

INSIGHT: Alcohol and Other Drug
Training and Education Unit



Induction Module 3

Micro-counselling Skills

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**Queensland
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Australia

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**Queensland
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Welcome to Alcohol and Other Drugs Sector Induction Material

Learning Material

This series of modules is designed to service health staff interested in addressing alcohol and other drug (AOD) issues with their clientele. The introductory material seeks to provide information to new workers in the alcohol and drug sector. The modules are based on best practice, and contain the most recent information available.

About InSight

InSight is a clinical support service that provides AOD clinical education and training, and clinical education services. InSight sits within the ADS which has a mission to minimise alcohol and other drug related harm and improve the health and well being of the Queensland people we serve.

Contact InSight

InSight can be contacted by phone or email if you have any queries or comments regarding this module, or for general information regarding training opportunities.

Our details are:

Web: www.insightqld.org

Phone: (07) 3837 5655

Email: InSight@health.qld.gov.au

How to use Module Materials

- The module contains a study guide (PDF) that can be downloaded. Please be aware this is copyrighted material. If a colleague requests this module, direct them to the web page for their personal module download.
- There are suggested readings and references for further study which are located at the end of this module.
- The suggested subject text for this module is:

Geldard, D. and Geldard, K. (2009). Basic Personal Counselling: A training manual for counsellors. 6th Edition. Prentice Hall: Sydney.

- The module is designed as a 2 - 4 hour short course.
- A short multiple choice assessment can be submitted to InSight to enable us to forward your completion certificate.
- You may contact InSight regarding this module at any time.

Micro-Counselling Skills

Aim

The aim of this module is to introduce health workers to the knowledge and skills required when communicating and counselling people with AOD problems.

Objectives

The objectives for this module are to:

- identify the attributes of an effective counsellor
- outline the basic micro-counselling skills used in communication
- recognise common blocks to communication.

Micro-Counselling Skills: An Introduction

The therapeutic relationship that develops between a counsellor and a client is an important component to therapy. The goals and attributes of an effective counsellor, along with the use of micro-counselling skills help build a supportive working relationship, where the relationship facilitates change and the objectives of therapy. Micro-counselling skills are basic verbal and nonverbal counselling skills that are essential for establishing and maintaining rapport with clients. These skills form the basis of effective communication, and provide a solid foundation for all counselling interventions and styles.

The Counselling Relationship

The counselling relationship, commonly known as the therapeutic alliance or working relationship that develops between the counsellor and the client is important to achieving optimal gains in therapy. This relationship can be enhanced by a number of attributes or qualities that the counsellor possesses, and the counsellor's goals towards therapy.

Counsellor Goals

The aims or goals of therapy in the alcohol and other drug field can be summarised as:

- managing current problems
- developing skills to prevent further problems
- developing the (life) skilled person.

Managing current problems involves focusing on the problem the client has presented with, providing brief advice, reducing harm, and remaining solution focused. Developing skills to prevent further problems involves altering or enhancing underlying abilities, and addressing problematic or recurring behaviour. Developing the (life) skilled person involves empowering the client to make appropriate life choices, and to effectively address new challenges through the realisation of personal control.

Counsellor Attributes (qualities)

The attributes of an effective counsellor include being patient, tolerant, understanding, and having a sense of humour and common sense. It is also necessary to be a good communicator and listener, have the ability to establish trust, and provide confidentiality.

Three essential counsellor attributes identified for the therapeutic relationship are:

- congruence
- empathy
- unconditional positive regard.

Congruence

Congruence implies that the counsellor is being genuine. That is, they are matching their external behaviour and expressions with their internal feelings and thoughts. The counsellor presents themselves without pretence, expressing their feelings and attitudes spontaneously and therapeutically. This does not mean that the counsellor should share all their feelings and thoughts impulsively, as disclosure should be appropriate to the therapeutic relationship. A congruent counsellor facilitates honest communication with the client.

Empathy

Empathy is shown when the counsellor is able to accurately understand and be sensitive to the feelings and experiences of the client. That is, to sensitively grasp the subjective world of the client, by understanding the client's situation, the choices they have made, and show consideration for the outcomes that have developed. Empathy creates trust and safety within the therapeutic relationship and provides a basis for rapport building. It involves listening, understanding, and communicating that understanding so that the client can comprehend their situation more fully, thereby facilitating constructive change.

Unconditional Positive Regard

Unconditional positive regard is a genuine caring for a person that is not bound by conditions. The counsellor accepts the client without judgement of the client's feelings, thoughts or behaviours as being good or bad. The client is accepted for who they are, without the counsellor stipulating conditions for this acceptance. The client is free to have feelings and experiences without risking the counsellor's loss of regard. In this way the

counsellor communicates to the client that they are valued as a person for who they are. The client is then able to explore their issues without the fear of criticism or rejection.

Micro-Skills

When working with clients, counsellors use a basic set of core micro-counselling skills which assist in developing a therapeutic relationship with the client, and establish a foundation for communication. These skills involve rapport building, the use of active listening, asking open questions, and summarising the information given to them by the client.

Rapport Building

An essential first step in initiating a therapeutic relationship with a client is to establish rapport. Rapport building can begin when first meeting the client by using positive non-verbal messages to assist the client to feel comfortable and know they are being listened to. As information is processed by visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic actions, how we use our eyes, as well as what we say and do during an interview will assist in developing rapport with the client. It is important to utilise attending behaviours to assure the client they are being listened to. Good visual and kinaesthetic attending skills can be summarised with the acronym:

SOLER

- S** → **Squarely** face the client. Sitting facing the client gives the impression of attentiveness and involvement.
- O** → **Open** posture. An open posture can show that you are available to listen. It can be gained by sitting with your hands either by your side or resting on your lap if you are writing things down.
- L** → **Lean** towards the client slightly. This indicates that you are involved and paying attention.
- E** → **Eye** contact. Maintain appropriate eye contact. It signifies “I’m with you, I want to hear you, and you are interesting to me”.
- R** → **Relaxed**. Try to remain relaxed with the client. Fidgeting (continuously moving about or looking at the clients’ notes) is distracting for the client and gives the impression that you are not interested in what they are saying.

Another attending behaviour is to mirror your client's actions to indicate that you experience the world as close as possible to the way the other person is experiencing it.

Match your client's:

- head position
- torso position
- arms and legs positions
- breathing rate (N.B: this can be powerful)
- language (pace).

Be careful not to copy the client's actions too exactly, as this will look artificial.

Active Listening

Active listening assists in establishing rapport as well as establishing trust in the therapeutic relationship. By utilising active listening, the counsellor helps the client feel understood and this encourages the client to disclose information. The micro-skills necessary to facilitate active listening include:

- use of minimal encouragers
- paraphrasing
- reflection
- reframing.

Minimal Encouragers

During counselling it is important to let the client know that you are genuinely interested in what they are saying and this can be done by using **minimal encouragers**.

Minimal encouragers are commonly used when two people have a conversation. They are useful to encourage the client to continue talking and can help to give you more information. Minimal encouragers can be either verbal or nonverbal responses that affirm that the counsellor is actually listening to what is being said. An example of a non-verbal minimal encourager includes:

- a head nod
- a raised eyebrow
- a smile.

Minimal encouragers also include appropriate silences. Clients often need time to process what has been said, and will often do this in a brief period of silence. Clients will usually regain eye contact with you when they have finished thinking.

Examples of verbal minimal encouragers include words such as:

- mmmm
- okay
- aha
- right
- I see
- oh?
- sure
- tell me more
- please continue
- really
- yes.

The timing of minimal encouragers is important, as overuse can be disruptive and intrusive. They need to be inserted at regular intervals and spaced appropriately.

Paraphrasing / Reflection of Content

An effective way of clarifying the content in an interview is to paraphrase the most important details the client has just given and reflect them back. To use this skill, the counsellor literally reflects or mirrors what they have heard the client say. Instead of repeating what the client has said word for word, the counsellor repeats the information in his or her own words. Paraphrasing involves four aspects:

1. acknowledges that you are going to feedback what the client has been saying in a sentence stem or starter (“You appear to be saying...”)
2. outlines the main points that the client has made
3. summarised essence of a longer statement
4. checks whether the client was heard correctly (“Am I right in saying...”).

Examples of Paraphrasing:

Client: I seem to be using more than I used to, and I don't seem to be getting as much out of a deal as I should be. I still get what I need I suppose.

Counsellor: It sounds like you're experiencing changes in tolerance levels but the drug is still useful to you.

Client: I don't know why people worry about my kids. I've always been able to look after them, even when I'm stoned.

Counsellor: There's no need for anyone to worry about your kids, you are always able to look after them.

Client: My friends seem to be using stuff that makes them legless. I'm not sure I want to go that far.

Counsellor: You are finding a limit to the types of drugs you want to use.

Paraphrasing can be useful in moving an interview forwards and towards greater clarity. If you are able to accurately paraphrase and reflect what the client has said, you will be rewarded with a "That's right" or "Yes". Successful paraphrasing and reflection indicates to the client that you are attending to, and attempting to understand, what is being said. Successful paraphrasing also helps to check your understanding of what was said, and helps the client to clarify their thoughts.

Reflection of Feeling

Reflection of feeling is a useful micro-skill, as it indicates to the client that the counsellor is able to empathise with them. This involves reflecting the client's basic feelings. The counsellor reflects the emotion they have heard the client express. Feelings can usually be expressed by one word (e.g. angry, depressed, frustrated, miserable, tense, and frantic) whereas thoughts (content) require a string of words (explanation). Reflection of feeling also helps to demonstrate your understanding of what the client is experiencing. Like paraphrasing, reflection has four aspects:

1. a sentence stem or starter (you sound like you are feeling.....),
2. use of feeling words (sad, relaxed...)
3. use of present tense if possible (more powerful) and
4. an accuracy inquiry.

Examples of Reflection of Feeling:

Client: I thought my mother would understand the problems I'm having.

Counsellor: You sound disappointed with your mother's reaction to your problems.

Client: What's the point of reducing my use? I'll be bingeing again on the weekend.

Counsellor: You seem frustrated with your efforts to cut back using.

Client: My wife continues to buy beer for her to drink, even though I have given it up, so this means it's always in the house.

Counsellor: It sounds like you're annoyed that she's leaving you open to temptation.

Clients are not always aware of their underlying feelings. The successful reflection of feelings by the counsellor can help the client become aware of them, and assist them to explore their feelings further.

Remember, emotion or feelings are not just being sad or angry. They can be frustration, confusion, intimidation, tense, etc. Successful reflection will attend to the affective component of what is said and also what can be observed by the client's behaviour.

Reframing

Individuals interpret the world around them from their personal experiences and life circumstances. Events can be interpreted in many ways such as positive or negative, enlightening or unhelpful, challenging or frustrating, depending on the particular viewpoint or outlook of the individual. It is not uncommon for a client to come to counselling with low self esteem, which may influence the way in which they perceive a particular situation. Reframing helps the client to look at a situation or experience in a different light or with a new perspective. By reframing, the counsellor offers a new meaning or interpretation by recasting the client's message in a light that is more likely to be helpful or supportive of change. Reframing often utilises a positive perspective, and may enable the client to perceive their situation differently and more constructively.

Reframing examples:

Client: My wife is always nagging me about my drinking. That's all she ever talks to me about these days.

Counsellor: It sounds like your wife really cares about you, and she is concerned about your health. I guess she expresses it in a way which angers or frustrates you. Perhaps you can encourage her to tell you that she is worried about you in a different way.

Client: I use the pills because I can't seem to relax around my son. The minute I turn my back he's up to something.

Counsellor: I get the impression that you are really important to your son and that he wants lots of attention from you.

Client: If I don't use speed at work, I can't get the job done.

Counsellor: I'm impressed with your work ethic. Not all people would be as concerned as you are to complete work tasks.

Care should be taken not to reinterpret the client's statements in such a way that it changes what they have actually said.

Open Questioning

The skilful use of questioning during counselling can have very productive results. There are two main types of questions. First, there are closed questions which generally restrict the answer to a short form, single word such as “Yes”, “No”, “Sometimes” or “Maybe”, or numbers, names, places, or times. This type of questioning is appropriate when a short answer only is required. However, when more information is required, such as when exploring a client’s concerns, an open question will elicit more information. For example, if the closed question asked was, “Did you get here on the train?” an answer such as “Yes” or “No” would be the most likely response given. However, if an open question was asked such as, “How did you find travelling here?” an answer might involve a description with respect to the mode of transport used, the time taken, the cost, or how long the trip took.

By asking an open question during counselling, a client is given more scope and opportunity to explain their situation in the answer. The following are some examples of open questioning:

- “Could you tell me how your parents are reacting to your drug use?”
- “What are your feelings toward the police officer who arrested you?”
- “Describe what happened the day you found out you had Hepatitis C?”
- “What does being drug free mean to you?”
- “What is your next step towards changing the way you drink?”
- “Tell me about your last relapse?”
- “Why are your liver function results a concern for you?”
- “How will you cope with your stress without taking pills?”.

It is important not to use questions one after the other as the client may find this manner of use interrogating, and stifle the interview. Instead, an appropriate use of questions that are interwoven with active listening skills can enhance an interview and be a productive experience.

Summarising

Summarising involves the counsellor drawing together the main points that were covered during the session and reflecting them back to the client. A summary can occur at various intervals during the session, or at the end of the session. It clarifies what has been said by the client and provides an overview of the content of the interview.

Summarising can be thought of as a number of paraphrases, reflections, and reframes that clarify the main statements made throughout the interview. It brings together the main points of content, accounting for the client's feelings, and places this information in an organised format to describe the discussion between the client and the counsellor. Summarising gives the client the opportunity to reflect on what was said, and review the content of the session.

Why summarise?

There are a number of reasons why a counsellor might want to summarise such as:

- to provide concise, accurate, and timely overviews of the client's statements and help organise their thoughts
- to help the client review what they have said in the interview
- to stimulate a thorough exploration of themes which are important to the client
- to provide organisation for an interview
- to let the client know that they have been heard.

When to summarise

It is useful for the counsellor to summarise:

- when a client's comments are lengthy or confused
- when a client presents a number of unrelated ideas
- to add direction and coherence to the interview
- when the counsellor doesn't know what to say next
- to conclude an interview
- when the client has finished describing a particular event or situation and before they go on to the next issue
- to clarify what the client has just told you

- at the beginning of a session to review what was discussed last session.

Examples of summarising:

“As I understand it, you are annoyed about the way your family is overreacting to your drinking, but you have some minor concerns about it as well. We talked about several things you could think about before next week, and you are happy to write down each drink you have over the next week on the monitoring card. You have agreed we only need one more session of counselling, all going well.”

“I think we have done well this session. We covered the difficulties you are having with your partner still using, and how well you are going now it has been a week since your last hit. The ideas we came up with last week appear to have been successful, despite the fact that you were unsure how you would find things. Let’s look at a plan to keep you safe over the next week.”

Want to learn more? Geldard, D. and Geldard K. (2009) Chapter 9. In: Basic Personal Counselling: A training manual for counsellors. 6th Edition. Prentice Hall: Sydney, (pp. 82-86).

Roadblocks to Communication

There are a number of communication tools which are very useful when they are used in the right context. However, when a counsellor is using active listening skills, these other communication methods can block the communication and restrict the client's exploration of the subject. These roadblocks include:

- ordering, directing, or commanding - "You have to"
- warning or threatening – "You had better not...."
- giving advice, providing solutions – "Why don't you...."
- talking over the client.
- persuading with logic, arguing, or lecturing – "Here are the facts of the matter...."
- moralising, preaching, or telling the client what they should do – "You ought to...."
- disagreeing, judging, criticising, or blaming – "I don't think you should...."
- agreeing, approving, or praising everything – "You're right...."
- shaming, ridiculing, or labelling – "You are stupid...."
- interpreting or analysing - "What you need to do is...."
- reassuring, sympathising, or consoling – "You'll be Ok...."
- excessive questioning or probing – "Why did you...."
- withdrawing, distracting, humouring, or changing the subject.

Effective communication and listening is vital to developing a successful therapeutic relationship between the counsellor and the client. Avoiding the use of roadblocks to communication enhances the communication process.

Conclusion and Course Completion

Micro-counselling skills form an integral part of the clinical relationship. It enables trust and rapport as well as more ability to obtain accurate information. Counsellors with empathy, unconditional positive regard and a non-judgemental attitude are essential in the role, and are often better able to quickly establish a positive therapeutic alliance. When coupled with good micro-skills, including rapport building, active listening reflection of content and feeling, they are able to accurately convey these positive attitudes.

Course Completion Certificate

To complete this module and **receive a completion certificate**, the following multiple choice questions must be completed and submitted to InSight. Please ensure you follow the guidelines for submission.

Guidelines:

- **Your full name**
- **Work place address:**
- **Date of submission:**
- **Module number:**
- **Evaluation of the module attached (last page of this module)**

Mail, fax or email to:

**Senior Clinical Education Coordinator
Insight: Centre for AOD Training and Education
Alcohol and Drug Service
270 Roma Street
Brisbane Qld 4000
FAX NO: (07) 3837 5716
EMAIL: InSight@health.qld.gov.au**

Micro-Counselling Skills Module Assessment

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Please circle your response to the following multiple choice questions.

1. Which, if any of the following, would be a counsellor's goal?
 - (a) Managing current problems
 - (b) Developing skills to prevent further problems
 - (c) Developing the (life) skilled person
 - (d) All of the above

2. Which of the following is not an attribute of an effective counsellor?
 - (a) Congruence
 - (b) Open questioning
 - (c) Unconditional positive regard
 - (d) Empathy

3. The aim of using active listening skills is to:
 - (a) Help the client feel understood
 - (b) Encourage the client to disclose information
 - (c) Assist in establishing rapport
 - (d) All of the above

4. Which of the following is not a roadblock to communication?
 - (a) Ordering, directing, or commanding
 - (b) Use of minimal encouragers
 - (c) Moralising, preaching, or telling the client what they should do
 - (d) Agreeing, approving, or praising everything

- 5. Which of the following is not a true statement about the use of minimal encouragers?**
- (a) Minimal encouragers do not include appropriate silences
 - (b) Affirm that the counsellor is actually listening
 - (c) Overuse can be disruptive and intrusive
 - (d) Encourage the client to continue talking
- 6. If you wanted to establish rapport with a client, which of the following behaviours would you exhibit?**
- (a) Maintain appropriate eye contact
 - (b) Move around continuously in your seat
 - (c) Mirror your client's actions
 - (d) Both (a) and (c)
- 7. Which of the following responses is a reflection of feeling for the statement "The future looks good since I have stopped using speed"?**
- (a) "You are anticipating some good times ahead of you now"
 - (b) "That sounds great"
 - (c) "You have done well"
 - (d) "Things are working out for you now"
- 8. Which of the following is an open question?**
- (a) Do you always inject your drugs?
 - (b) Will you consider going into detox?
 - (c) What plans do you have for the next week?
 - (d) How much per week does your drinking cost you ?

9. The following statement by the counsellor is an example of what skill?

Client: What's the point in trying to stop using, I always relapse sooner or later.

Counsellor: "You don't see the benefit of stopping at the moment".

- (a) Summarising
- (b) Paraphrase
- (c) Reflection
- (d) Reframe

10. When is it useful for a counsellor to summarise in an interview with the client?

- (a) To add direction and coherence to the interview
- (b) To conclude an interview
- (c) At the beginning of a session to review what was discussed last session
- (d) All of the above

Module Evaluation

(please attach this evaluation to your assessment)

Your name:

Date:

Module number: **3**

Module name: **Micro-Counselling Skills**

Please tick the box where appropriate:

After completing this module:	None	Limited	Some	Very good
My understanding of common blocks to communication is:				
My understanding of Goals & Attributes of an effective counsellor is:				
My understanding of Micro-skills is:				
My understanding of common blocks to communication is:				
My understanding of Goals & Attributes of an effective counsellor is:				
My understanding of Micro-skills is:				
	Not at all	Limited	Somewhat	Very
Was the module useful?				
Was the eLearning material readily accessible?				

As an introductory in-service what other information would have been useful:

Thank you.

References and Further Reading

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