

Counseling Practicum I

Lecture 2

Counseling Needs Assessment Before Practicum

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Introduction

This lecture will explain the importance of carrying out counseling needs assessment before engaging in practicum. It will help a counseling student on areas to consider when conducting counseling needs assessment to offer quality counseling services to clients.

Expected Learning Outcomes

At the end of this lecture, you will be able to:

- (i) Explain the importance of counseling needs assessment
- (ii) Identify key goals and objectives that guide counseling needs assessment
- (iii) Examine the benefits of counseling and psychotherapy

Setting Counseling Goals

The main goal of counseling is to help people use existing personal and other available resources for coping with life challenges” (Nelson-Jones, 2014, p. 4). But more than that, counseling also involves a relationship, a set of interventions, and a collection of psychological processes with goals. It is advisable for counselors to differentiate between

own personal needs and those of the client before engaging in therapy. Therefore, having personal therapy experience before practicum helps a lot (Coery, 2009).

According to Nelson-Jones (2014) the following five goals and objectives for counseling are very important to consider:

Supportive Listening

This involves providing clients with the opportunity to be heard, understood, and affirmed, the counselor must be skilled at listening, empathetic communication, giving safe and constructive feedback to the client, and leading the counseling process to the desired client goals. The client needs to have value for making a choice to come for therapy. Supportive listening by a counselor will provide the following to a client; comfort, ease suffering, healing psychological wounds, offer a sounding board and help the client move forward

Managing Problems

Clients will often bring problematic situations to counseling. The counselor can support the client by breaking a larger problem into several smaller, more manageable tasks and assignments. If a client has low self-esteem, the counselor can begin by asking the client to name at least five attributes they like about themselves and relate the feelings that go with the same. They can explore other areas like relationships that bring them down and those that lift their spirit. This will help the client to be more aware of situations and

relationships that either enhance or lower their self-esteem and can consequently make choices that favor them.

Problem Analysis

Alternatively, sometimes the problem a client brings to the session must be tackled as part of a much larger problem. Indeed, “problems can be larger and more complex than specific situations within them” (Nelson-Jones, 2014, p. 11). For example, a client’s sense of being overwhelmed or feeling depressed may have multiple dimensions: unhappiness in their job, lack of assertiveness in a relationship, and not looking after themselves. It is the work of a counselor to help them unpack the bigger problem to specific manageable problems that can create an inner sense of control and worth.

Strengthening Perceived Weak Skills

Clients come in with a set of skills that they have been applying in their daily life challenges. In certain situations, some clients are not fully aware of other skills that they have that can help them in different situations. Some skills they consider as weaknesses can be strengthened to become more useful. For example, a client may be too good to his colleagues because he wants to build team spirit at workplace, they can be taken for granted for being too good. They may appear less assertive. May be the client can be helped to be more assertive and ask each member to take up their load of task and he/she can stick to their tasks and remain firm on that decision.

Empowerment of Existing Strong Personal Skills

Some clients visit counselors because they wish to do better than they are doing now. The work of the counselor is to find out how they are doing currently and ask how they wish to from going forward. Therapy can be directed to achieving this desired goal in therapy and seek ways to maintain the same.

Ultimately, counseling requires that clients “make choices that enable them to feel, think and act effectively,” taking responsibility for creating and ordering their lives (Nelson-Jones, 2014, p. 11).

Enhancing Mindfulness

Most clients are not aware that regular check on how they think, feel and act on moment to moment largely contribute to the healing process especially of past traumas and coping with anxiety disorder. Mindful self-compassion also helps a client to treat themselves with compassion and self-kindness in their suffering rather than blaming themselves because of their suffering. This is a genuine inherent need for all clients, but it takes a counselor who is well trained in mindfulness and self-compassion to help a client meet this need (Germer, 2009).

Enhancing Interpersonal Relationships

Counseling helps a client to know self in relationship with others. A good counselor facilitates this process during therapy sessions. A counselor is required to model effective

communication that the client can adapt in communicating with others. There are proposed communication tips proposed by Nelson- Jones (2014).

Reflective Communication Tips

Volume – Was I talking loud enough for the listener to hear what I was saying comfortably?

Articulation – Was I clear in my speech, enunciating words, so the listener easily understood them?

Pitch – Was I overly straining my voice or talking too high or low?

Emphasis – Was I using too much emphasis and appearing melodramatic? Or too little and appearing flat?

Rate – Was I speaking very quickly and appearing anxious? Or very slowly and coming across as dull or pompous?

The client takes what they have learned into future conversations and adapt each element according to their audience.

Counseling and Psychotherapy Benefits

According to British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) counselling and psychotherapy are umbrella terms that cover a range of talking therapies. They are delivered by trained practitioners who work with people over a short or long term to help

them bring about effective change or enhance their wellbeing (McLeod, 2013). American Counseling Association defines counseling as a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals (McLeod, 2013). There are several benefits that clients derive from counseling from an effective intentional counselor.

These benefits include but not limited to:

- Enhanced self-awareness
- Enhanced interpersonal relationships
- Creativity
- Problem solving skills
- Solution focused skills
- Self-actualization
- Generativity and social action. Inspiring in the person a desire and capacity to care for others and pass on knowledge (generativity) and to contribute to the collective good through political engagement and community work. A good counselor will transform the client for them to fit in the society productively ((McLeod, 2013).

Conclusion

This lecture explained the importance of counseling needs assessment, identified key goals and objectives that guide counseling needs assessment and examined the benefits of counseling and psychotherapy.

References

Coery, G. (2009). *Theory and practice of counseling and counseling psychotherapy* (8 ed.). London: Thomson Brooks/Cole.

Germer, C. K. (2009). *The mindful path to self-compassion: Freeing yourself from destructive thoughts and emotions*. London: The Guildford Press.

McLeod, J. (2013). *An introduction to counseling*. New York: Open University Press.