

Report 4

AIPC's Counsellor Skills Series

Reflective Practice, Supervision & Self-Care



- Why Reflective Practice?
- Reflective Practice – An Introduction
- Evaluating Your Performance
- The Importance of Counselling Supervision
- Supervision – Theories & Models
- Supervision – Ethical & Legal Considerations
- Individual vs Group Supervision
- The Importance of Self-Care
- What is Burnout?
- Burnout Prevention
- Improving Work-Life Balance

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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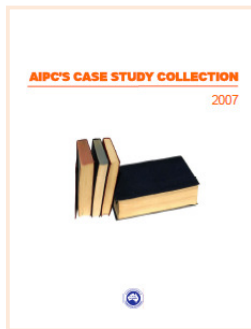
AIPC's Publications

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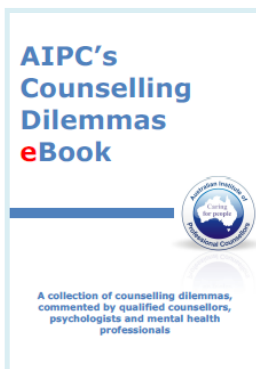
AIPC's Institute Inbrief

A compendium of best articles published in our official newsletter's first 50 editions, from 2003 to early 2007.



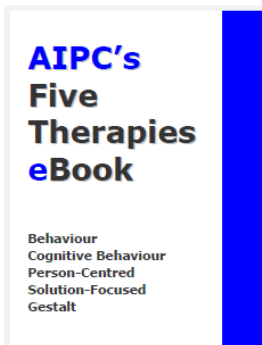
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A compilation of 18 professionally-written counselling dilemmas, including comments, opinions and strategies from qualified counsellors, psychologists and mental health professionals.



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An exploration of counselling's five mainstream therapies' histories, key concepts, applications, benefits, disadvantages and processes.

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Why Reflective Practice?

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".

Becoming a Reflective Practitioner

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE – AN INTRODUCTION

"As important as methods may be, the most practical thing we can achieve in any kind of work is insight into what is happening inside us as we do it. The more familiar we are with our inner terrain, the more sure footed our [work] – and living- becomes."
P. J. Palmer (cited in Skovholt, T. M., 2001)

The quest for self-awareness or self-understanding is a major component of effective reflective practice. Counsellors need not only to be aware of their skills, knowledge and performance as professionals, but also mindful of any personal factors that may interfere or impede their ability to provide an effective and objective service.

It is likely you have already developed a mechanism for analysing your actions, beliefs, reactions and thoughts. Perhaps you reflect through discussion with your partner, family members or friends. Maybe you spend some time thinking about your actions before undertaking them. You may be a journal writer or perhaps utilise BLOGS (on-line web logs).

This course is focused on reflective strategies and as such requires you to undertake some personal journaling. As journaling is most effective when you feel safe to be completely honest and authentic, your answers to the journaling activity will NOT be required for submission.

Reflective counselling practice is **mindful practice**. Reflective counsellors are aware of their own strengths and limitations. They conduct counselling with purpose and intention. They monitor their own levels of stress and are mindful of personal matters that may interfere with their performance. Reflective counsellors take the time to evaluate and refine their performance after each counselling session and are committed to ongoing personal growth and professional development.

There are many processes that contribute to effective reflective practice. Some of these include:

1. Evaluating own performance
2. Developing self-awareness
3. Monitoring potential for burnout
4. Ensuring adequate self-care

Dewey (1933 cited in Sharpy, 2005) first described reflection in terms of 'thinking about thinking' and encouraged professionals to examine the underlying rationale for their choices. In the early 1980's reflection took on a wider scope or meaning when Schon (1983) coined the term 'reflective practice'.

Counselling professionals in their everyday practice face unique and complex situations which may be unsolvable by only technical rationale approaches. Reflective practice is an important learning strategy by which professionals become aware of their implicit knowledge base and learn from their experience.

In effect, reflective practice is a form of experiential learning which enables the professional as the student or learner to move from their own concrete experiences to abstract conceptualisation of an idea, on which further action, leading to further experience, then occurs (Kolb, 1994, cited in Sharpy, 2005).

EVALUATING YOUR PERFORMANCE

Dewey (1933 cited in Sharpy, 2005) first described reflection in terms of 'thinking about thinking' and encouraged professionals to examine the underlying rationale for their choices. In the early 1980's reflection

As with all professions it is important to evaluate your performance as a counsellor. No one is perfect. No one gets it right 100% of the time. Most people are hesitant to objectively look at their performance. However, in counselling, as in many other professions, it is important to be able to critically evaluate how you performed. In this way you can identify any areas that may require change.

There are a number of strategies that can be implemented to assist you in monitoring and/or improving the way you conduct your counselling sessions. Here are a few examples:

Self evaluation - This is the process of reflecting on your own skills, your professional strengths and limitations. Awareness in these areas will enable you to choose professional development or training activities to fill any identified skill or knowledge gaps. Self-awareness of this nature will also enable you to identify clients that are beyond your scope of expertise and will ensure that you refer responsibly.

Client feedback - Providing client with the opportunity to review the counseling process can be tremendously beneficial for both counsellor and client alike. Not only does it acknowledge the client's opinion as valid and valued, it also provides an opportunity for the counsellor to evaluate his or her current approach and adjust or continue accordingly.

Peer review - Peer review enables counsellors to come together and discuss individual cases, ethical dilemmas and brainstorm intervention options. It is a process that can increase counsellor accountability and improve the quality of service offered to clients (please ensure confidentiality policies are appropriately upheld).

Professional supervision - Supervision is an integral part of counseling practice. Within supervision, counsellors can enhance their skill and knowledge base, ensure responsible and ethical practice and monitor their self-care and professional competence. Supervision acts as a mechanism to ensure that a counsellor's approach is aligned with professional standards and reflects the requirements of the industry. This importance of continually reviewing and updating your skills cannot be over-emphasised. Counsellors would, ideally, use all of the strategies listed above to ensure that they maintain a professional and ethical approach to their work.

Developing self-awareness

Schon (1987 in Sharpy, 2005) identified two types of reflection; reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action.

The first, reflection-in-action, occurs when the professional reflects on their own behaviour as it occurs, which enhances their following actions immediately.

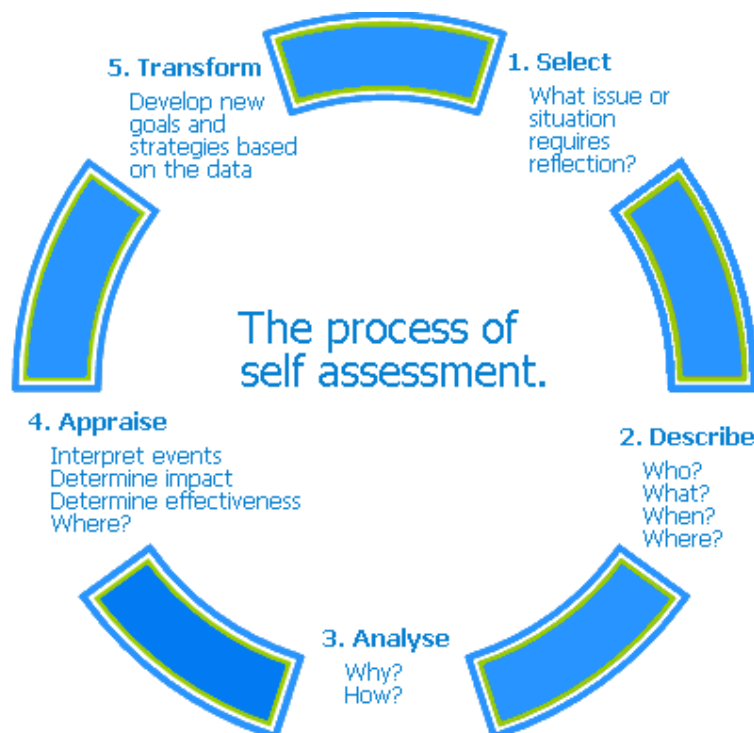
Compared with reflection-on-action which is essentially reflection after the event, where the professional counsellor reviews, describes, analyses and/or evaluates the situation, to gain insights for improved practice in the future.

Self-assessment

By engaging in a reflective process the counsellor begins the ongoing process of blending solid and effective counselling therapy techniques with their applied practice. Reflection therefore, requires thoughtful and honest recording, reporting and analysis of actual practice, philosophy, and experience. Understanding why an activity or practice was productive or non-productive in the therapeutic context is an important component in the progression from novice to master (Self assessment, 2006).

The self-reflection cycle can assist the counsellor to learn how to guide their questions in an effort for them to be better able to understand the reflection process. It also offers a structure or process to guide the counsellor, whilst at the same time allowing flexibility for counsellors to be able to apply their knowledge, skill, and ability in the context of their practice area (Self assessment, 2006).

The reflective practice cycle - The structure of how a counsellor can undertake self-reflection is described below:



Picture (previous page) adapted from Self Assessment (2006)

Step 1: Select

The first step is to identify and select the issue or situation requiring reflection.

Step 2: Describe

The second step is to describe the circumstance, situation, concern or issue related to the topic that has been selected in step one. Who, what when, where questions are then asked here (for example, who was involved (the client/s)? What was the context, circumstance, concern, or issue requiring reflection? When and where did the event occur?).

Step 3: Analyse

The third step in the process of reflection involves analysing and assessing the situation (i.e. to 'dig deeper'). This step explores 'why' and 'how' the action was taken or 'why' and 'how' the decision was made.

Step 4: Appraise

The fourth step requires the counsellor to appraise their behaviour by interpreting the situation and evaluate its appropriateness and impact. This is where self-assessment actually occurs.

Step 5: Transform

The final step is transformation. This step requires counsellors to shift from analysis and reflection into action. What changes can be made to your approach to practice? Has this made any shifts in your practice framework? What differences do you expect to see in the way you approach clients?

Further, becoming a reflective practitioner requires time, practice, and a supportive environment conducive to the development of the reflective process. It is an individualised process whereby the counsellor should discover the best structure and method of reflection that works for them.

Reflective writing or journaling - Learning to write reflectively is a process. In contrast to academic writing, reflective writing involves recording personal views, understandings, ideas or observations and opinions about counselling practice (University of Melbourne, 2006).

Reflective writing is more than simply a description of a counsellor's self-observations or thoughts. Reflective writing asks counsellors to shift their perspective; to see situations from all angles. Through reflective writing, counsellors can begin to, not only, process and assimilate their experience but also learn, grow and develop their skills.

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Reflective Journaling - ACTIVITY

The questions that you will be asked are designed to provide you with initial inspiration to begin journaling. Of course, you are not limited to the questions we have suggested. Once you have found your journaling voice, please use it to express anything that is on your mind or in your heart.

Journaling Questions

Instructions:

Step 1: Locate a notebook and pen.

Step 2: Read through the list of personal reflection questions provided below.

Step 3: Begin by writing the first question at the top of the first page of your notebook. Spend 5-10 minutes writing a response to this question. There is no recommended length for your answer. It may be as short or as comprehensive as you like.

Step 4: Continue in the same manner until you have completed all ten questions.

Reflection Questions

What have I learnt over the last 12 months?

(What new skills, knowledge and insight have I gained?)

What has been my biggest accomplishment to date?

What might I do differently if given a second chance? Why?

What have I done right?

What am I particularly proud of?

What am I most thankful for?

Am I different this year than I was at this time last year? How so?

What motivates me?

What gives me energy?

What am I striving for?

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Issues in Supervision

THE IMPORTANCE OF COUNSELLING SUPERVISION

"Supervisory relationships are a complex blend of professional, education and therapeutic aspects". (Geldard, & Geldard, 2001, p.377)

It is widely accepted that all counsellors, whether experienced or just starting out, will benefit from having regular professional supervision. A supervisor acts in a mentoring role, providing emotional support as well as information and guidance.

Counsellors working within helping agencies will hopefully have supervision sessions built into their work schedules, but it may be overlooked by those working in other organisations or in private practice. While recognising its value, some beginning counsellors may feel threatened by the idea of someone "judging" their effectiveness and avoid seeking supervision if it is not part of their work situation.

Geldard and Geldard in their book *Basic Personal Counselling* (2001) state that all counsellors need supervision to help them resolve their own issues and to avoid burnout in what is an emotionally draining occupation. As well as providing a sounding board for the counsellor's concerns, a supervisor is in a good position to spot the onset of any symptoms of burnout and to assist the counsellor in dealing with them.

Supervision is perhaps the most important component in the development of a competent practitioner. It is within the context of supervision that trainees begin to develop a sense of their professional identity and to examine their own beliefs and attitude regarding clients and therapy. (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 2007, p.360)

A good counsellor will be fully aware of his or her own values, beliefs, attitudes and biases; being aware of them lessens the danger of their impacting negatively on the counselling relationship. We all operate within a personal belief system, but counsellors need to remember always to work with their clients in a way which is consistent with the client's values, not their own.

As in all professions the counsellor needs to be constantly upgrading their knowledge and skills: there is ongoing development of psychotherapeutic techniques, strategies and models and it is incumbent upon us to keep up to date. If we neglect to pursue this continuing learning process we are short changing our clients.

"As practitioners, we can never know all that we might like to know, nor can we attain all the skills required to effectively intervene with all client populations or all types of problems". (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 2007, p.360)

Discussing counselling sessions with a supervisor and getting feedback enables practising counsellors to gain an objective insight into their own performance and skills. It provides an opportunity to learn and practise new skills and to find better ways to help clients. Debriefing is also an important element of the supervisory relationship, enabling the counsellor to look objectively at the issues raised in the counselling session and their response to them.

Due to the sensitive content of many client issues it is easy for a counsellor to become over-involved and for professional boundaries to become blurred; a supervisor will quickly spot this tendency and can intercede to stop it becoming problematic.

Counsellors will be challenged by many ethical dilemmas along the way and the correct path is not always clearly marked; discussing these issues with a supervisor will ensure that professional ethical standards are maintained.

"...professional competence is not attained once and for all. Being a competent professional demands not only continuing education but also a willingness to obtain periodic supervision when faced with ethical or clinical dilemmas". (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 2007, p.360)

Counselling can be a very stressful occupation. A supervisor who is looking on will notice symptoms of undue stress which could lead to burnout. Burnout is an ever present danger, particularly for beginning counsellors and those working in agencies with large caseloads. A supervisor can help the counsellor put prevention strategies in place.

There are several different models of supervision which fall into three main groups: the supervisor is present during the session; the session is recorded; and the counsellor reports on the session. It is important to note that the first two models require client consent; the third can be done without disclosing client details.

Direct observation of the session by the supervisor can occur in three ways:

1. the supervisor is actually present in the room for the counselling session; this would only be appropriate in an agency situation.
2. the supervisor watches the session through a one-way mirror
3. the supervisor watches the session via closed circuit television (CCT)

While the second and third methods are much less intrusive than having the supervisor physically present in the room, it is likely that all three will change the nature of the session. Both counsellor and client may be nervous with a third party present, also the client may choose to withhold some information or details which otherwise may have been presented. These variables will impact on the effectiveness of the counselling relationship to a greater or lesser extent.

Session recording may be video or audio which may pose some of the same problems, but possibly to a lesser extent as the participants may find it easier to forget the observer if they are not visible. If using video or audio taped sessions for supervision it is recommended that the supervisor make the time to study them prior to the supervisory session in order to maximise their usefulness. An alternative approach would be for the counsellor to present specific parts of the recording which they want to deal with but this does introduce an element of subjectivity.

Recording the session will also no doubt affect it in some way but the counsellor can help minimise this by themselves being relaxed about the process. Video recordings obviously provide more information as the non-verbal cues are clear, but they also are likely to make the participants more nervous than an audio recording which is less intrusive.

Self reporting by the counsellor is a much-used method, due to its convenience; it does suffer, however, from its subjectivity which may lead to inaccuracies: the counsellor's perception and/or memory of the session after the event may be unreliable or biased in some way.

On the other hand the resulting dialogue between supervisor and counsellor may bring about greater awareness and understanding for both parties. Process notes, which relate to case notes taken during the session, may be used; these do allow the supervisor to gain an insight into how the counsellor was feeling during the session but are still subject to the counsellor's own interpretation of the events.

Some supervisors believe that they cannot adequately work with the counsellor without either an audio or video recording of the session; others, however, consider that the self-report model offers them a better opportunity to understand the way the counsellor is working. The supervision model used will be a matter of choice and agreement between the supervisor and supervisee.

One aspect of the supervisory relationship which is extremely important and sometimes difficult to deal with is the issue of client confidentiality and informed consent. As already stated, only the self-reporting model of supervision can operate without client consent, and then only if the counsellor carefully maintains the client's anonymity which may be difficult in a small community, for instance.

In both the other models the client will need to give their consent, either to the presence of the supervisor in the session or watching through a one-way mirror or CCT or to the audio or video recording of the session. Some clients may refuse this consent, but the counsellor can improve the chances of its acceptance by the client by presenting the issue in a confident and professional manner. If the counsellor seems flustered or nervous the client will certainly pick up on this and probably decline to participate. It is obviously essential that all aspects of the issue are clearly explained to the client and correctly understood by both parties before seeking formal agreement.

Supervisors may work in an educative or training role, teaching the counsellor new skills and even having an ongoing training and assessment role. If the counsellor is working in an agency or organisation the supervisor will often be in a managerial role. Counsellors in private practice need to seek out a more experienced counsellor who will act in a consultancy and debriefing role.

There is also group, peer or team supervision where the supervisor is at a similar level to the supervisee. Group supervision can provide a range of learning opportunities and perspectives but, like any group activity, needs to be carefully facilitated. Peer group supervision is particularly relevant to more experienced and competent counsellors who have established a good support network.

Most supervisory relationships will be a blend of professional, education and therapeutic aspects, but it is of prime importance that the supervisor relate the supervision sessions to the counsellor (supervisee) and not to the issues presented by the clients.

"Supervisors play multiple roles in the supervision process, and the boundaries between therapy and supervision are not always clear. In the literature on supervision, there seems to be basic agreement that the supervision process should concentrate on the supervisee's professional development rather than on personal concerns and that supervision and counselling have different purposes". (Corey, Corey & Callanan, 2007, p.377)

Counsellors work in a range of different situations including organisations, helping agencies and private practice. Supervision is something which is sometimes overlooked in all three situations.

A counsellor working within an organisation is often working alone in an 'expert' position and may find it difficult to be seen seeking 'outside assistance'; agency counsellors often have much too heavy caseloads and time and opportunity for supervision is extremely limited or non-existent; and a private practitioner may experience initial difficulty in finding a compatible supervisor.

Whatever the difficulties, however, I believe that good professional supervision is a necessity for all counsellors, for learning, for debriefing, for self-development. I also believe that our clients have a right to expect that we do undertake ongoing professional development at all levels, remaining up to date and aware of new trends.

It is also vital that all practising counsellors develop an ability to 'supervise' themselves: to constantly observe, assess and evaluate their work with their clients objectively and truthfully. Perhaps the last word should go to Peter Hawkins and Robin Shohet in their book *Supervision in the Helping Profession*:

"There are many reasons to be proactive in getting supervision for ourselves. First, supervision is a central form of support, where we can focus on our own difficulties as a worker as well as have our supervisor share some of the responsibility for our work with the clients. Second, supervision forms part of our continual learning and development as workers, including eventually helping us to learn how to be supervisors.

A good supervisor can also help us to use our own resources better, manage our work load and challenge our inappropriately patterned ways of coping. We think that, if we are helping clients take more change of their own lives, it is essential that we are doing the same. Finally, there is research to show that good supervision correlates with job satisfaction". (Hawkins, & Shohet, 2000, p.23).

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SUPERVISION – THEORIES AND MODELS

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).

Extensive education and training over a number of years is considered part of the "rights of passage" to becoming a mental health professional. However, the preparation of the formal study for a mental health practitioner is generally two fold:

1. Formal theories and observations that have previously been confirmed and replicated by research.
2. Training in the accompanying skills that have been developed by experienced practitioners over time.

Clinical supervision provides the safe environment in which counsellors can learn to blend these two strands of knowledge and begin to incorporate them into their own working counselling style. As Bernard and Goodyear (1998) explain it, "Supervision is teaching that which occurs in the context of practice and provides a bridge between the campus and the clinic".

As mental health practitioners, we're well aware of the importance of supervision. In this article, we'll briefly explore common supervision models and theories.

Introduction

Kurt Lewin is renowned for claiming that "there is nothing as practical as a good theory". Theories allow us to make vast and complicated amounts of information into understandable concise pieces and to highlight the main issues or focal points of that vast amount of information.

All mental health practitioners and their supervisors function according to at least one theory but very often many theories. The supervisor's challenge is to extend their appreciation of those theories to guide their supervisory work with counsellors.

As supervision is an evaluative process, the theory or theories by which the supervisor chooses to use as a guide need credible and recognisable criteria. Patterson (1986) proposed what he considered to be the six most vital proponents of a theory:

1. Preciseness and clarity; containing clear, consistent, unambiguous wording.
2. Parsimony or simplicity, containing the minimum of assumptions necessary to explain the focus of the point.
3. Comprehensiveness, regarding the use of the known data in that particular area of interest.
4. Operationality, in that the hypotheses and concepts are expressed in clear, evaluative terms.
5. Practicality, or useful to practitioners.
6. Falsifiability, it is important that the theory can be disproved.

The following is a brief examination of psychotherapy-based theories, developmental models, social role models and eclectic or integrationist models of supervision.

Psychoanalytic Supervision

Psychoanalytic supervision is by far the oldest mainly because from its inception, psychoanalysis has addressed the concept of supervision. The supervisor assists the counsellor to be open to the experience that can be considered to mirror therapy whereby the counsellor learns the analytic attitude that includes such attributes as patience, trust in the process, interest in the client, and respect for the power and tenacity of client resistance.

An assumption of the psychoanalytic supervision model is that the most effective way a counsellor can learn these qualities in the supervisory climate is for them to experience these qualities from their supervisor in the supervisory relationship.

Client Centred Supervision

Carl Rogers was concerned with the concept of supervision for trainee counsellors, as he observed from early recordings of therapy sessions that the usual forms of learning were not effective in teaching student counsellors the non-directive approach of person centred therapy. Supervisors soon became starkly aware of this.

Roger, in his client centred therapy introduced the concept of listening and communicating the understanding of that experience with a client in such a unique way that many individuals were not familiar with prior to entering their formal education in counselling.

However, client centred therapeutic skills are more than listening and responding appropriately, they consist of the fundamental belief in the phenomenological process, that the issue of giving advice or instruction becomes superfluous. Therefore, client centred therapy and supervision is about stepping into the experience of the individual who chooses to be influenced, hence it becomes both a mirror and a paradox.

The successful client centred supervisor must therefore have a profound trust in the counsellor, believing the supervisee to have both the ability and motivation to grow and explore both the therapy and the self. This must therefore mirror the trust that the counsellor has in their clients to do likewise.

The challenge with client centred supervision occurs when the process is experienced in the supervisory context, and evidence or behaviour by the supervisee suggests that the supervisee actually has an inability to genuinely believe that their client has the ability to differentiate and move toward self actualisation. A counsellor who finds this incongruous and therefore mirrors this in supervision with their supervisor will have difficulty providing the necessary environment for their clients to change with this process.

Cognitive Behavioural Supervision

Cognitive-behavioural supervision proceeds on the assumption that both adaptive and maladaptive behaviours are learned and maintained through their consequences. As a result, CBT supervisors are more specific and systematic in their approach to supervision goals and processes than some of the other supervisory perspectives.

The supervisory model of the cognitive behavioural therapist consists of building rapport, skill analysis and assessment, setting goals (for the supervisee), implementing strategies, follow-up and evaluation. CBT supervisors accept part of the responsibility for supervisee learning, but define the potential of the counsellor, as the potential to learn, and therefore supervision is concerned with the extent to which the supervisee is able to demonstrate technical competency.

Developmental Approaches to Supervision

Developmental approaches fundamentally focus on how the counsellor will change as they gain further training and supervised experience. Such supervision is based on two assumptions, in the process of becoming competent, the counsellor will progress through a number of stages that are qualitatively different from each other that each stage requires a qualitatively different environment for optimum growth to occur.

Over the years, literally dozens of supervisory theories have been put forth by numerous developmental psychologists attempting to improve on previous theories. The Stoltenberg Model identified four stages or levels:

- During the first level the counsellor is dependent on the supervisor, by their lacking in self confidence, while imitating and endorsing categorical thinking with little real experience.
- Level two, is indicated by an increased awareness in the counsellor and a striving for independence becoming more assertive with less imitation but with fluctuating motivation.
- Level three is indicative of the counsellors/supervisee's autonomy, becoming more insightful and motivated as the supervisor's role now changes to being that of colleague.
- The fourth and final stage finds the supervisee confident with their interpersonal and cognitive skills culminating in a confident professional and is now on equal terms with their supervisor.

SUPERVISION – ETHICAL AND LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

Bernard and Goodyear, (1998) describe the major legal issues for clinical supervisors as malpractice, the duty to warn, and direct and vicarious liability. Malpractice - this refers to harm caused by negligence and is more likely for supervisors to be based on the alleged inadequate performance of their supervisee.

The duty to warn - this refers to the professional judgement and due care taken concerning a person's level of threat to the community and/or public.

Direct liability and vicarious liability - direct liability is when the supervisor is considered liable for the harm caused, whereas vicarious liability is when the supervisor is liable through association in the supervision relationship.

Bernard and Goodyear, (1998) suggests the following list of strategies that supervisors need to employ to ensure best practice:

- Develop a trusting relationship with the supervisee
- Keep up-to-date on legal issues
- Retain the services of an attorney/legal support
- Obtain good liability insurance
- Invest time and energy into doing a good job as a supervisor
- Document all supervisory contacts

An awareness of the codes of ethics that inform the counselling field is integral to professional practice. To retain credibility, both as a practitioner and for the profession as a whole, skills and knowledge in ethical practice should be developed in the supervisee and practiced by the supervisor at all times.

Due Process - supervisors follow a process necessary to fully protect and inform their supervisees of all aspects of supervision. This includes (1) informed consent (clarifying requirements, expectations, rules and roles), (2) assessment and evaluation and the implications of a negative evaluation and (3) the process of appeal. Supervisors need to also ensure that their supervisees are following due process with their clients, particularly in regard to risk and crisis work.

Informed consent - supervisees must receive comprehensive information about the process of supervision before consenting to the relationship. Supervisors are also responsible for ensuring supervisees give their clients the same opportunity for informed consent, including detailed information concerning the supervisory relationship.

Dual Relationships - it is common that supervisors and supervisees will participate in dual professional relationships with one another. Important ethical considerations concerning these relationships are (1) the likelihood that the dual relationship will impair the supervisor's judgement and (2) the risk to the supervisee of exploitation.

There is some evidence to suggest that unethical dual relationships that are modelled during supervision are repeated by the supervisee in their professional practice. As a result, dual relationships are a critical issue and it is essential that the supervisor emphasises the supervisee's understanding of ethical decision-making regarding dual relationships.

Competence - supervisors need to ensure that they participate in continuing education and professional networks to maintain their own professional competence. They should also be aware of the types of cases that they consider themselves competent to supervise. Additionally, it is critical that the supervisor focuses both on the training needs of the supervisee as well as their responsibility to protect the supervisee's clients.

Confidentiality - issues of confidentiality need to be discussed and addressed in supervision and in therapy. Supervisees need to know what information from the supervision sessions may be divulged to other professionals and what will be kept completely confidential.

Supervisors must ensure supervisees discuss confidentiality with their clients, particularly in relation to the supervisory relationship. Supervisors should model and maintain the rules of confidentiality in all types of supervision including group, audio-taped and live supervision.

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INDIVIDUAL VS GROUP SUPERVISION

Supervision generally fall into two main types: structured and unstructured. Structured supervision interventions are supervisor-directed and resemble those of a training session. Unstructured supervision can be either supervisor or supervisee directed and can be more difficult to implement as the supervisor has to facilitate learning without actually directing the session.

Both structured and unstructured supervision are beneficial to the supervisee at different points in their learning process. The three general functions of supervision include:

1. assessing the learning needs of the supervisee
2. changing, shaping or supporting the supervisee's behaviour
3. evaluating the performance of the supervisee

Individual supervision is one-to-one supervision with a supervisor and a supervisee. This can be completed face-to-face, by telephone, or by email, although the latter is still a relatively new area and requires additional attention in relation to relevant practical, ethical and legal issues.

There are a variety of interventions, both structured and unstructured, that the supervisor can employ to assist in the development of the supervisee. One critical issue for the application of different techniques of supervision is that the supervisor focuses on the learning needs of their supervisee, not on client issues.

Bernard and Goodyear (1998) describe in detail the different methods and techniques offered by individual supervision. Below is a brief summary of each:

Self Report - Like a case conference, the supervision technique of 'self report' requires the supervisee to recollect and discuss therapy sessions. This is the most frequently used supervision method and allows the supervisee to reflect in detail their own experiences with their clients. However, the effectiveness of the technique is greatly affected by the insightfulness and observation skills of the supervisee.

Process Notes - This technique requires the supervisee, after a therapy session, to write comprehensive notes about the processes encountered. This is not a literal account of what occurred in therapy, rather an introspective description of the experience from the supervisee's perspective.

The discussion of these notes in supervision can create a productive and meaningful supervisory environment. However, like other self report methods it is dependent on the supervisee's ability to accurately observe internal and external occurrences.

Audiotape - The use of an audiotape of the supervisee counselling sessions is one of the most widely used methods of supervision. Although supervisees are often hesitant to embark on what seems like a very disclosing process, with practice, it can become a valuable tool for both supervisees and supervisors.

While recording counselling sessions is a useful supervision resource, it is important to also consider the impact that this can have on clients and potentially on the therapeutic relationship. Clients must be given the opportunity to refuse to participate in the recorded sessions, and it is essential that their expectation of confidentiality is assured.

Videotape - This can be an expensive and bulky resource, but videotaping supervisee counselling sessions provides the most valuable source of information for the supervision of all the techniques discussed. The problems with this method are that the supervisee needs to be comfortable with the use of technology.

Otherwise, it can cause excessive performance anxiety, and it might provide too much information causing both the supervisee and supervisor to be overwhelmed. Bernard and Goodyear (1998) suggest six guidelines for using video in supervision. These are:

1. Focus supervision by setting realistic goals for the videotaped therapy session.
2. Discuss the internal processes of the supervisee during the videotaped therapy session.
3. Select tape segments that focus on performance that the supervisee is able to change with corrective feedback.
4. Use supervisor comments to create a moderate discrepancy between performance and the target goal.
5. Refine goals moderately as the videotape review must be seen in the larger context of supervisee development.
6. Maintain a moderate level of challenge so that the supervisee is stimulated to grow without becoming overly threatened.

Live Observation & Live Supervision - Live observation as its name suggests is simply when a supervisor observes through a one-way mirror, the supervisee conducting a counselling session with a client. Live supervision, however, occurs when the supervisor observes and interacts with the supervisee during the counselling session. Both live observation and live supervision provide a more complete picture of the supervisee's skills than audio or videotape, and allow the supervisor to intervene in the case of an emergency. Live supervision can be conducted by using any of the following methods:

- Bug-in-the-Ear – an ear receiver that provides brief, one-way communication from the supervisor.
- Monitoring – the supervisor monitors the session and steps in and runs the session if necessary.
- In Vivo – therapy is interrupted and a supervision consultation occurs in front of the client/s, then the supervisee continues the session.
- Walk-in – is more of a therapy intervention where the supervisor enters the room at a pre-arranged time and talks with the supervisee and the client/s.
- Phone-in and Consultation Breaks – the session is interrupted so the supervisee can receive input from the supervisor. This is done either by a phone call in the session or a break where the supervisee leaves the room for consultation with the supervisor.
- Using Computer Technology – a computer monitor is placed behind the client and the supervisor would type comments for the supervisee to read during the session.

As live supervision requires a co-ordinated response from the supervisee and the supervisor, all the methods above require pre-session planning and post-session debriefing. It is essential that the supervisor is sensitive to the supervisee's anxiety and vulnerability with the use of this form of supervision.

Live supervision increases the practical demands of supervision in time, cost of facilities, and organising appointment schedules. If not handled effectively by the supervisor it can also decrease the supervisee's initiative and creativity, and the therapeutic relationship could potentially be negatively affected by the intrusion of this form of supervision. However, when managed correctly live supervision provides a more profound learning experience for supervisees and a more protective environment for clients.

Counsellor Self-Care

THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-CARE

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.

WHAT IS BURNOUT?

Burnout is a syndrome which occurs due to prolonged emotional strain of dealing extensively with other human beings, particularly in helper and recipient relationships. Burnout is categorized as a type of stress. Unlike normal workplace stress which predominately affects individuals physically, burnout affects individuals emotionally.

The term burnout was introduced in the 1970's, and although the word is widely known, the impact of burnout is often misunderstood. Burnout can be a complex and disabling condition, far more serious than feeling tired after a long week at work. Although any profession at any level can be affected by burnout, there is an increased need for individuals working in the counselling, nursing and teaching fields to fully understand the symptoms of burnout, and more importantly, adopt preventative measures.

Over the years the definition of burnout has changed and expanded to include a number of key components. Below is a summary of a number of different perspectives of burnout:

- A disease of over commitment: This suggests that burnout is the state of emotional exhaustion related to overload.
- Changes in motivation: A psychological withdrawal from work in response to excessive stress or dissatisfaction.
- Alienation: The extent to which a worker has become separated or withdrawn from the original meaning or purpose of work.
- Other definitions also include attitude and behavioural changes in response to workplace demands and a tendency to treat clients in a detached, mechanical fashion.

These descriptions are all valid when describing burnout, and regardless of the preferred definition, burnout affects the individual emotionally, impacting on both the quality and satisfaction of their work.

What Causes Burnout?

There are predictors to assist individuals to identify if they are more at risk of burnout than others. These include both personal and organisational contributors. The following should be taken as a guide only.

Personal Contributors

In general, men and women have the same potential to burnout, as do all levels within professions. Studies indicate that the following personal factors can place an individual at a higher risk of burnout.

- **Age:** Burnout is considered to affect individuals earlier in their career. People under the age of 40 are most at risk.
- **Marital Status:** Married workers or those in a de-facto relationship tend to have the emotional support of their spouse and are less likely to suffer from burnout. Those who are single or divorced have a higher risk.
- **Work behaviour:** Individuals who are dedicated and committed to their role, work overtime, take home work or work at the office on weekends have a higher risk of developing burnout.
- **Personality:** Individuals who score highly on neuroticism as a personality factor (such as the Big Five personality indicator) are more inclined to suffer burnout. So too are people who are introverts, as they are less likely to discuss with co-workers the stress they are facing in the workplace.

Organisational Contributors

- **Overload:** The overall amount of effort required on a daily basis may be too much. There may be too much information to absorb and too many demands being made.
- **Lack of control:** Individuals can feel reduced control over their work when there is little flexibility in the way they can perform their role. This includes instructions from supervisors who dictate exactly what to do, when to do it and how to complete the task. This situation can leave workers feeling frustrated and promote feelings of failure and ineffectiveness.
- **Co-workers:** Dealing with co-workers, supervisors and administrators can be just as stressful, if not more stressful. Tension between these groups increases the likelihood of burnout to occur. Firstly this increases emotional stress and secondly it reduces the support network needed to prevent burnout.
- **Organisational guidelines and objectives:** Most organizations have guidelines defining the scope of the service which can be provided and objectives to be achieved. At times these can seem too rigid, with less focus on a holistic personalized perspective. A 'one size fits all' delivery of service can be unsatisfactory for both the recipient and helper.
- **Organisational opportunities:** Roles within organizations which have limited opportunity for promotions increase the likelihood that the individual may develop burnout.

Importance of Counsellors Understanding Burnout

Professional counsellors play an important role of guidance and strength in their client's life. Many counsellors have extremely high expectations of themselves and the outcomes they should be able to provide to others. As with most areas of employment, counselling has a number of ongoing everyday stressors combined with the need to connect with clients on a number of different emotional levels. Stressors uniquely associated with counselling and other similar roles include:

- Maintaining concentration, discipline and skill. This intensity is rarely understood by others not working in the field.
- The high level of continuous output of energy.
- Issues are often intense, painful and sometimes irresolvable.
- Role expectations of counsellors are often out of proportion to what is reasonably achievable.
- Limited organisational support for counsellors.
- Feelings of isolation and having expectations placed upon them.
- Feeling inadequate and having self-doubt when outcomes are achieved.

(Potter, 1987)

Counselling-orientated problems, with other factors previously mentioned, have the potential to place counsellors at a high risk of burnout.

BURNOUT PREVENTION

“If an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, then the best way to beat burnout is to keep it from happening in the first place. In other words, take action before burnout appears rather than afterward. Instead of suffering through the costs of caring and then trying to recover from them, it makes more sense to try to eliminate them. The costs may be too high ever to overcome, thus, it is wiser to avoid them altogether.” (Maslach, *The Cost of Caring*: p. 216)

Not all strategies require large amounts of planning and change. In fact introducing good work routines early in one's career can significantly reduce the likelihood of burnout. These include:

Source: Personnel Today

- Keep expectations realistic
- Reduce your workload
- Relax at work
- Take allocated lunch breaks
- Consider a career break
- Develop and maintain interests outside of work
- Use your full holiday entitlement
- Recognise your own responses to workplace issues

Burnout and its impact on counsellors, clients and organizations needs to an objective and highlighted subject in contemporary workplaces, with prevention a responsibility of both individuals and organizations. Potter (1987) suggests that individuals should focus attention on a 'Path to Personal Power'. The main objective is to develop a plan to encourage a sense of accomplishment, independent of your organisation.

Eight Paths to Personal Power:

Path 1: Self-Management

Effective self-management requires knowledge and skill. Properly done, self-management increases your personal power because you can create situations in which you can give yourself the 'wins' your need to sustain high motivation.

Path 2: Stress Management

It is important to know how your body and psyche function and which situations trigger your stress responses. This understanding can be used to raise and lower your tension level as needed. Personal power comes in knowing that, although you may not like the difficult situations, you can handle them. Such feelings enable you to rise to the occasion and to handle difficulties skilfully rather than avoid problem situations.

Path 3: Build a Support System

A strong social support system make up of family, friends and co-workers can help buffer you against the negative effects of stress. It's vitally important that you take active measures to build and maintain your support system.

Path 4: Skill Building

Inevitably, you will encounter situations requiring skills you've not yet developed. Personal power comes from knowing how to arrange learning situations for yourself. When you know how to acquire the skills you need, you'll have confidence to tackle new challenges and handle the unexpected.

Path 5: Modify the Job

Almost every job has some leeway for tailoring it to better fit your work style. The ability to mesh a job to your work style increases feelings of potency and enjoyment of work.

Path 6: Change Jobs

Sometimes the best solution is to change jobs. Too often, however burnout victims will quit an unsatisfactory job without analysing the source of dissatisfaction or exploring what is needed, and grab the next job that comes along. Sometimes the new job is as bad as, or even worse, than the old one. Personal power comes in knowing what you need in a job and knowing how to go out and find it.

Path 7: Mood Management with Thought Control

You may sometimes feel out of control in the face of your emotions. If so, you may be a victim of runaway thinking, and not knowing how to curb your thoughts, you respond to every red flag waved before you. Personal power comes in knowing how to empty your mind of negative chatter so that you can focus productivity on the moment and the tasks at hand

Path 8: Detached Concern

Detached concern is a higher-order level of mental control in which personal power is gained by letting go. This is particularly important for those who work with people having serious or even impossible problems. It is the attachment to your notions of how things ought to be that can imprison you and make you feel helpless.

(Potter, Preventing Job Burnout, 1987, p. 18-19)

IMPROVING WORK-LIFE BALANCE

According to the Australian National Occupational Health and Safety Commission Report, December 2003, high stress levels lead to thousands of stress-related WorkCover claims every year. Cases of mental stress had by far the highest median (8.5 weeks) and average (16 weeks) time lost, and accounted for 29% of all new cases of disease. This is way above the median of 3.4 weeks lost and average of 9.3 weeks for all new cases of injury or disease.

Stress in the workplace is common and caused by many different factors and issues. Many problems may never be fully resolved and the amount of stress a person experiences is often determined by whether or not they can accept that some things in life will simply never be sorted out to their satisfaction. For instance, a person may feel stressed by the way they are treated by their employer, or the behaviour of a work colleague.

Sometimes this stress can be resolved by dealing with the particular behaviour as in many organisations, there are processes that can be followed to deal with workplace problems like harassment, victimisation or unfair treatment. If your work life and personal life are out of balance, your stress may be running high. [Here's how to reclaim control.](#)

Finding work-life balance in today's frenetically-paced world is no simple task. Spend more time at work than at home and you miss out on a rewarding personal life. Then again, if you're facing challenges in your personal life such as caring for an aging parent or coping with marital or financial problems, concentrating on your job can be difficult.

Whether the problem is too much focused on work or too little, when your work life and your personal life feel out of balance, stress - and its harmful effects - is the result. To take control, first consider how the world of work has changed, then re-evaluate your relationship to work and apply the strategies for striking a more healthy balance as described in this guide.

How work invades your personal life

There was a time when employees showed up for work Monday through Friday and worked eight to nine hours. The boundaries between work and home were fairly clear then. But the world has changed and, unfortunately, the boundaries have blurred for many workers. Here's why:

- **Global economy.** As more skilled workers enter the global labor market and companies outsource or move more jobs to reduce labour costs, people feel pressured to work longer and produce more to protect their jobs.
- **International business.** Work continues around the world 24 hours a day for some people. If you work in an international organisation, you might be on call around the clock for troubleshooting or consulting.
- **Advanced communication technology.** People now have the ability to work anywhere - from their home, from their car and even on vacation. And some managers expect that.
- **Longer hours.** Employers commonly ask employees to work longer hours than they're scheduled. Often, overtime is mandatory. If you hope to move up the career ladder, you may find yourself regularly working more than 40 hours a week to achieve and exceed expectations.

- **Changes in family roles.** Today's married worker is typically part of a dual-career couple, which makes it difficult to find time to meet commitments to family, friends and community. If you've experienced any of these challenges, you understand how easy it is for work to invade your personal life.
- **Overtime obsession:** It's tempting to work overtime if you're an hourly employee. By doing so, you can earn extra money for a child's university education or a dream vacation. Some people need to work overtime to stay on top of family finances or pay for extra, unplanned expenses. If you're on salary, working more hours may not provide extra cash, but it can help you to keep up with your workload.

Being willing to arrive early and stay late every day may also help earn that promotion or bonus. Before you sign up for overtime, consider the pros and cons of working extra hours on your work-life balance:

- *Fatigue.* Your ability to think and your eye-hand coordination decrease when you're tired. This means you're less productive and may make mistakes. These mistakes can lead to injury or rework and negatively impact your professional reputation.
- *Family.* You may miss out on important events, such as your child's first bike ride, your father's 60th birthday or your high-school reunion. Missing out on important milestones may harm relationships with your loved ones.
- *Friends.* Trusted friends are a key part of your support system. But if you're spending time at the office instead of with them, you'll find it difficult to nurture those friendships.
- *Expectations.* If you work extra hours as a general rule, you may be given more responsibility. This could create a never-ending and increasing cycle, causing more concerns and challenges.

Sometimes working overtime is important. It's a choice you can make to adjust to a new job or new boss or to pay your bills. If you work for a company that requires mandatory overtime, you won't be able to avoid it, but you can learn to manage it. If you work overtime by choice, do so in moderation. Most importantly, say no when you're too tired, when it's affecting your health or when you have crucial family obligations.

Striking the best work-life balance

It isn't easy to juggle the demands of career and personal life. For most people, it's an ongoing challenge to reduce stress and maintain harmony in key areas of their life. Here are some ideas to help you find the balance that's best for you:

- **Keep a journal.** Write down everything you do for one week. Include work-related and non-work-related activities. Decide what's necessary and satisfies you the most. Cut or delegate activities you don't enjoy, don't have time for or do only out of guilt. If you don't have the authority to make certain decisions, talk to your supervisor.
- **Take advantage of your options.** Find out if your employer offers flex hours, a compressed work week, job-sharing or telecommuting for your role. The flexibility may alleviate some of your stress and free up some time.

- **Manage your time.** Organise household tasks efficiently. Doing one or two loads of laundry every day rather than saving it all for your day off, and running errands in batches rather than going back and forth several times are good places to begin. A weekly family calendar of important dates and a daily list of to-dos will help you avoid deadline panic. If your employer offers a course in time management, sign up for it.
- **Rethink your cleaning standards.** An unmade bed or sink of dirty dishes won't impact the quality of your life. Do what needs to be done and let the rest go. If you can afford it, pay someone else to clean your house.
- **Communicate clearly.** Limit time-consuming misunderstandings by communicating clearly and listening carefully. Take notes if it helps.
- **Let go of the guilt.** Remember, having a family and a job is okay - for both men and women.
- **Nurture yourself.** Set aside time each day for an activity that you enjoy, such as walking, working out or listening to music.
- **Unwind after a hectic workday** by reading, practicing yoga or taking a bubble bath. Sitting down and watching the news is NOT recommended for relaxation or unwinding as many studies advise the news creates an upward shift in anxiety and stress levels.
- **Set aside one night each week for recreation.** Take the phone off the hook; turn off the computer and the TV. Discover activities you can do with your partner, family or friends, such as playing golf, fishing, bike riding or walking on the beach. Making time for activities you enjoy will refresh you.
- **Protect your day off.** Try to schedule some of your routine chores on workdays so that your days off are more relaxing.
- **Get enough sleep.** There's nothing as stressful and potentially dangerous as working when you're sleep-deprived. Not only is your productivity affected, but you can also make costly mistakes. You may then have to work even more hours to make up for these mistakes.
- **Bolster your support system.** Give yourself the gift of a trusted friend or co-worker to talk with during times of stress or hardship. If you're part of a religious community, take advantage of the support your religious leader can provide. Ensure you have trusted friends and relatives who can assist you when you need to work overtime or travel for your job.

Balance doesn't mean doing everything. Examine your priorities and set boundaries. Be firm in what you can and cannot do. Only you can restore harmony to your lifestyle.

Recommended Readings

Below is a list of recommended publications which discuss reflective practice and self-care – divided into 3 categories: Understanding Reflective Practice; Self-Reflection & the Client and; The Process of Reflective Practice.

UNDERSTANDING REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

- Amulya, J. (2002). *What is reflective practice?* Center for Reflective Community Practice Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA.
- Hunt, C. (1998). An adventure: from reflective practice to spirituality. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 3(3), 325-337.

SELF-REFLECTION & THE CLIENT

- Gordon, C. (2004). Counsellor's use of reflective space. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 4(2), 40-44.
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- Fosha, D. (2005). Emotion, true self, other, core state: Towards a clinical theory of affective change process. *Psychoanalytic Review*, 92(4), 513-552. (excerpt: 529-552)
- Reupert, A. (2007). Social workers use of self. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 35, 107-116.

THE PROCESS OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

- Guiffrida, D. A. (2005). The emergence model: An alternative pedagogy for facilitating self reflection and theoretical fit in counseling students. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 44(3), 201-213.
- Wong-Wylie, G. (2007). Barriers and facilitators of reflective practice in counselor education: Critical incidents from doctoral graduates. *Canadian Journal of Counselling*, 41(2), 59-76.
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