Understanding the context for the use of counselling skills

1.1 Define counselling skills

Counselling skills are communication tools, like active listening, paraphrasing and summarising and silence, that are applied in a confidential 'speaker-listener' relationship that allows the speaker to talk about their feelings and thoughts freely. “…take Rogers’ sixth condition… the therapist must be an effective communicator of empathy and acceptance, and that the ways of being which make such communication clear and effective are indeed skills which can be learned.” (Sanders, Frankland & Wilkins, 2009 p117.)

These skills enable the listener to truly listen to the speaker in a non-judgemental way and relaying the speaker's story back with the feelings and emotions with which the story was shared, showing the speaker that he/she has been truly understood and heard.

1.2 Outline different roles within which counselling skills may be used

Counselling skills are used in a variety of settings and in different roles. A personal shopper may use these skills if she has a client that has low self esteem or body issues and may need empathy and understanding from the personal shopper.

Another professional that may need to use counselling skills, is a solicitor. Often dealing with difficult and emotional issues like divorce and death, these skills may useful when dealing with their clients in an empathic manner. A running partner could use the skill of active listening, to support their fellow running partner when they are having difficulty in their personal lives.

1.3 Outline different situations in which counselling skills may be used

Counselling skills are used in diverse settings and roles for many different situations. Looking at the roles mentioned in the previous question, I will expand on situations where counselling skills may be used.

In the example of the personal shopper, she may use these skills if she has a client that has low self esteem or body issues. Applying the skill of empathy and offering the client her understanding it will likely reassure the client and
turn a possible unpleasant experience into a pleasant, maybe even memorable, experience.

Looking at the example of the solicitor who may deal with difficult and emotional issues like divorce and death, these skills may be useful when dealing with their clients. A client who have just lost a parent may be very emotional. A solicitor who are able to show empathy and are sensitive to their feelings, will ensure that the client feels heard and understood.

A running partner could use the skill of active listening while out with their fellow runner, in order to support them when they are having difficulty in their personal lives. Listening attentively to the running partner while he/she unloads his/her personal struggles, offers a supportive environment for him/her to share his/her feelings freely without being judged.

1.4 Explain the difference between someone who uses counselling skills and a qualified trained counsellor

Everyone is able to learn and use counselling skills that will ensure they are effective communicators.

However, unlike trained counsellors, someone using these skills are not bound by time or a contract.

A trained counsellor will have a contract in place that outlines boundaries, limits of confidentiality and ethical obligations, like working according to the BACP ethical framework and having regular supervision.

A person that uses counselling skills are able to offer advise and guidance, unlike a trained counsellor. Someone who merely uses these skills do not attend casework supervision.

A qualified trained counsellor will practise in a safe secure setting where confidentiality can be maintained as supposed to someone using counselling skills that can and may apply these skills anywhere, confidential or not.

2.1 Explain the key features of one recognised ethical framework for counselling and psychotherapy used by qualified trained counsellors

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) Ethical Framework for Good Practice intends to guide their member practitioners and other closely related roles. An ethical mindfulness and willingness to be
accountable for their practice are essential requirements to be a member of the Association.

Three key features of the BACP Ethical Framework is:

• Values
• Ethical Principles
• Personal Moral Qualities

Until very recently ‘Head of Complaints’ formed part of the key features, but now sits under the voluntary register.

Values
These fundamental values include commitment to offering respect and dignity to clients according to human rights, offering safety and protection to clients, making sure the client-counsellor relationship is sound and overall wellbeing is sought for the client as well as respecting diversity and uniqueness of each client.

Ethical principles of counselling and psychotherapy
Practitioners have an ethical responsibility and a whole host of principles direct the attention to this responsibility. Below are the principles and a brief outline of each:

• Being trustworthy refers to the practitioner honouring the trust that clients places in them. This trust is fundamental to be able to understand and resolve ethical issues.
• Autonomy is the recognition and respect of the client’s ability and basic right to take charge of their own life and self-direct within the therapeutic relationship as well as all other aspects of life.
• Beneficence is the dedication to ensure the client’s well-being by acting in the best interest of the client. This involves working within the limits of competence and ongoing monitoring and bettering of the service that is being provided. This is done by continued professional development and supervision.
• Non-maleficence is to do no harm. Doing no harm involves avoiding all possible ways of exploitation, avoiding malpractice and incompetence which includes not practising while ill or intoxicated or in an emotionally or mentally unfit state.
• Justice involves being fair and non-discriminatory offering equal opportunities and a fair service to all clients regardless of their social, cultural or religious diversity and appreciating their uniqueness.
• Self respect includes the personal and professional development of the practitioner, developing self knowledge and care of self. The ethical responsibility for supervision links directly to self respect and self knowledge, ensuring the practitioner is well rounded as a person even when away from the counselling role.
Personal moral qualities
These moral qualities are the qualities that describes the practitioner’s way of being. As these qualities are deeply rooted in the person, it would be unrealistic to prescribe that practitioners should possess all of the qualities. These qualities are cultivated from personal and professional development and is a personal commitment made by the individual practitioner rather than an authority insisting on these qualities to exist. These qualities are of the utmost importance to the clients and are invaluable in the therapeutic relationship.

- **Empathy** is the ability to walk along side the client in their world and communicate their understanding back to the client.
- **Sincerity** is to deliver what has been promised and to meet the clients’ expectation in a realistic manner.
- **Integrity** is the commitment to be honest and act in a moral way and being personally straightforward.
- **Resilience** offers the opportunity for the client to bring their concerns without the practitioner loosing themselves in the client’s issues.
- **Respect** deals with every person they encounter on equal terms and honour their uniqueness.
- **Humility** brings the ability to acknowledge and accept one’s own strengths and shortfalls.
- **Competence** allows the practitioner to work effectively applying the skills, knowledge and experience that has been learned.
- **Fairness** ensures that every client is dealt with in a consistent manner by applying the relevant criteria when making decisions and taking action.
- **Wisdom** gained from experience will inform sound judgment in practice.
- **Courage** fuels the strength and determination to act despite fears, risks and unknown factors.

2.2 Compare their chosen ethical framework with the requirements of one other professional body or employing organisation

The BACP ethical framework has similarities and differences to the requirements of the organisation working with young people and children with learning disabilities.

Confidentiality, in the voluntary sector working with young people and children with learning disabilities, has to be broken if any case of abuse or negligence is shared by the individual. “As the law gives primacy to protection rather than autonomy for young people there are also definite limits to confidentiality.” (Sanders, Frankland & Wilkins, 2009 p293.)
Any significant information, including choices that they want to make that would be viewed as a risk by parents or carers, has to be shared. To some extent confidentiality is compromised by reporting on the number of individuals engaging and hours of engagement with each individual. The voluntary sector requires capturing personal information like age, gender, race, religion and disability all for reporting purposes.

In contrast, the BACP framework has four legal requirements for grounds to break confidentiality, one of which is the Protection of Children’s act 1999. A client’s details are kept confidential with a possible exemption if requested by a court of law.

Furthermore, the organisation's key principle was to promote independence, but any attempt of autonomy had to be approved by a parent or carer by way of written consent. In contrast the BACP promotes the respect for the client to self govern.

A qualified counsellor working in the voluntary sector is governed by the BACP ethical framework, but would also need to adhere to the organisation’s policies and procedures. A clear and transparent working agreement would need to be in place to ensure that all needs are met to promote the best interest of the client.

3.1 Explain the importance of the following when using counselling skills in a formal setting

Professional conduct
Professional conduct is very important and a structured framework provides accountability to the client and guides the facilitator to best practices. It ensures the clients’ interests are kept at the heart of the service provision. This framework ensures that standards are kept high and a safe and professional service is delivered. It also offers the practitioner protection and the overall confidence in the profession gets promoted.

Ethical issues
“One of the characteristics of a contemporary society is the coexistence of different approaches to ethics.” BACP ethical framework

Ethical issues are resolved by considering a whole host of different aspects. First and fore mostly always to do no harm, consider personal morals and values, the legal requirements and other resources at our disposal. Dealing with ethical issues are important and the aim is to achieve the best outcome (beneficence) while causing the least harm (non-maleficence).
Ethical issues may arise from a practitioners’ own values and experiences as he or she, “the instrument of counselling”, is a product of life experiences. These significant cultural influences must be recognised and examined and where possible, understood.

**Confidentiality**
Offering confidentiality to our client’s “is an expression of our respect for our clients.”

This confidentiality is of great importance as it ensures the speaker that they can trust the listener with their very sensitive personal issues. This trust is crucial for the process to take place. A speaker’s personal information is protected by confidentiality, even after their death. Confidentiality brings with it ethical and legal challenges as absolute confidentiality can not be offered. The limits of confidentiality in a facilitative relationship are clearly outlined in a contract before the relationship of speaker-listener is started.

Conflicting issues may arise for the listener if the listener has responsibility to both the speaker and the listener’s agency like a listener that facilitate staff members of the same agency.

**Boundaries**
Boundaries are very important as these personal limits are what will ensure that the listener feels comfortable. These boundaries are put in place before the helping relationship starts. It deals with what is on offer as to provide the speaker with reasonable expectations that the listener is likely to be able to meet. It defies times and availability, limits to confidentiality and fees as well as any other ‘business’ related matters. All of these are clearly set out in a contract.

Boundaries may need to be revisited if there is ‘an attack on the frame.’ This refers to when the boundaries have been challenged or over stepped. These boundaries offer the client to self govern.

**Legal responsibilities**
Applying non-maleficence to the speaker, the first consideration is to do no harm. Ensuring all basic health and safety procedures are in place and up to date to provide a safe environment so that the speaker suffers no physical harm.

Should a speaker get hurt while on your premises, the listener has a legal responsibility and liability and insurances that protect against physical injury is highly recommended.

Supervision, clear contracting, boundaries and following the BACP framework will greatly reduce psychological harm that may be suffered.
Professional indemnity and public liability insurance is recommended as defending cases can be very costly.

Negligence
Negligence can be largely avoided by following the guidance in the BACP ethical framework and regular CPD. The framework offers guidance on good practice and to keep the listener informed.
A good rule to practice by is to not give advise. This may carry legal responsibilities that may make is easier for the speaker to claim negligence. Mal-practice, including negligence, may lead to a period of suspension from the BACP.

“A finding of professional malpractice signifies that the service(s) for which the practitioner is responsible have fallen below the standards that would reasonably be expected of a practitioner exercising reasonable care and skill. Examples of malpractice include, but are not restricted to:
1. Incompetence
2. Negligence
3. Recklessness
4. The provision of inadequate professional services
A finding of serious professional malpractice is appropriate if the malpractice is of sufficient seriousness to merit a period of suspension of rights of membership and/or the withdrawal of membership of the Association.”
BACP website.

Diversity and difference
“...it is psychologically healthy to accept diversity. It is evidence of a mature psychology where acceptance is the natural, healthy response to diversity.”
(Sanders, Frankland & Wilkins, 2009 p277.)
This way of thinking lies very close to my personal way of being, my morals and values and it is important to look at how well the chosen approach fits with my personal values.

However it is imperative to examine how I may have been influenced from past experiences relating to diversity, say for example experiences from living in a different country with a different culture and how my childhood impressions may have been introjected. I need to, where possible, understand these experiences and make my own decisions as an adult. Supervision is helpful for this growth and exploration.

3.2 Explain when, how and why confidentiality and boundaries may be breached.

Listeners have to abide by all statutory laws, the same is any other citizen. A practitioner will also have a set of policies and procedures to follow in their
practice. However the four most common laws that a practitioner may face in their role as a facilitator are:

- Prevention of terrorism Act 2005
- Money Laundering regulations 2007
- Drugs trafficking Act 1996
- Protection of Children’s Act 1999

Legally and morally the facilitator is obliged to break confidentiality and inform someone if a client discloses that they are breaching any of these laws.

When a speaker oversteps the boundaries of the therapeutic relationship for example, by wanting to become friends and have a closer relationship, the boundaries have to be re-established to keep both the facilitator and the speaker safe. This could be potentially difficult as the speaker may feel abandoned or rejected and therefore has to be handled with great care.

“Keeping a positive therapeutic attitude at the forefront is essential to stop you from becoming anti-therapeutic as you try to maintain boundaries that will help you in the medium to long term, but may seem unnecessary to your client” (Sanders, Frankland & Wilkins, 2009 p234-235).

3.3 Explain, using examples, the importance of the right physical environment when using counselling skills

The tangible experience the speaker has when attending a session is vitally important and the listener needs to be able to provide a suitable and safe environment.

On arrival, ease of parking, accessibility and confidentiality all plays an important role as a speaker may feel embarrassed or vulnerable. Accessibility is very important to provide equal opportunities for all speakers to access your service. For example, if someone is unable to use the stairs, a stair lift needs to be in place or a ground floor room should be used. Accessibility also included ramps to get into buildings and drop curbs in the parking areas.

A welcoming room with warm, neutral colours where nothing demands too much attention is ideal as it will provide the right atmosphere for the speaker to be able to focus on their emotional material rather than be distracted by their surroundings.

Generic and calming imagery adds a nice touch and may add to elevate anxiety in the speaker. For example, using images of land-or sea scapes or abstracts. Do not display personal pictures of your family as this could be potentially upsetting for a speaker who may have lost a child or is going through a divorce.

Comfortable seating in a private and quiet environment is key for a speaker to feel safe to share their problems with the facilitator. Make sure that the
A clear and transparent contract will go a long way in maintaining emotional and mental health. For the listener, supervision is crucial to be able to ensure their wellbeing, learning and delivering an effective service.

4.1 Explain the difference between casework supervision and other forms of supervision.

Casework supervision concentrates on client work and all aspects of working with clients from the point of the listener, i.e., the skills or interventions used and the overall speaker-listener relationships. It is an ethical obligation for a listener to have casework supervision. This supervision is normally provided outside the organisation and should be completely independent from the listener and the organisation. This independence offer the opportunity for the supervisor to make unbiased recommendations and observations for the benefit of the listener and their therapeutic relationships. This supportive function allows the listener to be open and honest about their own feelings regarding speakers and their material. Lastly, a supervisor is more experienced and will be able to shed light on specific areas within your
practice. All this is done to ensure that the speakers are kept safe and that their best interests are honoured.

“The task is to work together to ensure and develop the efficacy of the therapist/client relationship. The agenda will be the therapy and feeling about that work, together with the supervisor’s reactions, comments and challenges. Thus supervision is a process to maintain adequate standards of therapy and method of consultancy to widen the horizons of an experienced practitioner.” BACP, What is supervision. (Sanders, Frankland & Wilkins, 2009 p330.

Managerial supervision looks at the organisation that the listener is working within and it’s aims and objectives. It looks at the listener as an employee and not a ‘listener’. Managerial supervision measures the listener’s effectiveness and the overall contribution to the organisation.

Managerial supervision focusses on the business of the organisation, budgets, targets and overall service delivery of contracts.

4.2 Explain why casework supervision is important for a trainee and a qualified trained counsellor.

Casework supervision plays different roles for a trainee and a qualified trained counsellor.

In the trainee’s situation, the supervisor will help to shape and inform their practice for future. The supervisor will be able to monitor progress and growth and possibly advise where additional training may be needed. The supervisor will also we able to ensure that the trainee is working within their experience and competency level and not ‘get in over their heads’. Moral and ethical guidance may also we shared with the trainee while building up their confidence in their own ability and effectiveness.

For qualified trained counsellors, supervision plays a crucial role in self care. A supervisor will be able to spot early signs of burn out or emotional fatigue due to heavy case loads or complex client issues. Furthermore, a supervisor will be able to help and guide with legal, ethical and confidentiality issues in complex situations.

Qualified trained counsellors will find the supervisor’s role more as consultive, giving them opportunity to ‘run things by them’ in order to get a different perspective. A supervisor’s experience may be helpful in terms of referral pathways and further training opportunities.

4.3 Using examples, explain the possible effects of good and bad casework supervision on

- the work being done with counselling clients
• the personal development of the trainee and the qualified trained counsellor.

Effect of good casework supervision on the work being done with clients:
An example of good casework supervision is the opportunity the practitioner gets to learn and grow from experience and knowledge that is shared in the practitioner/supervisor relationship. This in turn will enable the client to be able to resolve their issues effectively.

Effect of bad casework supervision on the work being done with clients:
An example of bad supervision is if the supervisor gives bad guidance or withholds information on client work that the facilitator is doing. The effect would be harmful to client as boundaries may be breached and lead the client to be in a worse place than when they started.

Effect of good casework supervision on the trainee
An example of the effect good casework, guidance and learning has, is the enriching experience for both trainee and client and building confidence in their effectiveness as a listener.

Effect of bad casework supervision on the trainee
The danger of bad casework for the trainee can be potentially destroying, for example if a supervisor does not challenge the trainee when a boundary has been breached like having a close relationship with a speaker and the speaker making a complaint against the listener.

Effect of good casework supervision on the qualified trained counsellor
Having good casework supervision as a qualified trained counsellor is vital as it will ensure continued self growth which in turns offer a better service to clients. An example is when a supervisor makes the trained qualified counsellor aware of new training opportunities that will further develop their practice.

Effect of bad casework supervision on the qualified trained counsellor
Bad casework supervision can be devastating both for the trained qualified counsellor and their clients. For example, if the counsellor stagnates and don't experience further growth, they may become closed and unable to deliver an effective service, potentially leaving their clients worse than when they started counselling.
Bibliography


Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy revised addition published 21 January 2013 by The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy
http://www.bacp.co.uk
