

INDIVIDUAL COUNSELING

DEFINITION

Individual Counseling is considered the heart of the counseling function. This role is perhaps the most visible aspect of the counselor's work and what most people think of when they imagine a counselor at work. Individual counseling involves a one-to-one interaction between a counselor and a client, where the object is to either aid the client to solve some problem, to find ways to use personal qualities more effectively, or to make an important life decision.

First step toward discovering what individual counseling is all about is to differentiate it from other forms of helpful dyadic interaction - namely conversation. When an individual enters counseling something special is expected to happen, something different from the experience of talking to a friend.

CONVERSATION AND COUNSELING

In the professional individual relationship typical in counseling, however, certain significant differences exist from those found in the ordinary social interchange (conversation) between two people. In counseling, one party is seen to have some knowledge or expertise that is potentially useful to the other. Also, one party is "using" the other (in the best

sense of the term "use"), to help deal with a set of problems or concerns. Thus, the personal and psychological need satisfaction available in the relationship tends to be "one way" rather than reciprocal. There are numerous differences between conversation and counseling that are not apparent to the untrained observer.

Interpersonal focus is one of these. In conversation focus is directed at both parties and participants often talk about themselves. Counseling, places the focus on one participant - client.

Exploration - that is the exploration of a problem, a stage or task of psychological development is promoted during the client - focused interaction.

Exploratory interchange of counseling as opposed to the non productive discourse of conversation, is emphatic and is directed at factors instrumental to the client's concerns and psychological development.

Another difference between counseling and conversation involves goals. The general goals of conversation are polite discussion, an exchange of information, making or continuing a friendship or acquaintance. But the goals of counseling are more professionally than socially based. Counselors are committed to fostering the counselee's welfare in general and psychological development in particular.

Counseling has immediate and explicit objectives that conversation does not have.

Strategies, composed of techniques and methods based on the principles of developmental psychology learning theory and therapeutic behavior change, are the last point of differentiation between conversation and counseling. Counselors use strategies that are designed to help clients mobilize and utilize their resources.

THE GOALS OF COUNSELING

In any human endeavor, before thinking about how to accomplish something, it is essential to clarify what is to be accomplished. So it is with counseling.

What can a person reasonably expect to achieve as a result of participation in counseling? Can counseling help one make a better psychological adjustment to the environment? Does it help the client become a self-directed person? Does counseling help to reduce uncomfortable symptoms? Does counseling help to foster better interpersonal and intrapersonal functioning? Such questions lead to a consideration of the goals and aims of the counseling process. Such goals are normally developed and defined by the counselor and the client.

Counseling is a human transaction process to help individuals achieve goals, such as the following:-

1. To provide a supportive, accepting and empathic relationship so as to help the person feel comfortable in seeking help and not feel that it is wrong to have a problem.

This is primary even if nothing else is accomplished. A person with a problem tends to feel isolated and alienated. In some religious groups he would feel a misfit if he is troubled with a problem. He is made to believe it is wrong to have problems and that he should always put on a cheerful disposition and cheer up in the midst of adverse circumstances.

Instead of denying or belittling people with problems, a counselor wants to let the person know that it is all right to have problems. He needs to know it is not abnormal and that he is not alone. Through the supportive, accepting and empathic relationship, this feeling is communicated.

2. To help reduce the level of anxiety a person has when confronted with a stressful situation. Problems can often bring stress upon the person's life. The emotional reaction that disturbs the person is frequently that of anxiety. He may not be able to verbalize it and may not even be aware that he is anxious. What he would say is that he feels uncomfortable, unsettled and disturbed. As we build the relationship with him and let him talk,

we are trying to help him release his emotions and reduce his level of anxiety. When that happens, he can usually see himself, his world and other people more clearly and be more ready to deal with his problems.

3. To help the person accept responsibility for his problem and deal with it. As we have noted in the previous chapter, it is rather easy for people to blame others or run away from problems. It is appropriate therefore that we should, by the very act of helping, assist the person to accept responsibility for his problem, to own it and do something about it. While there will be reasons for the problem, excuses for not doing anything should be avoided. The person needs to know that he can have control over his own life and situation.

4. To enable the person to explore possible approaches in dealing with his problem and equip him to cope with any future problems he may encounter. If we believe that a person is not a helpless pawn left to be manipulated by circumstances and environment, then we will aim to help him solve his problems. This is done through the problem-solving process. We are not only helping him solve his problems, we want to equip him with skills to handle future problems. A helper wants to help others become capable of helping themselves, not make them dependent on him.

5. To help build a sense of worth, significance and security so that the person may be able to adjust and adapt himself effectively to his day-to-day living. We have already noted that a person with a problem often feels worthless, insignificant and insecure. The helping relationship therefore provides for him a means to feel worthwhile, significant and secure. This improved sense of self is a basic need for human existence and therefore a very important outcome of helping. A person who cannot solve his problem needs inner strength to cope with it. That requires a strong inner self. The attention given, the process of exploration and understanding and the help in gaining control over his life, all add up to build in the person-in-need this improved sense of himself.

- understand self
- acquire information about present and possible future environments
- make important personal decisions
- set personal goals that are achievable and growth enhancing
- develop plans in the present to bring about possible and desired futures
- develop effective solutions to personal and interpersonal problems
- change ineffective behavior to more effective behavior

- cope with difficult environmental and life space circumstances
- gain control over negative and self-defeating emotions, such as debilitating anxiety, guilt, self-pity, loneliness, alienation, hopelessness, and basic insecurity.
- acquire, and learn to use, effective interpersonal transaction skills
- acquire and use the essential elements of the decision making process for making important personal decisions.
- acquire a sense of basic liking and respect for self and a sense of optimism about one's ability to satisfy one's ability to satisfy one's basic needs
- engage continuously in self-examination.

USING INDIVIDUAL COUNSELING IN DRUG ABUSE

Counseling is an integral part of the total rehabilitation process with the drug abuser. Counselors in the rehabilitation process must be prepared to go beyond the one-to-one relationship for the full utilization of community resources that will culminate in successful personal, social and vocational adjustment.

In counseling the drug abuser the focus is on identifying specific needs of clients, and providing them with concrete services rather than dealing with intrapsychic processes.

The drug counselor is required to coordinate client services, is responsible for the client's basic personal and family treatment needs, must maintain liason with other professionals, i.e. physicians, probation officers, etc.

Although it is acceptable that most of the known theories of counseling have been successfully used with the drug abuser (Brammer & Shostrom, 1968) many feel that the most effective counseling strategy involves a directive approach that attempts to uncover and understand the relationship and influences that contribute towards one's abuse of drug (Sifneos, 1972).

Here we will attempt to discuss some of the approaches that we feel is effective with the drug abuser.

1. REALITY THERAPY

Developed by an American psychiatrist, William Glasser (1965), who felt that a person always has a choice open to him/her in any situation as to how to behave and that this choice can include either responsible or irresponsible behavior. glasser also stated that we all have four basic needs, which are necessary in order for us to feel fulfilled and to maintain good mental health. These needs include, love, freedom, power, and fun (Glasser, 1984). An inability to fulfill these needs will result in a failure identity and psychological disturbance. glasser's use of a failure

identity and irresponsible behavior closely parallels the life pattern of the drug abuser.

Basic concepts and techniques of reality therapy are as follows:

- a. Relationship building, First the counselor must build a relationship that convinces the client that he/she cares about him/her.
- b. The client must place value judgements on his/her behavior. In other words, he/she must decide if a specific behavior is "good" or "bad".
- c. The counselor will always focus on the present, and will try to help the client avoid discussing past events. Regardless of how negative events in the past have been, it is impossible to change what has happened, and if the client focuses on these past events, the client reinforces his/her failure identity.
- d. The client must be taught only to focus on his/her behaviors and not on feelings. If a client expresses a feeling, such as, "I feel depressed," the counselor simply says, "what are you doing to make yourself feel this way?"
- e. The development of a more productive and responsible life style begins once a plan action is developed. This treatment or action plan requires mutual consent, and

must contain realistic goals and the steps required to obtain these goals.

- f. Probably the most important aspect of the counseling process is the commitment that the client makes to follow through with the action plan.
- g. Excuses are not permitted in Reality Therapy, and the counselor should never ask the client why he/she did not do something, but say instead, "what are you going to do about it?"
- h. It is essential to make the client aware of the consequences of his/her behavior. This is especially pertinent to the drug abuser who either avoids dealing with the consequences of his/her behavior, or views the consequences as being unfair.

2. BEHAVIOR THERAPY

A general definition of behavioral counseling is that it "consists of whatever ethical activities a counselor undertakes in an effort to help the client engage in those types of behavior which will lead to a resolution of the client's problems" (Krumboltz, 1965, p.384). This definition is perhaps too general to fully portray the character and color of behavioral counseling, but it points out the two important facts that (1) there is no end to the variety of methods used in behavioral coun-

seling, and (2) the goals of counseling - to resolve the client's problems - can be stated in behavioral terms. As will be explained, these two facts are interrelated.

The methods and procedures of behavioral counseling are based on social-learning theory - theories about how people learn and change their behaviors. Forms of learning such as operant conditioning, classical conditioning, modeling, and cognitive processes are used to help clients change unwanted behavior and/or develop new, productive behaviors. These forms of learning are translated into specific techniques, multiple-technique methods, and multiple-method strategies, which are used by the counselor and clients to reach behavioral goals that they both agree on.

Briefly this methods can be grouped into these categories.

- * Changing and controlling the antecedents of behavior.
- * Changing and controlling the reinforcers of behavior.
- * Using models to recognize unwanted behaviors and to learn desirable behaviors.
- * Using imagery to extinguish and/or practice behaviors.
- * Learning social skills.

BEHAVIORAL COUNSELING PROCESS

The process of behavioral counseling flows through sequential stages. In the first stage, the counselor helps clients to explore their concerns, and a behavioral analysis and assessment is conducted through questioning and perhaps a questionnaire or survey instrument. The counselor tries to analyze the clients concerns in terms of composite behaviors or deficits, and extent of severity of these behaviors and deficits is assessed.

Next, the two parties set mutually acceptable goals, stated in behavioral terms. These goals are the targets for stage three - developing and implementing goal oriented strategies based on learning-theory principles. As noted in Krumboltz's definition, quoted earlier, an accountable strategy is any set of ethical procedures that helps clients to engage in behaviors that resolve their concerns. Accountability is reached in stage four of behavioral counseling when client feedback indicates that the strategy was effective in promoting target behaviors and problem resolution.

CONCLUSION

What's individual counseling all about? It is certainly more than can be presented in this paper. Yet, a few universal basics have been established. Though similar to conversation counseling is distinctive enough to have its own identity. It helps individuals with developmental and personal adjust-

ments problems, and where there are no problem counseling can foster healthy human development by increasing self awareness and resourcefulness.

How is counseling done? Through many different approaches, methods, and techniques. Ultimately, one's "how" in counseling consists of one's unique and idiosyncratic manner of helping others combine with the skill and knowledge acquired from the different methods.

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