful.
- They might have been playing roles such as the child, the parent, the saviour, the holy one, the rebel, the teacher or some other role which may have affected the other's behaviour.
- They may have guilt feelings that were making them vulnerable to the other's words or behaviours.
- Perhaps they were not communicating their needs clearly and effectively as an adult.
- They may have been projecting onto the other their childhood or other experiences.
- The other might have been reflecting back their lack of self-esteem or self-respect.
- They may have attachments that were coming between them.
- They may have inner conflicts, which were reflecting back to them from the other.

Regardless of whether they stay with that person or not, they may need to learn to love the other in spite of his or her behaviour. Happiness, security and love are internal states that are always within individuals, if only they allow themselves to experience them.

Clients can use this opportunity to develop greater inner strength so they feel confident and able to face whatever may come to them in the game of life. Most people will need to change their self-image. They need now to learn to accept, love and respect themselves more, so that they do not create the same problem in their next relationship or in life in general.

The lessons to be addressed can be separated into five categories:

1. Learn to communicate more effectively, assertively and lovingly.
2. Let go of some attachments, which are increasing conflicts with others and diminishing happiness.
3. Examine behaviours that might be annoying the other.
4. Free themselves from subconscious programming, which limit their self-esteem and ability to attract the behaviours that they deserve.
5. Develop inner feelings of security, self worth and freedom. Once their happiness, security and love have become internalised, they can experience unconditional love.

Although they need to make every possible step to heal their relationships, if and when a relationship breaks down, there is still much they can learn.

TIME MANAGEMENT

It is said that good time management can add two hours to a person's daily life (Tracy, 2007; Panella, 2002). Those hours can mean the difference between having quality of life and feeling strained; more time spent with loved ones including playing with children and helping them with their homework; having time for a hobby such as creating a fabulous garden; extending their education or they could simply relax!

Teaching time management to clients is not just about focusing on matters of organisation or looking at how to squeeze the maximum amount out of each hour of the day. It is also about investigating the psychological and emotional factors in addition to the usual organisational issues.

Aspects of why the client is not using their time more efficiently or why they have issues with time can be addressed. You can also work with clients to discover why a client is inefficient with their time and their sense of their time not being well spent.

Time management is also something that dovetails well with other forms of counselling. Someone who is stressed and who needs to find more time to relax will benefit from assistance with time management. Couples who need to spend more time with each other, students under pressure as they approach exams and, of course, busy managers, executives and parents are all likely to benefit from help with time management counselling and coaching.

Basic Principles of Time Management

There are some recurring principles in time management that are worth considering:

The 80/20 rule - The 80/20 principle is also known as the Pareto principle. It is based on the ideas of an Italian economist called Vilfredo Pareto. Pareto was a French–Italian economist and philosopher who lived between 1848 and 1923. Initially his observations were based largely on the distribution of wealth.

In other words, he saw that 20 per cent of people owned 80 per cent of wealth. The remaining 80 per cent control only 20 per cent of the wealth. Over time it was realized that the same principle could be applied to many areas. In time management this can be applied in a number of ways. One of these is to say that 20 per cent of what you do accounts for 80 per cent of your results (Koch, 1997).

Prime time - In line with the 80/20 rule is the idea of 'Prime Time'. It is found that not only do 20 per cent of your efforts account for 80 per cent of your results, but also that your best efforts occur in 20 per cent of the day.

In other words, most people are found to be somewhat inefficient for 80 per cent of their time. If someone is found to have a time in the day that is more productive than other times, this is when they should carry out their priority work and this is the time of the day they should protect themselves against distractions and diversions.

Don't try to change everything at once - Also following on from the 80/20 principle, it is best to help a client to focus on certain areas of their life, and set tasks that gradually help them to build from one success to another. For example, if a client is simply not sleeping well and their average day is a disaster due to exhaustion, then we know that a very large result can be obtained by working on this one problem.

Similarly, if we go to a client's workplace and observe them spending 5 out of every 15 minutes looking for something, then we know that helping them to reorganize their work area will give them an immediately significant result. From each success we can go on to the next area, rather than adding to their overload by trying to do too much at once.

New habits take time to form - It can take 21 days to learn a new habit (Tracy, 2007). Therefore clients may need coaching, may need to do homework exercises and may need to repeat basics many times before they will really get a grasp on what they need to do.

Tasks take up available time - When clients are attempting tasks they should keep in mind an old truth about time keeping; that a task will tend to fill the time allowed for it. We have all experienced this. If we think that we will stay up all night if necessary to get something done, often that will be the case.

If we think that a chore will be done some time on the weekend, often we are racing to finish it on Sunday night. This is important when setting goals and deadlines. If people give themselves limitations on the time they are willing to allocate to tasks, they can quickly become more efficient.

What are we going to stop doing? Time is a limited commodity. Management of time is partly looking at what can be done better or more efficiently, but it is of course also going to consist of finding things that should not be done or that no longer need to be done.

Work efficiency and family time - Tracy (2007) makes the important point that what people require of their business and work time is efficiency, whereas family and personal life tends to come down to quantity of time.

Taking a broad look at the problem - If a client wants to manage their time more efficiently, we (as counsellors) have to be able to look at their life broadly and see what may really be going on. As counsellors we might detect some discontentment with life; hidden standards about what people think their life should be or underlying repressed emotions that are making them want to squeeze more out of every moment. People are complex so we have to expect anything. For this reason, this course will focus on a variety of approaches to time management.

Time Management and Goal Setting

Allen (2001) explains that the essence of time management is completing decisions and determining action steps about the things that capture our psychological and physical space. To cope with everyday demands, Allen has suggested a processing sequence of work and tasks:

Collect all situations, projects and tasks that need to be done, including those that keep flowing in on a regular basis.
Process them and work out what actions need to be taken.
Organise the resultant tasks and projects.
Review them and look at options for action.
Do what has been decided.

Allen's approach can be described as 'from the ground up'. He feels that there are still too many people who cannot, despite all their best intentions, thrive on a goal oriented approach to time management. In fact, he believes that setting lofty goals may impose more need for change on people and therefore more demands on their daily schedule.

Certainly, coaches need to be alert for clients chasing unrealistic goals or clients not being content with what they have. However, goal setting is seen as a forte in coaching for helping drive clients through their barriers and strive towards an end result.

Morgenstern (2005) has developed a simple approach to sorting out the things that need to be completed. This is known as the "WADE" formula.

Write it down
Add it up - estimate how long it will take
Decide what to do about these items. This can include the 4 Ds of time management - **D**elete, Delay, Delegate or
Diminish into smaller tasks.
Execute the plan of action decided on.

It may help a client to visualise how they process their incoming work. This system incorporates the 4 Ds of time management - Delete, Delay, Delegate or Diminish into smaller tasks. The Diminish stage is where something is seen to require more than two minutes to be completed and is added to a "Plans and Projects" stage where it is broken down into manageable steps.

Sorting out tasks with constant reference to goals and ideals is a key to time management from a counselling perspective. There are perhaps various ways of going about this.

An approach (The Life Organisation Exercise) is suggested below:

1. Have your client sit with their written goals and objectives handy.

2. Invite your client to complete an inventory of all their unfinished actions/tasks.

3. Have them write down everything they can think of. Write one item for every two or three lines on a page; in other words have them leave space to add notes.

4. Invite your client to get together at home and in the office all the physical things that need doing.

5. Work with them to assess what time these actions will take and incorporate this in their lists. While completing this task they can be grouping items into categories. For example: home, office, children, car, etc.

6. Invite your client to compare this list against their goals and see if the time they will take is justified. They might also see whether or not the actions are justified at all.

7. Apply the four Ds: Delete, Delay, Delegate or Diminish into smaller tasks.

The tasks that maintain priority should be allocated places in the diary or calendar system used by the client. Don't be surprised if a client starts to go through some fatigue and/or emotions while completing an exercise such as this.

Note that your presence with them while they do this exercise is one of the reasons it will work as it will help them work through some mental barriers as they confront a whole mass of incomplete, unfinished business in their life.

Some clients may try to 'escape' the exercise. They will come up with various things that demand their attention, and reasons why they can't sit down and get through it. Without being unkind, guide your client through to completion of this or a similar exercise.

Please note: This is a suggested routine; you may have a variation of this and the client may prefer to sketch plans using diagrams and colour. The important thing is to get the person through what they might not otherwise get through so that they start to get on top of the barriers to personal organisation.

WELLBEING AND VITALITY

There are some simple steps counsellors can take in guiding a client towards better energy and vitality. These steps involve minor adjustments to diet, exercise routines and sleep. Referring a client for a general medical check up is a must if there are any signs of physical difficulties or depression. However, within the framework of counselling there are some very simple things that can be done to boost people to higher levels of efficiency.

Balanced Diet

Helping a client to be more productive can initially be as simple as guiding them towards having a good breakfast. The reason for this has a lot to do with a person's blood sugar levels.

When people get up in the morning their blood sugar levels are usually good, but they decline rapidly with the morning's activity. Most people don't feel like eating and many try to get by with a cup of coffee or some cereal and toast. This sort of meal, even if supplemented with orange juice and bacon, is high in carbohydrate and causes sugar levels to peak rapidly but about an hour later they drop dramatically.

The effect is even worse if a person eats food high in sugar such as jam, doughnuts or sweet pancakes. This peak followed by the drop in blood sugar causes feelings of fatigue and irritability and makes concentration difficult. People who eat protein in their breakfast, such as eggs or fortified milk (milk with skim milk powder or protein powder added) elevate their blood sugar to a good level and it stays consistently high throughout the morning.

Studies have shown that no matter what a person eats after having no breakfast or a high carbohydrate breakfast, they are susceptible to fatigue and irritability for the rest of the day. It is now generally accepted that people should eat breakfast (with protein) to be able to function for a full day (Davis, 1976; Eades & Eades, 2000; Holford, 2005; Wills, 2000).

Many people drink coffee or tea as a starter for the day. The caffeine in these drinks artificially allows the body's levels of adrenaline and dopamine to rise. Adrenaline is a 'heart starter' and dopamine promotes a sense of well being and alertness. However, because caffeine has artificially stimulated this result, the body's natural regulation is interfered with and caffeine is needed to continually keep the body stimulated.

In other words, coffee and tea drinkers become addicted to caffeine. Over time, this may lead to a higher tendency towards apathy, depression and exhaustion. After only a few weeks of using caffeine, people must either continually boost the levels to get the same result. However, people usually start to lapse into the phase of fatigue and poor concentration. The solution is to stop drinking these sorts of drinks and to allow three or four weeks for the body to readjust. The feelings of fatigue and heaviness will pass (Holford, 2005).

Exercise

When helping a client establish a program that incorporates exercise, it is important to remember that any sort of exercise may be beneficial to the client as long as it is within the capabilities of the individual.

Please remember that such advice should only be given in conjunction with other health professionals. As a counsellor you may find your role to be more that of a motivator, to get people sufficiently focused on their goals that they are willing to make some changes in their lifestyle.

Mental Fatigue and Burnout

When working with a client it should become clear if they are overdoing things. They can then be counselled towards simple remedies such as:

Taking regular breaks at work. Rather than work at something for an hour, they might try working for 45 minutes and then replenishing themselves with 15 minutes of stretching or fresh air. People often get caught in a pattern of slogging away trying to produce resulting in draining themselves of their energy and never feeling any rewards. These small breaks can be considered rewards as part of a behavioural management system, whereby production is then rewarded by a break.

Scheduling family time and down time. Too many people treat such things as though they are of secondary importance. However, such activities should be included in a time management plan as with anything else.

Taking a walk. This is a walk not where they continue to think about things, but rather a walk where they focus their attention on what is going on around them. This also expands the mental zone around someone who may have spent several hours of the day fixated on a computer screen or a task that was immediately in front of them. In fact, you can break someone's cycle of introspection by asking them to notice things in the environment such as "Look around here and notice something you haven't noticed before". This can be extremely refreshing for some people.

Sleep

People who are stressed and overloaded usually need more sleep; it is ironic however that their sleep is affected because they are stressed and overloaded. A number of factors can be investigated to help improve sleep (Holford, 2005; Mattlin, 1979):

Keep to a regular schedule of going to bed.

- Establish a ritual for going to bed. This might involve reading to children, putting pets to bed, drinking milk, checking the doors and other rudimentary actions. They all help to start to signal to the consciousness that it will soon be time to switch off.

- Keep caffeine levels low.

- If hungry, eat a light and easily digested meal. Cereal or toast is recommended. Anything heavy will require too much effort in the digestive system, thereby keeping the person awake.

- Have a definite cut off point for the working day, and allow some time before going to bed to wind down. Stretching, yoga, reading, meditating or sex are activities recommended in this time period. Television and the internet are not recommended.

- Keep a journal and write down the events of the day. This is a way of getting the day out of one's head. A few minutes of reviewing the day, perhaps an hour before retiring can be helpful. Clients should be advised to keep it light and not get into too much analysis of what has happened in the day. If they really want to start looking into things, they might try restating the day expressed in positives or writing down what they have learned from the day that is useful.

- Don't get into a routine of using sleeping pills or alcohol. They may be effective in a crisis but their usefulness will wear off in a couple of weeks, leaving a situation that is worse than it was before.

- Have a comfortable bed. Many people overlook this, as they become accustomed to what they are sleeping on and they don't realize there is anything wrong. It pays to try different beds until they find one they feel comfortable with.

- Keep noise and light to a minimum. People who think they sleep successfully through intermittent noises such as trucks and trains going past may have their cycle of deep sleep interrupted, even if they are not fully waking up.

- If you can't sleep, get out of bed and do something simple. Part of the theory behind this is that lying awake in bed is 'conditioning' someone to associate their bed with being awake. Reading or watching something dull on TV may help, as may stretching or light exercise. This may not work for everyone; the key is to find what works for each client.

- Warm milk before bed. Studies demonstrate that the tryptophan in the milk acts as a natural tranquilizer when heated. Tryptophan is also found in eggs, chicken, nuts and seeds. Tryptophan is also sold as a supplement but may only be possible from a doctor.

As well as the aspects discussed above, there are a number of factors that can cause low energy and vitality. The following factors are part of an energy program developed by Cabot (1997):

- Consume anti-oxidants and essential fatty acids to help look after one's cellular level
- Boost the immune system
- Cleanse the liver to optimize its function
- Correct hormonal imbalances
- Handle any exposure to toxic chemicals
- Correct inappropriately prescribed drugs

From this information it becomes even more apparent that counsellors should not hesitate to liaise with medical and health professionals should they suspect a client is struggling with low energy levels. As a counsellor you might be able to help a client rediscover their own successful strategies for sleeping well and keeping their energy levels high, strategies that for some reason have fallen out of place.

OTHER EFFECTIVENESS STRATEGIES

Below are three specific strategies clients can learn to maximise their effectiveness. These are practical strategies that can be implemented immediately in both their professional and personal lives. These strategies can also be used continually throughout their lives as they are simple but powerful mechanisms that can unlock potential and enhance performance.

Seek First to Understand

> "I know that you believe you understand what you think I said, but I'm not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant." Robert McCloskey

"Seek first to understand and then be understood" is an instruction first delivered by Stephen Covey in his acclaimed book *The Seven Habit's of Highly Effective People*. Covey's message is a simple but powerful one. Too often people enter into communications with others with pre-conceived assumptions or notions about what the other person's expectations, ideas or judgements will be.

Rarely are communications entered into without a pre-determined idea of the response people are seeking or expecting. This does little but make communication more complex and susceptible to misunderstanding.

Studies into interpersonal communication have continually discovered that three core qualities foster effective communication. These qualities are defined as:

- Genuineness;
- Respect and
- Empathy.

By incorporating these qualities into your everyday interactions with others, clients can ensure that their relationships and communications become increasingly authentic, valid and meaningful.
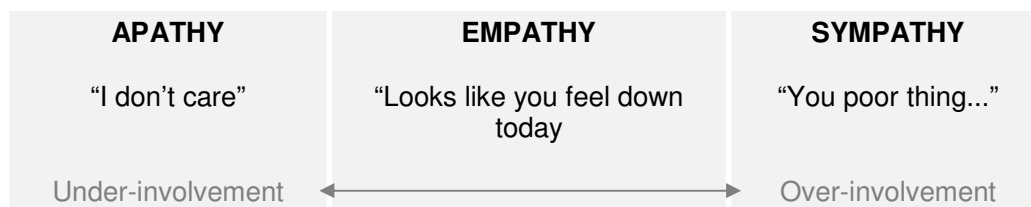
Genuineness - To be genuine in communication is to be open, honest and self-expressive. The degree to which someone behaves in this way is the degree to which they'll be able to significantly relate to another. A conversation devoid of genuineness sees people conceal their thoughts, values or motives. Concealment can lead to defensive responses and ultimately minimal connection between people.

Of course, it is neither advisable nor appropriate to be completely self-expressive in all situations. Genuine communication means engaging in sincere, honest and responsible conversations. It means accepting oneself and expressing who that is.

Respect - Respectful communication is communication that values the other person. When a person engages in respectful conversation he or she appreciates the other person's separateness and self-identity. To facilitate respectful communication:

1. Show consideration for personal boundaries. Avoid asking questions that are overly personal or intrusive. People often show this respect to colleagues and acquaintances but can fail to so with our children or other family members.

2. Don't impose personal values onto others. Appreciating differences in other's values and beliefs is a key step in developing relationships.

3. Avoid making assumptions. Assume someone is thinking or feeling a particular way simply because that would be a natural response or reaction is not advisable. Instead, check with person.

Empathy - Empathy exists on a continuum between apathy and sympathy (see table below).

APATHY	EMPATHY	SYMPATHY
"I don't care"	"Looks like you feel down today	"You poor thing..."
Under-involvement	← →	Over-involvement

Effective communication means showing genuine care and concern for somebody. It does not mean identifying so strongly with another's situation that it becomes debilitating or difficult for the individual to manage. Empathy means **viewing the world through another's person's eyes**. It requires abandoning self-focused communication for authentic connection and understanding.

The more someone develops their communication skills the greater the possibility for genuine conversations based on honesty and respect. It is these conversations that have the power to influence their lives.

Interactions based on genuine connection and consideration lead to improved understanding. This, in turn, maximises the likelihood of successful communication that is not only authentic but leads to results.

Utilise the Power of Planning

> "When it comes to the future, there are three kinds of people: those who let it happen, those who make it happen, and those who wonder what happened." John M. Richardson Jr.

One of the most powerful tools for overcoming procrastination and increasing productivity is planning. Every minute spent on planning can save up to 10 minutes in execution. Planning needn't be time consuming or complicated. It does however need to be regular. Plan everyday in advance and watch your productivity and performance soar.

Planning begins by **creating lists**. With all of the technology available today (such as palm pilots or electronic organisers) it can be easy to forget that a simple list can be a vital planning tool. It is important to always work from a list. When a task comes up, it should be added to the list before completed. People can increase their productivity by 25% from the first day they begin working consistently from a list.

Many people find it helpful to create a variety of lists from which they plan. A popular and well regarded planning system involves the use of four key lists: *Master list*; *Monthly list*; *Weekly list* and *Daily list*.

The *Master list* contains everything the individual wishes to accomplish sometime in the future. This is the brainstorm list where they can capture all of their thoughts and ideas. Anything at all that they would like to do should be included on this list.

The *Monthly list* is made up of all of those things that they would like to achieve within the month. Some of these items may have been transferred from the Master list.

The *Weekly list* is a record of all those tasks that need to be accomplished within the week. This list may, of course contain items that have been transferred from the Monthly list.

Similarly, the *Daily list* includes all those items and activities that need to be achieved within the day. As people progress through the items on lists, their sense of progress and accomplishment will become almost tangible, creating a sense of momentum and dramatically increasing their effectiveness.

Lists should be continually evolving and changing. It may be helpful to create a routine around list creation. Setting aside some time every evening to clearly plan the next day can be part of this routine.

Identify Obstacles

> "The block of granite which was an obstacle in the pathway of the weak becomes a stepping-stone in the pathway of the strong" Thomas Carlyle

What factors are holding your clients back, slowing them down or preventing them from achieving their goals? Almost all progress toward a goal or series of goals comes up against a limiting factor of some kind. It is crucial to help clients in identifying these limits or obstacles in order to eliminate them. Progress at the pace they'd like and in the direction of their goals requires the systematic removal of obstacles that undermine advancement.

Identifying the true obstacle to progress takes honest reflection and analysis. Obstacles may be entrenched within organisational structures or culture. Conversely, obstacles may be embedded in their own minds, in the beliefs that they hold and the behaviours that they routinely perform.

By encouraging them to reflect honestly on the obstacles within their own mind, counsellors can help clients to focus their energies on **removing or eliminating the most appropriate obstacle**. This of course is preferable to spending valuable time removing external obstacles that are inconsequential to their progress.

Personal Obstacles - Personal obstacles consist of any belief, thought or action that may sabotage an individual's progression towards their goals.

They may include:

- The attitudes people hold about change and progress – e.g. does your client believe that progress is controlled by them or controlled by something external, such as luck or destiny? This is the concept of *locus of control*. Locus of control refers to the extent to which a person believes they are in control of their destiny.

  An individual with an external locus of control attributes change largely to forces outside of themselves such as fate, good fortune or bad luck. Conversely, those individuals with an internal locus of control are more likely to see change as a function of their own doing. Individuals with an internal locus of control tend to be more comfortable with change and consequently make smoother, more efficient progress.

- Self-limiting thoughts - Self-limiting thoughts are ingrained processes of thought that impact on the way in which people appraise, interpret or analyse a given situation or event. Self-limiting thoughts can take many forms, such as:

  1. Black and white thinking – The tendency to interpret events in extremes (no shades of grey). This means that anything less than perfect is interpreted negatively and limits your clients' ability to see the positives.

  2. Unrealistic expectations – The tendency to pre-empt an event with unrealistic ideas of what should occur.

  3. Selective thinking – This is the tendency to hone in on the negative aspects of a situation and ignore any of the positives, leading to an unbalanced perspective.

  4. Catastrophising – Imagining the worst possible outcome. This can discourage action and stall change.

Lack of assertiveness - Assertiveness is the ability to communicate self-assurance to others. It involves being direct and clear about what one wants without aggression or hostility. An individual lacking assertiveness may miss opportunities and may be taken advantage of by others.

A lack of assertiveness can interfere with the achievement of your client's goals. If you suspect a lack of assertiveness may be an obstacle to your client, it may be useful to focus on assertiveness training and communication techniques to assist them in eliminating this obstacle (assertiveness training is explored in more details at the conflict resolution section of this publication).

Vague time management - Vague or unfocused time management can impact greatly on the achievement of tasks and can ultimately impact on the quality of an individual's performance. If your client finds that time slips away from them and meeting deadlines is difficult, they may benefit from focusing on their time-management skills.

It is possible, however to have well-developed time-management skills, but find difficulty prioritising tasks. Sometimes guilt and expectations can distract people from concentrating on their self-focused goals. If this rings true for your client, consider the section on self-limiting thoughts.

Conflict Resolution Skills

WHAT IS CONFLICT?

Conflict occurs when people (or other parties) perceive that, as a consequence of a disagreement, there is a threat to their needs, interests or concerns.

There is a tendency to view conflict as a negative experience caused by abnormally difficult circumstances. The people in the dispute (also known as disputants) tend to perceive limited options and finite resources available in seeking solutions, rather than multiple possibilities that may exist 'outside the box' (Healey, 1995).

Therefore, conflict can be defined as a disagreement through which the parties involved perceive a threat to their needs, interests or concerns (Mayer, 1990). Conflicts, to a large degree, are situations that naturally arise as we go about managing complex and stressful life situations in which clients are personally invested (Ury, 1988).

How Clients Benefit From Conflict Resolution Skills Training - Conflict comes about from differences between individuals; their needs, values and motivations. Sometimes through these differences individuals can complement each other, but at other times there will be conflict. Conflict is not a problem in isolation, its how it is dealt with that determines whether it resolves or escalates (Helpguide, 2006).

Conflict can endanger relationships, but if handled effectively, it can provide opportunities for growth, ultimately strengthening the bond between two people. Since relationship conflicts are inevitable, learning to deal with them (rather than avoiding them) is crucial (Bercovitch, 1984).

As a counsellor, recognising and managing conflict is also an essential part of building emotional intelligence. By being able to teach clients the skills needed for resolving conflict you are assisting them to keep their relationships strong and growing.

An unresolved or ignored conflict can engage large amounts of our attention and energy. It is not always easy to fix the problem that ignites a conflict, but it can be of great benefit to provide clients with the skills to manage conflict effectively.

CONFLICT AND CHILDHOOD ATTACHMENTS

It can be helpful for counsellors to understand the client's childhood experience of the attachment, formed with their primary caregivers in early childhood. This can affect clients as adults, as it creates expectations of how others will respond to them in the future (Hater, 1990).

People who grow up believing their needs will be met are resilient and able to remain focused, relaxed, and creative in challenging situations. People who grow up without such expectations will fear conflict, and will not trust themselves in conflict situations.

The aim of conflict resolution is to encourage clients to preserve their relationships and help them grow, by being able to confront and resolve conflicts promptly - without resorting to punishing, criticism, contempt or defensiveness (Conflict Resolution Network, 2006).

Types of Attachments - attachments developed in our formative years can be broadly categorised as either secure or insecure. Individuals who experienced mostly secure attachments with primary caregivers are likely to exhibit a secure response in the face of conflict. Similarly, individuals who experienced mostly uninvolved or insecure attachments are more inclined to display an insecure response in the event of conflict (Hater, 1990).

Secure responses to conflict are characterised by the capacity to recognise and respond to important matters; readiness to forgive and forget; the ability to seek compromise and avoid punishment; and the belief that resolution can support the interests and needs of both parties.

In contrast, an insecure response to conflict is characterised by an inability to recognise and respond to important matters; explosive, angry, hurtful, and resentful reactions; feelings of rejection, isolation, shaming, fear of abandonment, and the withdrawal of love; an expectation of bad outcomes; and the fear and avoidance of conflict (Hater, 1990).

For many, attempts to deal with conflict result in:

- Avoidance or withdrawal - e.g. let's not talk about it
- Anger and verbal or physical aggression
- Emotional blackmail - e.g. you never, you always
- Inappropriate use of power - e.g. while you're living in my home you will...
- Passive aggression - e.g. not talking to one another
- Compromise and giving in - usually leaving at least one person aggrieved

Not one of the above results is an ideal way to end conflict.

VALUES AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Every person has distinctive viewpoints that are equally valid (from where they stand) as the other party involved in the conflict. Each person's viewpoint makes a contribution to the whole and requires consideration and respect in order to form a complete solution.

This wider view can open up the communication transaction possibilities. It may require one party to change their mind chatter that says: "For me to be right, others must be wrong" (Alexelrod, 1984).

To apply conflict resolution skills, individuals need to consider how the problem or the relationship will look over a substantial period of time. Looking at the conflict or problem in question in terms of a longer timeframe can help individuals become more realistic about the consequences of the conflict as well as exploring options to resolve the conflict (Alexelrod, 1984).

People experiencing conflict tend to respond on the basis of their perceptions of the situation, rather than an objective review of it. This is where having a counselling intervention can benefit someone in overcoming their subjective frame of reference. Subsequently, people filter their perceptions (and reactions) through their values, culture, beliefs, information, experience, gender, and other variables. Conflict responses are both filled with ideas and feelings that can be very strong and powerful guides to our sense of possible solutions (Healey, 1995).

As in any problem, conflicts contain substantive, procedural and psychological dimensions to be negotiated. In order to best understand the threat perceived by those engaged in a conflict, all of these dimensions need to be considered.

When conflicts arise (or are likely to arise), it is important to develop healthy, functional and positive coping mechanisms to identify them, their consequences, as well as the strategies which can be used to manage them. New opportunities and possibilities may be discovered which in turn will transform the personal conflict into a productive learning experience (Healey, 1995).

Creative problem-solving strategies are essential to the application of positive approaches to conflict resolution. There is great importance in developing the ability to learn how to transform the situation from one in which it is 'my way or the highway' into one in which people entertain new possibilities that have been otherwise elusive (Ury, 1988).

NEGOTIATION SKILLS

Negotiation is defined by the Macquarie Dictionary (1998) as 'to confer (with another) with a view to agreement'. There are no formal rules governing how these negotiations are to be conducted, although there are culturally accepted styles or approaches for doing so.

Some of the things a counsellor should be aware of when teaching a client negotiation skills as part of the conflict resolution process is that when a person enters into a negotiation or they find themselves in conflict with another person, the outcomes they and the other person desire appear to be diametrically opposed.

Otherwise there would not be a conflict or need for serious negotiation (Mindtools, 2005). A counsellor should consider the following about negotiation skills training:

1. Determine how much the parties invested (i.e. time, money, emotion, energy). This will help establish whether the outcome is achievable and whether a negotiation will be successful.

2. The difference between a conflict situation and entering a negotiation is that the tension levels are already high when in conflict and relationships may have already been damaged.

3. It is common that both parties see themselves as 'right', and want to prove their 'rightness' to each other. In this sense every negotiation has potential for conflict.

4. If both parties maintain their position of 'rightness', there is little opportunity for resolution or for either party to achieve their desired outcomes. Relationships may be irretrievably damaged and neither party wins.

(Source: www.mindtools.com/CommSkll/NegotiationSkills.htm)

The following are common ways individuals seek to resolve conflict:

Competing is a style in which one's own needs are advocated over the needs of others. It relies on an aggressive style of communication, low regard for future relationships, and the exercise of coercive power. Those using a competitive style tend to seek control over a discussion, in both substance and ground rules. Competing results in responses that increase the level of threat.

Accommodating, also known as smoothing, is the opposite of competing. Persons using this style yield their needs to those of others, trying to be diplomatic. They tend to allow the needs of the group to overwhelm their own, which may not ever be stated, as preserving the relationship is seen as most important.

Avoiding is a common response to the negative perception of conflict. "Perhaps if we don't bring it up, it will blow over," we say to ourselves. But, generally, all that happens is that feelings get pent up, views go unexpressed, and the conflict festers until it becomes too big to ignore. Because needs and concerns go unexpressed, people are often confused, wondering what went wrong in a relationship.

Compromising is an approach to conflict in which people gain and give in a series of tradeoffs. While satisfactory, compromise is generally not satisfying. We each remain shaped by our individual perceptions of our needs and don't necessarily understand the other side very well. We often retain a lack of trust and avoid risk-taking involved in more collaborative behaviours.

Collaborating is the pooling of individual needs and goals toward a common goal. Often called "win-win problem-solving," collaboration requires assertive communication and cooperation in order to achieve a better solution than either individual could have achieved alone. It offers the chance for consensus, the integration of needs, and the potential to exceed the "budget of possibilities" that previously limited our views of the conflict. It brings new time, energy, and ideas to resolve the dispute meaningfully.

(Source: www.ohrd.wisc.edu - Academic Leadership Support)

By understanding each style and its consequences, the results of our behaviours in various situations are obvious.

ASSERTIVENESS TRAINING

Assertiveness is the ability to express one's feelings, opinions, beliefs and needs directly, openly and honestly, assert one's rights whilst respecting the feelings and rights of another (Lloyd, 1998). Non-assertive individuals may be passive, aggressive or passive-aggressive.

Assertive individuals have fewer conflicts in their dealings with others, which translates into less stress in their lives. It also results in stronger, more supportive relationships which can assist clients with stress management (Downing, 1995).

Passive clients avoid conflict by not communicating their needs and feelings, but these behaviours can damage relationships over time. They can feel like victims, avoiding confrontation. The other party doesn't know there's a problem until the formerly passive individual reacts with explosion (Stress, 2006)

Aggressiveness, in contrast, can alienate others and create undue stress. Those on the receiving end of the aggressive behaviour can feel attacked and frequently avoid the aggressive individual.

Over time, people who behave aggressively have more failed relationships and little social support. They don't understand that this is often related to their own aggressive tendencies. Interestingly, they often feel like victims, too (Stress, 2006). It is beneficial for clients who are struggling with passive or aggressive communication to be encouraged by counsellors to become more assertive. In this article, we discuss the assertiveness skills that can be used to teach clients.

How can a client become more assertive?

Step one: Assessment of current communication style - The first step in teaching a client to become more assertive is for the counsellor to assess their communication style.

Inviting a client to answer the following questions will assist in gaining insight into the client's current communication patterns and offer an avenue for discussing changes in their communication approach.

1. Do you have difficulty accepting constructive criticism?

2. Do you find yourself saying 'yes' to requests that you should really say 'no' to, just to avoid disappointing people?

3. Do you have trouble voicing a difference of opinion with others?

4. Do people tend to feel alienated by your communication style when you do disagree with them?

5. Do you feel attacked when someone has an opinion different from your own?

(Source: Rees & Graham, 1991)

Step two: Communication skills - The second step is to teach clients how to apply assertive communication in practice. The following skill-set provides an established procedure that clients may adopt when they are first learning how to communicate assertively.

Assertive Communication Techniques:

> **Stating** - When you do ...., when I see you ...., I feel............
> **Checking** - I am not quite sure how clearly I explained that, could you tell me what you think I said?
> **Insisting** - Yes, I understand that you are busy. However, I need to speak to you urgently.

Compromise - I can see that you are very busy right now, can we arrange a time that is convenient for both of us?

> **Goal setting** - Would you be satisfied if we.........?
> **Goal inviting** - What do you suggest that we do so that both of us are happy?
> **Reflecting** - Do you feel .... when I......? I can see that you are really angry.
> **Accepting** - I can understand why you might think that, or how you came to that conclusion.
> **Inquiring** - Were you upset by......................?

(Source: Rees & Graham, 1991)

Step three: Assertive listening - The third step in assertiveness skills training is assertive listening. According to McBride (1998) the primary goals of assertive listening are:

• to accurately understand what another is saying
• to acknowledge that the other person has been understood

ANGER MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

"**Anger**: Kassinove and Sukhodolsky (1995) defined anger as a felt emotional state. This private state varies in intensity and duration, as well as frequency, and is associated with cognitive distortions, verbal and motor behaviours, and patterns of physical arousal. Although anger may emerge spontaneously, another person is typically seen as the cause of anger. And it usually includes a perception of blameworthiness.

Anger is not a form of aggression, and most often does not lead to aggression! Rather it is a felt experience that typically follows unwanted, aversive interactions with close friends, colleagues, and family members. Although anger is common, and sometimes useful, it can become an independent problem with many negative consequences, requiring treatment in the context of individuals, couples, or family therapy in private practice or institutional settings."(Kassinove & Tafrate, 2002, p.12)

Anger is not aggression, hostility or violence (although these may result from the experience of anger), rather anger is an internal event, a feeling, a physiological reaction. For this reason, some clients may find it challenging to articulate their experience. 'Feeling angry' can manifest in a variety of ways. Two clients may state that they feel angry, yet the variation between their experiences may be as broad as the intensity difference between mild irritation and frenzied rage.

Strategy 1 – Record the Episode

To begin the management of anger, both counsellor and client require an understanding of the client's expressive patterns. This can be achieved by encouraging clients to complete an Anger Episode Record. This is a record of each trigger, appraisal, experience, expressive pattern and outcome the client encounters during an established time period.

Defining the Components of the Anger Episode Model

1. *Triggers* are external or internal events, words, thoughts or experiences that elicit an anger response.

2. *Appraisals* are the way in which a trigger is interpreted. A simple teasing statement, meant in jest, for example, may be interpreted by one person as a light-hearted way of building a bond, another may interpret the same remark as an attack on their character. When an individual appraises a negative event as unexpected, preventable and intentional – anger is the likely result.

3. *Experiences* refer to the client's internal awareness of anger.

4. *Expressive patterns* relate to the way in which an individual's private, internal experience of anger is conveyed – common patterns include outward expression, anger-in or indirect anger expression.

    a. *Outward expression* includes instances of direct verbal expression ("You're a jerk"), overt motor behaviours (pushing, shoving) or other forms of aggression (violence, torture).

    b. *Anger-in* occurs when a client consciously chooses not to express their anger. In these instances suppressed anger may eventually dissipate or alternatively the anger may be expressed at another time.

c. *Indirect anger expressions* are instances of passive aggression or covert sabotage. Passive resistance to work demands, not carrying one's weight in a team, intentionally ignoring requests, purposely failing to act in a timely manner and engaging in gossip can all be expressions of anger and as such should not be ignored by the counsellor.

5. ***Outcomes*** are the results generated through the expression of anger. If the result is positive (it provides attention, compliance or admiration of others) the behaviour is likely to reappear in the future. If, on the other hand, the results are not positive (or are ignored) it weakens the likelihood of that behaviour occurring again in the future.
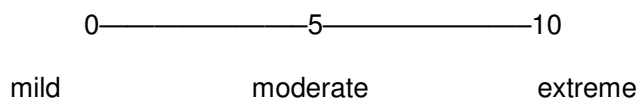
Anger Episode Record - EXAMPLE

Trigger

- The target for my anger was:
- The situation surrounding my anger was:

Appraisal

- The thought I had about the trigger was: _____

Experience

The intensity of my anger was (mark a cross on the scale)

0———————————5———————————10

     mild   moderate   extreme

Expressive patterns

I engaged in the following behaviour during this anger episode:

- Aversive verbalisations (yelling, arguing, threatening etc)
- Physical aggression (kicking, punching, throwing something etc)
- Passive retaliation (doing something deliberately harmful etc)
- Avoidance (escaping through TV or listening to music etc)
- Substance use (drinking a beer, taking an aspirin etc)

Outcome (positive)

1. List the positive short-term outcomes:
2. List the positive long-term outcomes:

Outcome (negative)

1. List the negative short-term outcomes:
2. List the negative long-term outcomes:

The sample template (above) is an example of how a client might record this information. Recording information in this way fosters self-reflection and promotes personal awareness. Additionally, this information can act as a foundation on which cognitive approaches can be launched.

The **anger episode model**, illustrates the linear process from the experience of a trigger through to the final outcome. The **cycle of anger** (click the link below to view image), demonstrates how this linear process is embedded within a continuous cycle of learning.

www.counsellingconnection.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/01/anger-cycle.gif

Our role as counsellors is to effectively thwart the momentum of this learning cycle by assisting clients to modify their response at one or more of the key points within the cycle.

Through the completion of the anger episode record (strategy 1), it is anticipated that clients will have an enhanced awareness of their personal triggers, appraisals and expressive patterns. Awareness, of course, will do little to alter behaviour if clients are not encouraged to engage in corresponding action.

It is therefore essential that any increase in awareness be coupled with appropriate strategies for initiating desired change.

Strategy 2 – Challenge Thoughts

Once appraisals of triggers have been identified, it can be beneficial for both counsellor and client to consider the appraisal and evaluate its validity. This can be achieved through a number of questioning techniques (as outlined below).

Examining the evidence

- What is the evidence to suggest that the appraisal is accurate?
- What is the evidence that supports the appraisal?
- What is the evidence against the appraisal?

Looking for alternatives

- Is there an alternative explanation?

Questioning the effect

- What is the effect of my believing this appraisal?
- What could be the effect of changing my thinking?

Action planning

- What should I do about it?

Double standards

What would I tell_____ (a friend) if he or she were in the same situation?
(Source - Adapted from Beck, J. (1993). Cognitive therapy: Basics and beyond. New York: Guilford Press.)

> **Example Transcript**
>
> Rachel (client): At work the other day I got so mad at Don. He kept interrupting me. It was infuriating!
>
> Counsellor: Yes…
>
> Rachel: It's because he doesn't respect what I have to say. He thinks I'm stupid.

In the above transcript, the client has identified both a trigger and an appraisal of her anger. The trigger is Don's interrupting behaviour which the client has appraised as an indicator that he thinks she is stupid. As conversation continues, the counsellor decides to challenge the client's appraisal.

> Counsellor: Tell me, Rachel, if Don interrupted Gail [Rachel's respected manager], what reason would you give me for why that occurred?
>
> Rachel: Gee, if Don interrupted Gail I would say that he was trying to impress her by dominating the meeting and appearing to be full of ideas.
>
> Counsellor: Right…

The counsellor has used the double standards technique in this example.

Strategy 3 – Self-Calming

"What we think affects the way we feel. Distorted thinking can increase the likelihood of negative emotions such as anger, while calming or challenging thoughts can reduce the impact of these feelings. Self-calming statements are thoughts that can be (1) prepared in advance to anticipate and cope with a situation or trigger; (2) used to cope with the situation or trigger when it arises; and (3) used to calm ourselves down after the situation or trigger has passed."

| Distorted Thought | ←————————→ | "He's getting at me..." |
| Self Calming Statement | ←————————→ | "Don't take it personally..." |

(Source: Williams, E. & Barlow, R. (1999). Anger control training: The anger control training guide (part 3). London: Winslow Press (p. 83).)

Formulating self-calming statements - Self-calming statements can be formulated to assist clients in each stage of responding to a trigger (before provocation, during provocation and after provocation). When an anger-provoking event can be anticipated, clients can formulate self-calming statements that enhance coping skills.

For example, a statement such as - "Remember, this is a fair request. You're doing the right thing by standing up for yourself" - may effectively act as a calming force for an individual about to enter into a confrontational discussion or negotiation. A statement such as - "I don't have to feel intimidated" - can act to calm a client during the discussion or negotiation. And statements such as - "I handled that well" - can reassure the client after the event has passed.

Strategy 4 – Relaxation

The body tends to respond in an innate flight or fight response when faced with an anger-provoking situation. That means that reactions within your body call you to ask yourself whether you should leave the situation (flight) or use your newly produced adrenalin and cortisones to get through (fight).

The body often responds to anger by:

- Increasing sweating to help cool the body
- Slowing digestion to preserve energy for a fight/flight response
- Increasing blood pressure to maximise oxygen production
- Tensing shoulders and back muscles to ready the body for action
- Dilating pupils to maximise focus on the threat

Because of the state of high tension the body endures during an anger experience, clients may benefit from the use of relaxation strategies. When you are in a relaxed state, your body responds in a number of ways:

1. Metabolism slows, as do physiological functions such as heart rate and blood pressure.
2. Muscle tension decreases.
3. Brain wave patterns shift from the faster waves that occur during a normal active day to the slower waves, which appear just before falling asleep or in times of deep relaxation.

Important Note: Not all relaxation exercises suit everyone. It is important, therefore, to try a number of techniques to find one which suits your client. The following example has been included because they take only a few minutes to perform and may be used almost anywhere.

Technique – Erasing Stress

Erasing stress is a visualising technique. It allows you to visualise the thought or situation which is constantly on your mind or inciting anger and helps erase it from your thoughts.

Sit or lie in a comfortable position. Breathe slowly and deeply.
Visualize a situation, a person, or even a belief (such as, "A situation at work which is confronting" or "A home renovation which is causing disruption in the household") that causes you to feel angry.

As you do this you might see a specific person, an actual place, or simply shapes and colours. Where do you see this stressful picture? Is it below you, to the side, in front of you? How does it look? Is it big or little, dark or light, or does it have a specific colour? Imagine that a large eraser, like the kind used to erase chalk marks, has just floated into your hand.

Actually feel and see the eraser in your hand. Take the eraser and begin to rub it over the area where the stressful picture is located. As the eraser rubs out the stressful picture it fades, shrinks, and finally disappears. When you can no longer see the stressful picture, simply continue to focus on your deep breathing for another minute, inhaling and exhaling slowly and deeply.

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