
Essential Qualities In The Relationship Between The Counselor And The Client

Throughout history, counselling has been an integral part of society. It gives counsellors the ability to encourage personal growth in individuals, offers corrective reinforcement, and creates opportunities for renewed happiness and longevity of life. “Self- experiential learning in the form of personal practice has been considered a key aspect of a therapist since Freud first emphasized the importance of personal therapy for psychoanalytic training” (Bennett-Levy, Finlay – Jones, 2018). The key aspects of a successful career in counselling involve self- care, a period of supervised mentorship, and development of therapeutic self.

Attributes of Self-care

Self-care is a vital aspect of counselling. “The American Counselors Association’s (ACA) Code of Ethics states ‘ counsellors engage in self-care activities to maintain and promote their own emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing to best meet their professional responsibilities’ (Spector, page 28). After engaging in many emotional conversations, often a counsellor can experience episodes of burn out, and fatigue due to the emotional baggage that they have listened to on a daily basis. Effective self-care enables a counsellor to regroup and regain the passion to be an effective counsellor. “When you regularly practice self-care, you feel calmer, more centred, and better capable of guiding your clients” (Spector, page 28).

There are many key components that are vital to a counsellor’s self-care techniques. They are designed to bring stability to a counsellor and maintain a healthy lifestyle. A self-care strategy is designed to reflectively reduce stress and increase mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health. It also provides an opportunity to regain strength and maintain a positive self- image and self-esteem. A balanced self-care is beneficial to a counsellor in many ways. There are five areas that are impacted in self- care. They are cognitive, emotional, physical, spiritual, and social. While all of the areas of wellness are important, the most critical areas are cognitive, emotional and spiritual. Cognitive can be as simple as volunteering at a homeless shelter. Emotional could be considered as watching a funny movie with friends and family. The spiritual aspect is a religious community. I have gained strength, peace and knowledge from applying many of these self-care techniques into my personal life.

Supervision/Mentoring in Relation to the Personal Theory of Development

The creation of a personal theory of development is vital to a counsellor and clients that they will serve in society. “Relationship problems and personality problems affecting therapy lead to more critical incidents leading to a change in therapeutic effectiveness than any other factors” (Kruglanski, Higgins, 2016). Within the dynamics of supervision, opportunities will arise that will encourage a counsellor to grow and experience new critical situations under the guidance of a seasoned professional. It will also illuminate the personal and professional behaviours that they will be mandated to uphold under the ACA Code of Ethics.

The relationship with a mentor is critical to the longevity of a counselling career. Studies have shown that people who are supervised or mentored in the beginning stages of their counselling career have an opportunity for healthy counselling relationships, higher pay and the ability to become prominent leaders within society. A seasoned supervisor/ mentor will be able to challenge the mentee and enhance their current skill set. They are also able to establish professional relationships with other licensed counsellors. “The relationship can be transformed into one of mutual admiration and ongoing ‘collegial’ support” (Dittman, 2005). Within every profession or personality, there is always the risk of difficulties. “67 % of clinical psychology students in a 2000 study of mentorships reported problems in their mentorships... clashes of personalities, conflicting expectations, too much criticism” (Chamberlin, 2005). Depending on the intensity of the situation, many issues can be resolved with respect to the personal goals/viewpoints and active listening. A period of mentoring/ supervision is necessary to develop beneficial attributes of a seasoned counsellor.

Personal Qualities that result in the Development of Therapeutic Self

The development of the therapeutic self is also vital to the establishment of a successful counsellor. “Many researchers agree with the notion of the development of the therapeutic self comes from personal beliefs in physical, psychological, emotional self-care” (Foster, 2016). Physical self-care can be established by a healthy diet, regular exercise, and daily periods of relaxation. Psychological self-care incorporates reflection and personal counselling. “Wellness experts say as life gets busy, counsellors may tend to assume that they can, or even should handle problems and stress on their own. But, these experts caution, counsellors who ignore their own needs will find their outlook on the profession going quickly downhill” (Shallcross, 2011). A counsellor must have ways to dispel the emotional baggage that they experienced during the day. The creation of therapeutic self is such a vital aspect of the field of counselling that the ACA included it in their Taskforce on Counselor Wellness and Impairment. “If I’m not well, that’s going to get in the way of me being able to tune into the needs of my clients” (Shallcross, 2011). One of the key aspects of therapeutic self is the creation and maintenance of personal and professional boundaries. If the boundaries are not established, a sense of bitterness can occur. “A lack of professional boundaries can create feelings of being overwhelmed, bitter and angry” (Shallcross, 2011). Effective self-care practices can encourage and maintain a healthy counsellor/ client relationship.

Having a healthy support system is also beneficial to the development of the therapeutic self. “Peer support can be incredibly effective in improving self-awareness and supporting positive growth and wellness. Creating personalized wellness goals and committing to them in the company of colleagues can support counsellors in turning plans into reality” (Shallcross, 2011).

Emotional/ Spiritual self-care is also vital to the development of the therapeutic self. These goals are achieved by participating in yoga classes, self-reflection and participation in various support groups. Singing, praying and embracing our personal moral values are essential to the establishment of the therapeutic self. The ability to use all of these on a regular basis will benefit everyone in these relationships. “From the patient’s perspective, self-disclosure makes therapists seem more real and human, which in turn strengthens the therapeutic alliance” (Kohler et al. 2017). In the successful development of therapeutic self, the counsellor is able to use personal experience to gain an understanding of the therapeutic process.

Each of these qualities is essential to the relationship between the counsellor and the client. The attributes of self-care, quality supervision and the development of a therapeutic self are vital to a successful career in counselling. In the creation of a building, the cornerstone/foundation must be strong to withstand the stress/ weight of the rest of the building. If the cornerstone is weak, the building will crumble. If the cornerstone is strong, the building will withstand any event that occurs. The same analogy applies to a healthy therapeutic self. A healthy, therapeutic self, self-care and quality supervision create a strong foundation for a strong career in counselling.