

# Report 1

## AIPC's Counsellor Skills Series

# Verbal & Non-Verbal Communication Skills



- Counselling Microskills – An Overview
- Focusing
- Encouragers, Paraphrasing and Summarising
- Questioning
- Confrontation
- Reflection of Meaning
- Self-Disclosure
- Active Listening
- Body Language – An Overview
- Observation Skills
- Attending Behaviour
- Empathy

## 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](mailto:blog@aipc.net.au).

Kind Regards,

*Sandra Poletto*

Sandra Poletto  
Chief Executive Officer  
Australian Institute of Professional Counsellors

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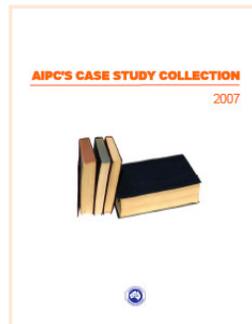
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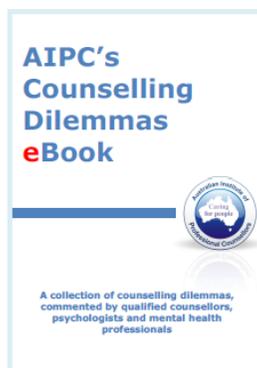
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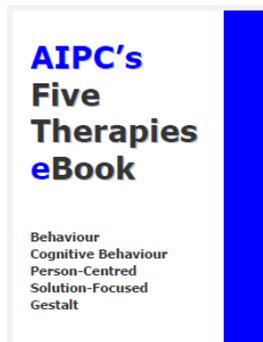
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An exploration of counselling's five mainstream therapies' histories, key concepts, applications, benefits, disadvantages and processes.

## Table of Contents

<b>About This Series</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Who We Are</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Join Our Community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>AIPC's Publications</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Verbal Communication Skills</b>	<b>5</b>
Counselling Microskills – An Overview	5
Focusing	8
Encouragers, Paraphrasing and Summarising	8
Questioning	10
Confrontation	11
Reflection of Meaning	12
Self-Disclosure	12
Active Listening	14
<b>Non-Verbal Communication Skills</b>	<b>15</b>
Body Language – An Overview	15
Observation Skills	15
Attending Behaviour	17
Empathy	18
<b>References</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Contacts</b>	<b>20</b>

## Verbal Communication Skills

### COUNSELLING MICROSKILLS – AN OVERVIEW

Counselling Microskills are specific skills a counsellor can use to enhance their communication with clients. These skills enable a counsellor to effectively build a working alliance and engage clients in discussion that is both helpful and meaningful.

Many will be familiar with the skills-development-matrix advocated by the Gordon Training International Institute in California which illustrates the learning stages of skill development in four phases: 1. unconscious incompetence, 2: conscious incompetence, 3: conscious competence and 4: unconscious competence.

#### Conscious-Competence Model

		<u>Competence</u>	
		Incompetent	Competent
<u>Consciousness</u>	Conscious	Conscious Incompetence	Conscious Competence
	Unconscious	Unconscious Incompetence	Unconscious Competence

#### **Source: Gordon Training International, California, USA**

To illustrate this concept let's consider the apprentice carpenter, Stan.

When Stan begins his apprenticeship all he knows is that he loves working with wood. He saws, chisels and carves pieces of wood to create basic sculptures and amateur pieces of furniture.

At this stage, Stan is unaware of the enormous learning curve he is about to embark on (i.e. he is unconscious of what he needs to learn). As he begins his study and watches some of the experienced carpenters work, he begins to realise how much he has to learn to become a master of his trade. Stan is now conscious of his incompetence.

Further, as Stan progresses through his apprenticeship he begins to gain new skills (he must concentrate on holding the wood and the tools at certain angles to bring about the result he wants). This, at first, takes enormous concentration but he is gaining confidence. Stan is now conscious of how skilled he is becoming.

Finally, Stan completes his apprenticeship and goes on to open his own business. In a few years, he is making wonderful pieces of furniture, hardly thinking about what he has to do to bring about the exquisite results he produces. Stan is now unconsciously competent. He simply does his work, barely paying attention to the process (sometimes signing along to the radio in the background). He no longer has to concentrate on every stage of his work.

In the same way, counsellors build their skills in communication by progressing through these stages. Counsellors who are finding the use of micro skills awkward or difficult are likely to be in the consciously incompetent stage. Counsellors, who are using the skills effectively but feel a little unnatural or awkward, are likely to be consciously competent. And counsellors who have learnt the skills thoroughly and are no longer immediately aware that they are using the skills are unconsciously competent.

It can be reassuring to know that you will progress through the skill-development matrix. It is only a matter of time and practice before you master the skills and they become second nature to you.

### **SUMMARY OF COUNSELLING SKILLS**

<b>Micro-skill</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>When it's used</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<b>Attending Behaviour</b>	Attending behaviours encourage clients to talk and show that the counsellor is interested in what's being said.	Throughout entire counselling interview. Particularly important in the initial stages of establishing rapport.	Attentive body language (eye contact, leaning forward slightly, encouraging gestures)
<b>Questioning</b>	Effective questioning helps guide the counselling conversation and may assist in enriching the client's story.	Questioning is useful in the information gathering stage of the interview. It can however be an important skill to use throughout the entire process.	"What would you like to talk about today?"  "When does the problem occur?"
<b>Responding</b>	Accurate Responding allows the counsellor to confirm with the client that they are being heard correctly.	Responding is useful throughout all stages of a counselling interview. It helps the counsellor to clarify and encourage clients' stories.	"Let me see if I've got this right. You want to go back to full time study but are worried about your financial commitments?"
<b>Noting and Reflecting</b>	Noting and reflecting is used to bring out underlying feelings.	Noting and reflecting can assist in adding the emotional dimension to the client's story, so is often used in the interview stages of gathering information and exploring alternatives.	"You feel disappointed because your mother didn't call you on your birthday."

<b>Client Observation</b>	Skilled client observation allows the counsellor to identify discrepancies or incongruities in the client's or their own communication.	Observation is a skill that is utilised throughout the entire counselling interview.	Observing body language, tone of voice and facial expressions.
<b>Confrontation</b>	Confrontation is a skill that can assist clients to increase their self-awareness. It can be used to highlight discrepancies that clients have previously been unaware of.	Confrontation is often used when the counsellor observes mixed messages or incongruities in the client's words, behaviours, feelings or thoughts. Confrontation should only be used after rapport has been developed between client and counsellor.	"You say you would like to do further study but you haven't contacted the training institution."
<b>Focusing</b>	Focusing enables a counsellor to direct client's conversational flow into certain areas.	Focusing is a skill that is relevant to all stages of a counselling interview. This skill however should be used sparingly.	After noticing that a client has mentioned very little about his family, the counsellor, (believing the family is relevant) directs the conversation toward the client's family.
<b>Influencing</b>	Influencing may facilitate change in the way a client chooses to think or act.	Influencing is generally used when the client is exploring alternative ways of thinking or behaving.	A young person has just started taking drugs. The counsellor discusses the possible long and short term consequences of his/her actions.

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## FOCUSING

Focusing enables a counsellor to direct client's conversational flow into certain areas. It is a microskill that is relevant to all stages of a counselling interview. This skill however should be used sparingly.

*Example:* After noticing that a client has mentioned very little about his family, the counsellor, (believing the family is relevant) directs the conversation toward the client's family.

Ivey and Ivey (2003) have identified seven areas a counsellor can focus on in the counselling session to bring about broader perspectives and potential solutions.

The first is Individual focus, where the counsellor begins the counselling session by focusing totally on the personal aspects of the client; the demographics, history, and the reasons why counselling is sought, from the client. The counsellor will often use the client's name, to help bring about total focus on that client. For example, "Joan, tell me a little about yourself". "Joan, are you the oldest daughter in the family?"

The second is; Main theme or problems focus. Attention is given to the reason why the client sought counselling. Other focus, as no problem is truly isolated, the client will often speak of friends', colleagues, extended family members and other individuals that are somehow connected with the reason for the client seeking counselling.

Family focus, concerns siblings, parents, children. Flexibility is required in the definition of "Family", as it can have different meanings to different people, i.e. traditional, single parent, nuclear and/or can include extended family members, or very close friends who are given family titles such as Aunt or Uncle.

Mutuality focus is concerned with how the client reacts to the counsellor, because this could be an indication of how the client develops in relation to other people. It attempts to put the counsellor and client on an equal level, with the counsellor asking: "How can we work together?" "How would you like me to help with this situation at this point?"

Interviewer focus is where the counsellor may disclose information about themselves.

Finally, Cultural/environmental/context focus. The counsellor will understand how a client is influenced by the community/ies in which they grew up, but this can be extended to other issues such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status to gain a greater understanding of the person the client is today.

## ENCOURAGERS, PARAPHRASING AND SUMMARISING

A counsellor can encourage a client to continue to talk, open up more freely and explore issues in greater depth by providing accurate responses through encouraging, paraphrasing and summarising. Responding in this way informs the client that the counsellor has accurately heard what they have been saying. Encouragers, paraphrases and summaries are basic to helping a client feel understood.

Encouragers, also known as intentional listening, involve fully attending to the client, thus allowing them to explore their feelings and thoughts more completely. Paraphrasing and summarising are more active ways of communicating to the client that they have been listened to. Summarising is particularly useful to help clients organise their thinking.

The diagram below shows how encouragers, paraphrases and summaries are on different points of a continuum, each building on more of the information provided by the client to accurately assess issues and events.



**Encouragers** - Encouragers are a variety of verbal and non-verbal ways of prompting clients to continue talking.

Types of encouragers include:

- Non-verbal minimal responses such as a nod of the head or positive facial expressions
- Verbal minimal responses such as “Uh-huh” and “I hear what you’re saying”
- Brief invitations to continue such as “Tell me more”

Encouragers simply encourage the client to keep talking. For a counsellor to have more influence on the direction of client progress they would need to make use of other techniques.

**Paraphrases** - To paraphrase, the counsellor chooses the most important details of what the client has just said and reflects them back to the client. Paraphrases can be just a few words or one or two brief sentences.

Paraphrasing is not a matter of simply repeating or parroting what the client has stated. Rather it is capturing the essence of what the client is saying, through rephrasing. When the counsellor has captured what the client is saying, often the client will say, “That’s right” or offer some other form of confirmation.

*Example:* I have just broken up with Jason. The way he was treating me was just too much to bear. Every time I tried to touch on the subject with him he would just clam up. I feel so much better now.

*Paraphrase:* You feel much better after breaking up with Jason.

**Summaries** - Summaries are brief statements of longer excerpts from the counselling session. In summarising, the counsellor attends to verbal and non-verbal comments from the client over a period of time, and then pulls together key parts of the extended communication, restating them for the client as accurately as possible.

A check-out, phrased at the end of the summary, is an important component of the statement, enabling a check of the accuracy of the counsellor’s response. Summaries are similar to paraphrasing, except they are used less frequently and encompass more information.

## QUESTIONING

Questions during the counselling session can help to open up new areas for discussion. They can assist to pinpoint an issue and they can assist to clarify information that at first may seem ambiguous to the counsellor. Questions that invite clients to think or recall information can aid in a client's journey of self-exploration.

Counsellors should be knowledgeable about the different types of questioning techniques, including the appropriate use of them and likely results. It is also important to be aware and cautious of over-questioning.

Asking too many questions sends a message to the client that the counsellor is in control and may even set up a situation in which the client feels the counsellor has all the answers. In determining effective questioning techniques it is important to consider the nature of the client, their ongoing relationship with the counsellor and the issue/s at hand.

There are two main types of questions used in counselling: (1) Open and (2) Closed.

**Open Questions** - Open questions are those that cannot be answered in a few words, they encourage the client to speak and offer an opportunity for the counsellor to gather information about the client and their concerns.

Typically open questions begin with: what, why, how or could.

For example:

1. What has brought you here today?
2. Why do you think that?
3. How did you come to consider this?
4. Could you tell me what brings you here today?

"How" questions tend to invite the client to talk about their feelings. "What" questions more often lead to the emergence of facts. "When" questions bring about information regarding timing of the problem, and this can include events and information preceding or following the event. "Where" questions reveal the environment, situation or place that the event took place, and "Why" questions usually give the counsellor information regarding the reasons of the event or information leading up to the event.

- How? Most often enables talk about feelings and/or process.
- What? Most often lead to facts and information.
- When? Most often brings out the timing of the problem, including what preceded and followed it.
- Where? Most often enables discussion about the environment and situations.
- Why? Most often brings out reasons.

It should be noted that care must be taken by the counsellor when asking "why" questions. Why questions can provoke feelings of defensiveness in clients and may encourage clients to feel as though they need to justify themselves in some way.

**Closed Questions** - Closed questions are questions that can be answered with a minimal response (often as little as "yes" or "no"). They can help the counsellor to focus the client or gain very specific information. Such questions begin with: is, are or do.

For example:

- Is that your coat?
- Are you living alone?
- Do you enjoy your job?

While questioning techniques can be used positively to draw out and clarify issues relevant to the counselling session, there is also the very real danger of over-using questions or using questioning techniques that can have a negative impact on the session. The wrong types of questioning techniques, at the wrong time, in the hands of an unskilled interviewer or counsellor, can cause unnecessary discomfort and confusion to the client.

## **CONFRONTATION**

Generally speaking the term confrontation means challenging another person over a discrepancy or disagreement. However, confrontation as a counselling skill is an attempt by the counsellor to gently bring about awareness in the client of something that they may have overlooked or avoided.

There are three steps to confrontation in counselling. The first step involves the identification of mixed or incongruent messages (expressed through the client's words or non-verbals). The second step requires the counsellor to bring about awareness of these incongruities and assist the client to work through these. Finally, step three involves evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention evidenced by the client's change and growth.

During the counselling process there are four (4) discrepancies which the client could display. The discrepancy can be between:

- Thoughts and feelings
- Thoughts and actions
- Feelings and actions or
- A combination of thoughts, feelings and actions.

Having identified a discrepancy, the counsellor highlights this to the client, using a confrontation statement such as:

"On the one hand ..., but on the other hand...."

This is a standard and useful format for the actual confrontation. Of course, you may also use variations such as:

"You say ... but you do ...," or  
 "Your words say ... but your actions say ...."

E.g.: "Your words say you would like to spend more time with your sister, but your actions say that it's not a priority for you."

## REFLECTION OF MEANING

Reflection of meaning refers to the deeply held thoughts and meanings underlying life experiences. For the counsellor who uses reflection of meaning in their work, they will find that clients will search more deeply into the aspects of their own life experiences.

For example, imagine two individuals who take a holiday on an island resort: the same island, the same resort, the same time of year. One of them passionately expresses the wonders of the sunsets, walks along the beach and leisurely life style. While the other complains about the heat, sunburn and boredom they experienced.

This example illustrates how the same event can have a totally different meaning to the different individuals experiencing the event. Hence, the skill of reflection of meaning is to assist clients to explore their values and goals in life, by understanding the deeper aspects of their experiences.

## SELF-DISCLOSURE

The benefits or advantages of self-disclosure include: helping the client to not feel alone, decreasing client anxiety, improving the client's awareness to different viewpoints, and increasing counsellor genuineness.

Some disadvantages of applying self-disclosure include: moving focus from the client, taking too much counselling time (and thus reducing client disclosure), creating role confusion (who is helping who?), possibly trivialising the client's issue by implying everyone goes through it, and interfering with transference.

**Guidelines for use of self-disclosure** - According to Gladding (2006) there are some guidelines which can help counsellors to effectively implement self-disclosure strategies. Such guidelines are basically communication skills which can be used to avoid common pitfalls of this process, such as losing rapport or focus in the situation.

Primarily, the counsellor should be direct, brief, focused and relevant. This will ensure the self-disclosure process does not lead to time wastage and loss of focus in the client's situation. Self-disclosure should also not be used frequently (more self-disclosure is not necessarily better) and should not add to the client's problems and negative outcomes in a situation.

In essence, the purpose of self-disclosure should be clear to both counsellor and client and the process should only be used after considering other options, envisaging that there is a risk of miscommunication and an effect on the balance of power.

### **Case Study: A Briefing of the Technique**

A young man wishes to move out of his family home and seeks a counsellor for help. The young man is very distressed by the possible change and the effect it could have on both his parent's and his own life. In the counselling setting, he briefly describes his motives for moving out; however, he attests that he does not want to cause emotional strife to his parents.

In that context, he asks the counsellor to help him come up with a way to tell his parents without hurting them. A solution to that situation would relieve the young man from his personal anxiety.

The counsellor and the client explored all available options and at the end of the counselling session, the young man is still very emotionally affected by his decision and its possible outcomes. At that point, self-disclosure was used as a strategy to help the client move into a positive frame of reference.

The counsellor disclosed that her son left the family home only last year, and even though it was a very emotional situation for the family, they understood his decision and moved forward. Nowadays, they regularly meet and have a very positive relationship. At the end of the counselling relationship, the client felt comfortable with the knowledge that a similar situation had ended with a positive outcome, and was able to move forward with his decision without distress.

This example showed the effective use of self-disclosure and how this technique can be beneficial to clients. It was observable that in that scenario, the following benefits were achieved: helping the client to not feel alone, decreasing client anxiety and increasing counsellor genuineness.

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## ACTIVE LISTENING

Active listening is an essential skill counsellors can exploit to develop a positive and healthy interaction with a client.

“Active listening intentionally focuses on who you are listening to, whether in a group or one-on-one, in order to understand what he or she is saying. As the listener, you should then be able to repeat back in your own words what they have said to their satisfaction. This does not mean you agree with, but rather understand, what they are saying”.

(Source: [www.studygs.net/listening.htm](http://www.studygs.net/listening.htm))

There are numerous situations in which counsellors can utilise active listening to build rapport with clients and improve overall communication. Some of these are explored below.

**Information - getting a clear picture.** This means asking questions to find out about needs, instructions and context of a client. Counsellors should check back to ensure they've heard and understood the relevant details, and that the client agrees on the facts.

*Aim of the speaker:* To tell them what you want.

*Aim of the listener:* To find out and confirm what they are saying.

**Affirmation - affirming, acknowledging, exploring the problem.** Listening actively to a person who would benefit from having their problem acknowledged by the counsellor.

The problem may or may not involve the counsellor directly. Counsellors may reflect back the client's feelings and perhaps the content of the problem with a single statement of acknowledgment or during a dialogue over a period of time, exploring the difficulty in more depth.

*Aim of the speaker:* To tell someone (counsellor) about the problem.

*Aim of the listener:* To help them hear what they are saying. The listener is assisting the speaker to explore the problem further, so the speaker can find greater clarity and understanding for themselves.

**Inflammation - responding to a complaint.** When clients tell the counsellor they are unhappy with them, criticising them, complaining about them, or getting it off their chest, the best thing the counsellor can do (although challenging) is to effectively listen.

*Aim of the speaker:* To tell the counsellor that they are the problem.

*Aim of the listener:* Let them know that they have taken in what they are saying and to defuse the strong emotion.

When there is conflict it is very common to blame the other person. It is challenging to be objective when the emotional level is high. Active listening is an effective tool to reduce the emotion of a situation. Every time the counsellor correctly labels an emotion, the intensity of it dissipates like bursting a bubble.

The speaker feels heard and understood. Once the emotional level has been reduced, reasoning abilities can function more effectively. If the emotions are high, counsellors should deal with the emotions first by using active listening skills. Effective use of active listening skills can turn a challenging situation into a co-operative situation.

# Non-Verbal Communication Skills

## BODY LANGUAGE – AN OVERVIEW

“Fie, fie upon her! There's language in her eye, her cheek, her lip. Nay, her foot speaks; her wanton spirits look out at every joint and motive of her body.”

William Shakespeare's quote is one of many epic statements that illustrate the complexity of body language. The most prevalent form of communication since pre-historic times, body language can express subtle feelings of a client - particularly in instances without words to reveal.

The word “language” is often associated with spoken or written language. After all, it is this unique ability that separates humans from other primates. But despite the association, body language reigns supreme when it comes to volume of messages. In some interactions, over 90% of the communication is exchanged non-verbally.

Body language is often “taken for granted” because in many instances, it occurs on an involuntary or semi-voluntary basis. For example, the human face has around 90 muscles and just about 30 exclusively expressing emotions. Most of the communication which is represented by changes in facial muscles is biologically-inherited and unconscious. Nevertheless, there are several cues which can indicate how a person is feeling or what they are thinking through facial expressions.

We also do semi-conscious or automated body movements. These movements can represent certain mental dispositions and in many instances, we don't notice them at all.

“We all, in one way or another, send our little messages out to the world... And rarely do we send our messages consciously. We act out our state of being with nonverbal body language. We lift one eyebrow for disbelief. We rub our noses for puzzlement.

We clasp our arms to isolate ourselves or to protect ourselves. We shrug our shoulders for indifference, wink one eye for intimacy, tap our fingers for impatience, slap our foreheads for forgetfulness. The gestures are numerous, and while some are deliberate... there are some, such as rubbing our noses for puzzlement or clasping our arms to protect ourselves, that are mostly unconscious.” (Julius Fast, *Body Language*)

## OBSERVATION SKILLS

By accurately observing non-verbal behaviour, a counsellor can gauge the affect her/his words and actions have upon the client. For example, when a client enters into the office of the counsellor, the counsellor can gain some indication of how the client is feeling about the session (are they reticent, comfortable, awkward?) by the way the client walks in, takes their seat, and greets the counsellor.

If a client is resentful about the counselling session taking place, they may keep their eyes lowered, seem dismissive of the counsellor and sit in a closed position, not encouraging communication.

A counsellor can also gauge the effectiveness of their words by carefully observing the facial expression and eye contact of a client. If a counsellor asks a question that the client may find embarrassing to answer, the client may lower their eyes, or their head, or look away. This will tell the counsellor that the client might be uncomfortable with that statement or question.

**Facial Expressions** - There are three sources of information about an individual's feelings and thoughts in the visual channel: facial expression, posture and gestures. Facial expression is considered most prominent source of information about emotions by many researchers and scientists.

The study of facial expressions began over one hundred years ago with Charles Darwin. The famous biologist published a book entitled *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* after years of observation and noting. Darwin's conclusions regarding the link between facial expressions and emotions have been supported by most modern research.

**Eye Accessing Cues** - Eye signals are one of the most 'eloquent' forms of facial expression. The presence of eye contact normally determines whether a person is interested in a certain conversation. If the individual stares uneasily to his or her interlocutors, it he or she may be intimidated; whilst a 'direct stare' is commonly associated with aggression and/or a challenging stance.

Brain research has also enabled scientists to directly associate certain facial movements with thinking processes. Eye accessing cues are an example of those. Following are six distinguishable cues (applied to a normally organised right-handed person):

- Looking left and up: visual recall (recalling a visual memory)
- Looking left and centrally: auditory recall (recalling a noise or sound)
- Looking left and down: auditory internal dialogue
- Looking right and up: visual construction (imagining an image, not factual)
- Looking right and centrally: auditory construction (imagining a sound, not factual)
- Looking right and down: kinaesthetic (imagining a kinaesthetic sensation, not factual)

These cues are often used by police officers in interviews, in order to determine whether the person is lying about particular questions. However, it can be useful in any context: personal, business, etc.

Practical exercise: Ask a friend to recall something he or she has experienced and something that he or she will need to imagine (mentally create). Observe the eye accessing cues.

**Posture and Gestures** - Posture and gestures provide several cues to an individual's personality, self-perception and mental disposition. Much about gestures is culturally-related: the Italian people, for instance, are known for their hand gestures while conversing between each other and with others. It is referred as a body cue to the energy level, or passion, that they speak about some topics.

A person's posture often indicates his or her disposition in a conversation. When people are uninterested during communication, they often demonstrate that by crossing their arms or legs or pointing their body away from the interlocutor.

Inclining back during a conversation is a sign of comfort and perceived power; normally used in hierarchical situations such as job interviews or a work meeting. Particular postures are also, in many scenarios, an agreed convention: people are expected to have a certain posture in a corporate meeting, at a classroom, at a social event, and so on.

**Behavioural Discrepancies** - Voltaire once said: "one great use of words is to hide our thoughts". People often do use words to hide feelings, emotions and thoughts. It may be the result of someone's unwillingness to reveal a weakness, or perhaps an attempt to avoid conflict by contrasting a friend's opinion. Despite their motives, the majority of individuals find it difficult to hide their feelings – and that becomes more apparent when they present behavioural discrepancies.

Behavioural discrepancies are basically the incongruence between someone's words or actions, and their body language. For instance, imagine the following scenario: it is 1 o'clock in the morning when your neighbour knocks at your door asking for ice (he ran out of ice in his party). You smile weakly and say that it would not be a problem. Although your words signified acceptance, your body language was of despise and anger. When people get frustrated, they are likely to 'fake' their feelings to avoid unnecessary conflict (depending on the level of frustration, naturally).

In most situations, it is easier to pick up behavioural discrepancies by observing a person's eyes – they are harder to hide. The old adage "the eyes are the window to the soul" is not only poetic assertion, but a practical and highly applicable point when it comes to body language.

## ATTENDING BEHAVIOUR

Attending is the behavioural aspect of building rapport. When a counsellor first meets with a client, they must indicate to the client that they are interested in listening to them and helping them. Through attending, the counsellor is able to encourage the client to talk and open up about their issues.

Eye contact is important and polite (in Western society) when speaking or listening to another person. This does not mean that the counsellor stares at the client, but maintains normal eye contact to show genuine interest in what the client is saying.

Geldard and Geldard (2001) suggest that to assist clients to relax, counsellors can include in their repertoire, the matching of non-verbal behaviour. This skill can take a little time to learn effectively, but it begins with the counsellor sitting in the same position as the client.

For example, if at first the client is sitting on the edge of her chair with her arms outstretched resting on her knees the counsellor can reflect or mirror this position.

As the client speaks more, the counsellor can either lean forward, to indicate empathy and understanding, or slowly slide back into the chair to take up a more relaxed sitting position. If the rapport has begun to be built between client and counsellor, the client is likely to follow suit. This will reduce the anxiety levels for the client.

Counselling consists mainly of listening and talking, but sometimes the use of silence can have profound effects on the client in the counselling session. When we first begin as counsellors, sometimes silence can be awkward and we rush to fill the gaps, but as our experience grows, we become more comfortable with the concept of simply "being" with the client.

## EMPATHY

A requirement for being an effective counsellor is being able to practice and impart the skill of empathy in the client-counsellor interaction. Being empathetic ensures you are listening and dealing with the client's concerns as they present them. You are not judging them. Some issues for you to remember when considering the issue of empathy when dealing with challenging clients.

**Intensity** - responding to the feelings expressed at the appropriate level of intensity e.g. if you are working with a client. They are very agitated, about to be evicted and their mother is sick. Your response is "You are a bit upset". The client becomes distant - you have not reflected his/her level of emotion accurately.

**Context** - take all aspects into account, not just word and non-verbal behaviour. A lot of people we come into contact with have multiple problems in their lives. They may behave in ways we find inappropriate but taken in context of their experience are understandable.

**Selective responding** - sometimes it may be appropriate to respond only to feelings or behaviour. Some clients do not respond well to discussing their feelings, and in these cases it is useful to focus on more concrete elements, such as experience and behaviour.

When your empathic responses have been successful, it is evident from the client's response, a nod of the head, or a positive verbal response. If your empathic responses have not been accurate, the client will indicate this non-verbally by stopping, fumbling or becoming frustrated.

Being aware of these signs will assist you in relating to a client. You may need to adjust your approach if the client is not responding to you. By using empathy in your interactions with clients you will:

1. Build the relationship
2. Stimulate self-exploration
3. Check understanding
4. Provide support
5. Assist communication
6. Focus attention on the client

(Hanna, 2001)

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