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1. LEARNING OUTCOMES

After studying this module, you should be able to

- Know what are counselling skills
- Understand the different meanings of the term skills
- Learn about the meaning of affective skills
- Insight into the emotions and its components
- Analyze the emotions through affective skills of a therapist

2. Introduction

The success of any counselling or psychotherapy session depends considerably on the skills of a counsellor. These skills help facilitate a good rapport between the therapist and client and helps one gain an understanding of the process between the two. The term skills can be used in different connotations. One usage of the term skills means an “area” of skill such as listening or disclosing. Another meaning and use can be to refer to the competency level such as how good or strong one is in a particular area. Hence, one may have degrees of competency in a skill. One may be stronger in a different area such as active listening but not well in summarizing.

Another meaning of the term ‘skill’ relates to the knowledge and decisions required in implementing a skill. This aims at achieving the counselling objectives. For instance, if you are to be a good listener, the choices and decisions need to be made in this skills area. The aims of counselling skills training programs training programmes help learn how to make strong and effective choices.

The therapeutic competence of a counsellor is the resultant of his self-awareness, his knowledge of the therapies and application of skills. The personal component that the therapist brings is reflected in self-awareness. The education and training of a counsellor comprises his knowledge. The skills of a counsellor helps him use his awareness and knowledge into effective therapy. Hence for effective therapy and counselling, all these aspects need to be used.

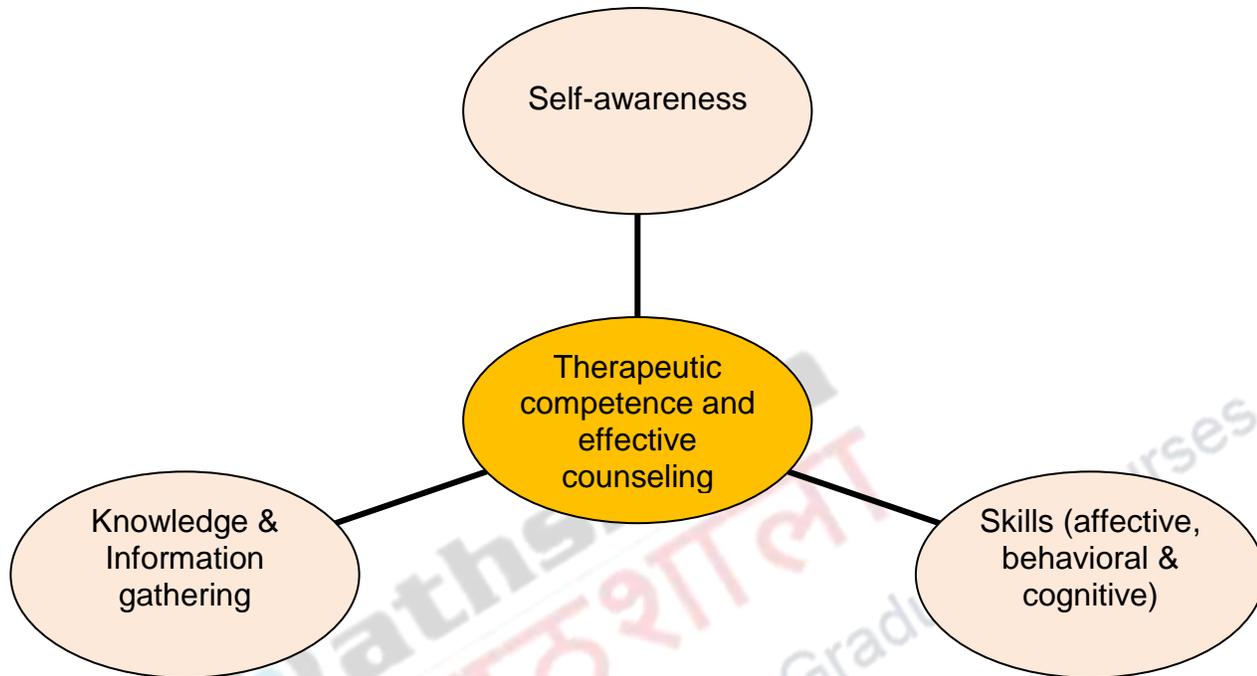


Fig- Diagram of therapeutic competence and effective counselling

3. Basic Concept: Affective skills

The counsellor uses affective, behavioral and cognitive skills simultaneously to develop a meaningful rapport with the client and make the therapeutic process effective. The term affect implies to the 'relative or momentary mood' of the client. In usual language we refer to it as feeling. As living beings, we constantly 'feel' and this in turn affects our thoughts and cognitions. It is believed that we are shaped by our feeling. Some common and significant feelings include happiness, interest, surprise, fear, sadness, anger and disgust or contempt.

The dictionary definitions of feelings tend to use words like 'physical sensation', 'emotions' and 'awareness'. These are various dimensions of feelings. Feelings as physical sensations or as physical reactions represent people's underlying instinctual nature and the fact that feelings are resultant of physical changes in body such as hormones secretion and nervous system stimulation. Examples of primary emotions is sadness, anger, happiness, shame and examples of physical sensations include headaches, muscle tension, chills etc. The word emotions implies movement

such as the continuous flow of biological experiencing. Awareness implies that people can be conscious or make a cognitive assessment of their feelings. The feelings and physical reactions experienced during negative or stressful events cause immense uncomfortableness and difficulties for a person. Feelings have various dimensions:

- Feelings can be overt or covert or combination of two. Overt feelings are evident in verbal and non-verbal cues. Covert feelings are hidden such as a person experiencing anxiety in his first public lecture.
- Feelings can be positive negative or neutral. Emotions like happiness, love etc are positive. Worry, anger, sadness are negative. Others such as drowsiness and inquisitiveness are neutral.
- The intensity of emotions vary greatly depending on the person and circumstances
- People may be aware or unaware of their emotions and sensations.
- Appropriateness of feelings is also significant dimension affecting how we are perceived by others and our relationships with them.
- Congruence is important. When the feelings expressed verbally and non-verbal have the same message then they are said to be congruent. In congruent emotions are when the verbal expression is different from the non-verbal felt emotion. Congruence also helps in sending clear and compact messages
- Emotions tend to help or hurt people on the basis of various factors discussed above. Expressing emotions can enhance our relationships and help us move towards positive achievement. Expressing emotions can harm our relationships with others also.
- Emotions are also affected by gender. Women are more attuned to reading emotions in others. In addition, women easily express emotions as compared to men who fear expression.
- Some research has suggested that older adults experience less anxiety and depression, more contentment and shorter period of negative mood than younger adults.
- Emotions are expressed differently in different cultures. Also only emotions that are compatible with a particular culture are expressed.

Hence, assessment of the feeling and physical reactions is significant for the counselling process. The counsellor needs to be competent enough to be aware of his/her own feelings as well as clients. Feeling needs to be experienced, expressed and appropriately managed. All these refer to the affective skills of a counsellor.

4. Dealing with Affect and Emotion

Emotions and feelings are complex in nature. Emotions comprises of three aspects, emotional awareness, experience and expression. Emotional awareness refers to becoming conscious and identifying the feelings present in a person. Emotional experience refers to the ability to recognize the bodily sensations and changes in the body accompanied during an emotion. Emotional awareness and experience help in understanding of affect and identification of target emotions that needs to be changed. Emotional expression is the outward manifestation of the inner physical changes and feelings experienced. These three aspects are closely linked with each other.

Process of affective awareness:

The counsellor first focuses on the affective awareness of the client. This is usually assessed through detailed questioning and discussions with the client. The focus is to explore the feelings of the client. Also, some strategies used are helping the client become aware of the physiological changes linked to feelings, such as bodily awareness exercise, breathing exercises etc. Hence the client learns to listen to the signals produced by the body. Next, the client is told to enlist or tell the inner experiences that he has of the affect/feeling such as growling of stomach, pain in abdomen, headache, stiffness in neck, sweating, palpitations, breathlessness. Next, the client gives a label to his feeling such as sad, anxious, stressed, anger, depression etc. Now the client is taught to identify the intensity of the affect. This is important as it indicates the subjective perception of the distress caused by the affect. Also it will help identify which emotions cause more distress and target these emotions first for change. Sometimes there may be mixed affect and conflicting affect experienced simultaneously. This may lead to confusion and failure in identifying the emotion. Confusion may also be due to lack of acceptance of the emotion. The counsellor then identifies the underlying affect for the client and work towards acceptance of the affect. The client is taught how certain affective and response styles may have developed over time. Understanding affect helps client gain confidence to manage one's emotions.

Understanding affective expression-

Expression is explored and assessed to understand the potential areas for intervention. The counsellor tries to understand whether the expression of emotions outwardly is equivalently appropriate and congruent to the inner experiences such as physical changes and feeling. The congruency and intensity both are assessed as problems may occur if expression is not congruent and if not at the same intensity as felt. Outward expression is also significant. If there is no outward expression then the reason for his needs to be found as this may be the result of extensive defensive mechanisms employed by the client, which is unhealthy.

Catharsis in counselling session- catharsis simply implies facilitation of emotion. It is the process of outward expression of the inner felt affect. Catharsis is significant for working with the affect of the client. It helps the client to identify and accept one's affect. It raises the inner self-awareness of the client and helps him take responsibility of his affect as it is done in the safe setting of counselling.

Working on Body & Affect-

The client needs to realize that there is an integration between mind and body. There are various exercises that the client is taught to understand about the fine balance between body and experience of affect. These exercises focus on smaller muscle groups and gradually focus on overall body. Another relaxation technique is Jacobson's progressive muscle relaxation. In the Indian context hath yoga prescribes breathing exercises such as 'anulom-vilom' and meditation. The various stages of these exercises are linked to how various feeling lead to tension and relaxation of various muscles. This helps client control and manage their affect and not become victims of their emotions.

Dealing with Affect and Emotion-

The focus here is on helping clients become polished with their affective experience, teaching them higher levels of affective awareness. It helps the client accept all of their emotions, both positive and negative and to recognize their meaning and source.

Exploring affect- the client needs to learn to become aware of the inner experience and recognize the emotion felt. The clients need to recognize their emotional state empathically and accurately. Some clients are unable to recognize their affect because of some possible reasons such as childhood learning of not paying attention, traumatic experience leading to repression, poor environment in childhood, excessive focus on cognition and behaviour and failure to learn expression and labeling of affect appropriately. Some general affective strategies used by clinicians especially humanists are imagining the worst that might happen; providing emotionally powerful stories, metaphors etc; using emotionally charged language; persuading; eliciting appropriate emotions via imagery and then practicing changing them; using humour; encouraging will power and determination to change and promoting unconditional clinician and self-acceptance.

5. Importance of emotions in Counselling and Psychotherapy

- Clients feel they are listened to and understood by the counsellor.
- Recognizing and dealing with emotions can help develop good rapport with the client.
- Clients feel more optimistic about their therapy results.
- Clients feel cared by the therapist and develop confidence in their relationship.
- Specific treatment goals and interventions can be formulated to assess success.
- Expression and understanding of painful feelings can enable clients to change the antecedents, the personal meaning, the nature and the expression of those feelings leading to relief of symptoms.

The following illustration can help us understand how emotions felt by the client are analyzed:

Ria: “Shaurya and I had a big fight yesterday. His family was coming for dinner and I had lots of work to do. I asked him to help me but he was “busy” watching cricket match. I was very upset at this , I shouted and I threw the remote. It all ended in a big argument and I cried a lot”.

Nature of Ria’s feeling; Anger, Sadness

1. Emotional, physical or a combination- Ria’s anger is emotional (feels mad) and physical (shouts, throws the remote). Sadness is both emotional and physical (feels like crying).
2. Over, Covert or a combination- anger is overt (shouting, throwing). Sadness was covert initially till she verbalized it.
3. Positive, Negative or neutral- both emotions are negative.
4. Level of intensity- Ria’s anger was very intense and sadness was moderate.
5. Appropriateness to context and stimulus- Ria slightly overreacted which may be result of past conflicts and disappointments. The pent up anger is brought up in this situation.
6. Congruence- Ria’s verbal and non-verbal were congruent.
7. Helpful or harmful- the outrage and anger is harmful for their relationship.

7. SUMMARY

The success of any counselling or psychotherapy session depends considerably on the skills of a counsellor. These skills help facilitate a good rapport between the therapist and client and helps one gain an understanding of the process between the two. The dictionary definitions of feelings tend to use words like 'physical sensation', 'emotions' and 'awareness'. These are various dimensions of feelings. Feelings as physical sensations or as physical reactions represent people's underlying instinctual nature and the fact that feelings are resultant of physical changes in body such as hormones secretion and nervous system stimulation. Feelings have various components such as emotional or physical; overt or covert; positive, negative or neutral; levels of intensity; in and out of awareness; congruence and helpful or harmful. Feeling needs to be experienced, expressed and appropriately managed. All these refer to the affective skills of a counsellor. The therapist works in exploring the affect and body and the body and the relation between the two. The therapeutic competence of a counsellor is the resultant of his self-awareness, his knowledge of the therapies and application of skills.

