

Elements of a Successful Therapeutic Relationship

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Many elements contribute to a successful counseling relationship and experience. A counselor must provide a judge-free environment where clients feel safe to share. The client-counseling relationship is important as they become a collaborative team working together to identify issues and potential solutions. In addition to building rapport, collaborating, and trusting one another, the counselor must be competent in the presenting issues and therapeutic modalities. This paper discusses the importance of the counselor role, counselor identity strategies, dispositions, counseling skills, and theory knowledge.

Counselor Role

A counselor's role is to help clients work through problems that interfere with their well-being. They help clients identify goals and possible solutions, strengthen self-esteem, teach coping skills, and promote behavior change when needed (American Counseling Association, n.d.). As a counselor, I will acquire my Licensed associate counselor (LAC) license in Arizona as soon as I finish my master's program. Simultaneously, I will earn certifications focused on trauma, crisis intervention, and critical incident stress management (CCISM). In addition, I will continue to volunteer for the Red Cross Disaster Action team and work towards earning hours for my Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) license by seeking employment with an organization specializing in crisis, trauma, and possibly first responders.

Counselor Identity Strategies

A counselor's professional identity is the mission statement of the counselor. It sets them apart from other counselors, and it is the description clients will read to decide if you are the right therapist. Developing a professional identity takes exposure from strong mentors willing to

dedicate time to teach and guide you (Coppock, 2012). My strategy to develop my professional identity is to read as much as possible inside and outside the classroom, focusing on trauma, critical incidents, and first responders. In addition, I will become a member of organizations focusing on trauma to stay current on the latest research and network with colleagues in the same specialties. I will continue to volunteer for the Red Cross and lean on my relationships within the organization to gain experience in disaster relief. I will utilize these resources to learn from the current professionals as I build my own identity and strengths as a counselor.

Dispositions

I strive to demonstrate all the counseling dispositions, gravitating toward my strengths of acceptance, flexibility, and empathy. As a counselor in training (CIT), I was fortunate to counsel my peers and gain valuable experience. My client shared her struggle to balance work and home life within the standards she set for herself. I was empathetic because I could see how being in her shoes of working, managing kids' sports schedules, house-cleaning, food prep, parenting, and trying to be a good wife was giving her anxiety. I understood that she was overwhelmed because of all the tasks she juggled and pointed out that her feelings were normal and valid. Furthermore, I utilized the disposition of acceptance by letting her know we would work together to find solutions. Finally, I demonstrated flexibility as the client's presenting issues changed from work to home life.

Counseling Skills

During the sessions with my peer, I practiced several counseling skills to move the sessions along and find the real problem. The counseling skills that felt natural were opening sessions, building rapport, scaling and open-ended questions, reflecting, and summarizing. The

more challenging counseling skills were SOLER, active listening, and reframing. I built rapport by asking welcoming questions at the start of each session and summarizing the prior sessions. I asked if I missed anything and if I was accurate in my assessment. We could pivot when my client's stress changed from work to home life. With open-ended and scaling questions, we identified the stressors, measured the intensity, and discovered possible solutions (Egan, 2019). At the end of each session, we recapped and discussed coping skills as homework. The counseling skills I can improve on are active listening and reframing. I took notes and thought about my next question while the client talked. I naturally smiled and fidgeted so my body language could be more attuned. Finally, it was not until the last session that I tried to reframe the client's issues to the positive side of having such a full and busy life with work and family.

Theory Knowledge

When choosing a therapy modality, one's beliefs and values tend to guide the decision. As a CIT learning about all the modalities, I gravitate toward Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and Solution-focused behavioral therapy (SFBT). I find these modalities insightful and believe that clients can find help by regulating their emotions, finding their exceptions, and being aware of their actions. All in all, I find all the theories fascinating and imagine that I will use pieces of most throughout my experience as a counselor.

Conclusion

In conclusion, many elements help establish a good counselor and counselor-client relationship. As a CIT, I will continue to learn from past and current professors, mentors, and supervisors. I will expand my education beyond the master's degree and earn certifications in my specialty of trauma. Over time and with experience, I will improve my counseling skills and

establish my counselor identity and therapy modalities. I will continue to network with my fellow therapists and volunteer my time to the community. I will become a student of life and abide by the ACA Code of Ethics to help those in need to maximize their well-being (American Counseling Association, 2014).

References

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