

## INTERPERSONAL SKILLS IN COUNSELLING & THERAPY

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aiHmSd-iysA>

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### ▪ INTRODUCTION

We spend most of our childhood and young age getting education, learning lots of skills and gaining knowledge. Most of this is more focused on building our academic credentials and technical skills. But when we think about the real world, there we need some more important skills. These skills are important to understand and connect with ourselves and the people around us.

The skills which help you to communicate and connect with yourself are *Intrapersonal skills* while the skills required to effectively communicate, interact and work with other individuals and groups are called *interpersonal skills*. These skills are useful in achieving success in personal and professional life. They need strong verbal and non verbal communicators.

A person needs a good Emotional quotient to acquire these skills. These skills are mainly learnt in the real life outside the educational institutes. Though western countries have started focusing on interpersonal skills, Asian countries are still not giving it enough importance.

### ▪ IMPORTANCE IN COUNSELLING & THERAPY

As a professional counselor or therapist, one should have the ability to connect with another person on a human level. So the *interpersonal skills* becomes crucially important. They will help to build the trust and comfort.

Hence the counselor should be good at conversational skills like listening, responding appropriately and guiding the person to lead the conversation with thoughtful questions.

Counselor has to be curious and attentive to their clients while inquiring about their backgrounds, surroundings, views, feelings and emotions in a respectful conscientious manner without making any discomfort to the client. Client should always feel it to be a safe and comfortable space to open up.

Counselor is not supposed to listen to only the words spoken but also understand and read the body language so as to decide the line of questions and whether to continue or to return to the question in later session.

### ▪ FACTORS AFFECTING INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

#### 1. Socioeconomic factor -

Socioeconomic conditions can help to understand the environment that the person is living in and one can get some idea about the probable obstacles or opportunities one can face in a particular environment.

Similarly the cultural background and the knowledge about the language can help to connect with the client in a better way.

#### 2. Patient's attitude and health literacy-

Whether the person is aware about various health issues one can have or whether the person is totally unaware about mental health can determine the approach and the steps taken to make

him aware about the situation. It would help the counselor to be at the grasping level of the client and help the client in a better way.

### 3. Sitting

The space chosen for the therapy would also affect the conversation. As it should be quiet without any outside disturbances. There should be enough privacy for the client to speak up comfortably.

### 4. Biases-

There should not be any personal bias while listening to the individual opinions. No homophobia or racism or religious aspect should impair the rationality and the goal of the therapy.

### 5. Body language

Calming soothing voice, reassuring occasional notes, small gestures can be helpful to show the attentiveness and thereby building some assurance and confidence between the therapist and the client.

### 6. Negative findings

It is very important to react carefully especially to the negative findings which might come up during the session.

### 7. Indifference

It's the lack of emotions or care which can affect the interpersonal communication.

### 8. Condition of the doctor

How the doctor is presenting himself affects the way the client would react and bond. So it is advisable to be well groomed and professionally dressed.

## ▪ BASIC INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

- |                     |                                  |                              |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Listening skills | 2. Unconditional positive regard | 3. Counselor self disclosure |
| 4. Empathy          | 5. Concreteness                  | 6. cultural sensitivity      |
| 7. Genuineness      | 8. Open questions                | 9. Self awareness            |

## ▪ RAPPORT ESTABLISHMENT AND EMPATHY

*Rapport is a relation of harmony, accord and trust between the client and the therapist.*

It's very important to establish a rapport with the client on the first visit.

*Empathy is the ability to understand or feel what another person is experiencing from within their frame of reference.*

Some useful factors to build the trust on first visit and to establish a good rapport with the client are-

- Be punctual about appointment timings
- warm greetings while visiting
- a proper self introduction even though the client knows who you are
- assuring the client about the privacy and confidentiality of the sessions
- understanding the nature of the client and try to appropriately adopt the behaviour
- thereby reinforcing and building a professional healthy relationship

- more focus on clinical and therapeutic relationship
- find some general similarities to bond with small talk

## ▪ **QUESTIONING SKILLS**

There are various ways of questioning useful in different kind of situations to get the information, to make the client talk and to guide him .

### 1. Open ended vs. Closed ended questions

Open ended questions might lead to an elaborate answer making the client speak and explain. They are used in the beginning of the session.

E.g. Tell me about your health issues?

Closed ended questions would get an answer in one or two words. These are useful in screening disorders.

E.g. Is your sleep ok?

### 2. Direct vs. Indirect questions

Direct questions are straight forward questions. They can be asked after establishing a good rapport . These can be open ended or closed ended.

E.g. Do you have any sexual problems?

Indirect questions are asked in a non threatening way with the use of soft non offensive words. These questions are useful to elicit sensitive information.

E.g. Do you wish to discuss how your romantic life has been like?

### 3. Non leading vs. Leading questions

Non leading questions are neutral and unbiased. They will let the patient choose and decide the answers on their own. Client won't feel pressurised to give the answer you are expecting.

E.g. Now that your liver is affected, what would you propose to do about your drinking habit?

Leading questions are asked to guide the patient to think in a particular way and understand the situation. Client can feel influenced.

E.g. Do you want to kill yourself?

When will you stop drinking?

## ▪ **Listening skills**

One of the most important skills for a therapist is active listening. *Active listening is analysing, evaluating, understanding what is being said by the patient through words, tone and gestures.*

It requires efforts, concentration and patience to listen attentively throughout the session.

## ▪ SELF AWARENESS

### 1. TRANSFERENCE

*Transference is a phenomenon that occurs when client redirects emotions, feelings, desires and expectations about one person to the therapist.*

Types

1. paternal/ maternal transference – in this case, the client associates the feelings or characteristics of their parent mother or father with the therapist. It can show up as admiration, fear or feeling of nurture.
2. Sibling transference – in this case, reflects the dynamics of sibling relationship
3. Non familial transference – in this case, the client idealizes the therapist or reflects the stereotypes that are influencing the client
4. sexualized transference – in this case, the client becomes obsessively attracted to a therapist in an erotic way.

How to help the client experiencing transference-

- educate the client
- ask the client to keep a journal that way they can spot the patterns of behaviour.
- if nothing works then its better to transfer the client to another professional therapist.

### 2. COUNTER TRANSFERENCE

*Counter transference occurs when the therapist transfers feelings to a client or acts out of a formative relationship, can occur in various ways.*

1. Excessive disclosure of personal matters – if therapist becomes too friendly with the client he / she start opening up and sharing personal matters that are not beneficial to the client's treatment.
2. Parent child dynamic - it can result due to own attachment issues of the therapist.
3. Harsh reaction to racist or homophobic beliefs – clients harmful beliefs may trigger a therapist's protector dynamic. This might result in lashing out at the client

how to prevent counter transference

- awareness
- being attentive to emotions and behaviours and observing the space between stimulus and response will help therapist to choose to act in a thoughtful ways rather than automatically reacting or being driven by feelings.