

Elements of a Successful Therapeutic Relationship

Janessa Goudeau

Grand Canyon University

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Role as a Therapist

My role as a therapist is to be a public servant and to be an advocate for mental health issues. Counselors should aim to make a difference in the world by providing public services with little or no financial return. Ways that I can achieve this is by speaking to support groups, sharing professional information and offering reduced fees (American Counseling Association, 2014). I want to be an advocate for mental health by raising awareness to others, especially for teens and young adults. They are in a sensitive and impressionable time of their life. So, it is important for individuals to learn the importance of mental health during these formative years. My goals as counselor is to have my own in person practice, while giving the option for individuals to have virtual or online sessions. I would also want to help shape the minds of future counselors by becoming an educator in psychology.

Counselor Dispositions

In order to be a successful, each counselors must embody all dispositional expectations. They are in place to help counselors remain ethically and professionally competent, and to help clients thrive. Even though all counseling dispositions are important, the main dispositions I want to incorporate into the counseling relationship are Psychological Fitness, Cultural Diversity, Empathy and Professional Identity. I currently suffer from depression and anxiety disorder. My educational career has helped me understand my mental health issues and provided me different ways to resolve them. Psychological Fitness would be my awareness of my emotional and mental health issues. I would need to ensure that my personal issues are resolved before I can offer any counseling services. The ACA Code of Ethics also advises that counselors engage in self-care activities while practicing. Being a counselor involves talking with diverse individuals about their most personal and dramatic issues. This can take a significant toll on a

counselor. If a counselor is not psychological fit, they will not be able to properly assist their clients.

Cultural Diversity revolves around a counselor's ability to respect, honor and engage individuals from different cultures. As a future counselor, I will embrace each client's uniqueness, and help them strive for empowerment within their own culture. Every person is different. They have their own religion, beliefs, morals, thought processes and customs. This means that I will have to be open and objective to different perspective and lifestyles.

Empathy is one of the most important aspects of counseling. Without empathy, a counselor cannot affectively help their client. When a counselor shows empathy towards their client, they are showing understanding and compassion. My goal is to ensure that each client is treated with respect and dignity. I will also make sure to avoid any actions that could potentially harm my client.

Professional Identity is a counselor's responsibility to adhere to all appropriate regulations, continue their education and support counseling associations. This entails adhering to the ACA Code of Ethics and state board regulations. It also means that counselors must continue their education even after they are fully licensed. I will make sure to further my education by attending trainings and seminars within my community and pursue my Doctorate.

Building Rapport With Clients

The counseling skills I will practice in order to build rapport with clients are active listening, non-verbal communication and self-disclosure skills. Active listening is vital for each interaction with clients. A client must feel "heard" in order to feel comfortable sharing information. If a client feels that their counselor is not listening to them, this can leave an

impression that the counselor does not care about their problems. This could potentially harm the client.

Communication is not just accomplished verbally. Some of the most important types of communication is from a person facial expressions, body language, eye contact, or even remaining silent. It would be beneficial for me to practice appropriate non-verbal communication to ensure a client will not misinterpret any of my actions. For example, during each therapy sessions it is important for counselors to maintain a calm, natural and relaxed demeanor. If the counselor is in a relax state, the more likely the client will be comfortable. It is critical to keep this natural behavior and not react when the client shares any disturbing or dramatic information. Any inappropriate facial reactions or body movement can be misinterpreted by the client (Hays, 2008). For example, in my first counseling session, the counselor asked me to complete an ACE questionnaire to determine my level of childhood trauma. This questionnaire is made up of 10 yes or no questions, and each “yes” answer earns you a point. The higher the score, the more trauma you have experienced. After answering all questions truthfully, I had an ACE Score of 10. When I gave the counselor my questionnaire for review, she gasped, and her eyes got really wide with worry. That reaction alone made me really upset and almost made me not want to go back to therapy. I want to practice appropriate communication skills to ensure I do not cause a client that same harm.

Another important way to build rapport with clients is counselor self-disclosure. This revolves around the counselor sharing personal information and experiences with the client. Sharing personal information can potentially help the client feel more comfortable and open up. However, it is important to know what information is appropriate to share. Self-disclosure is dependent on the client and the situation, and the information shared must not cause harm to the

client (Hays, 2008). Also, if the counselor does decide to share, it must be done in a way that does not impose their personal beliefs or morals onto the client.

Strategies to Advocate Mental Health

A major role of a successful counselor is to be an advocate for mental health issues. Ways I will be a victorious advocate for mental health is volunteering, supporting local counseling associations, and taking pro-bono clients. I want to become a counselor to help people. So, volunteering is an effective way to give back to the community. Popular volunteer activities I can partake in are fundraisers, help with trainings, teach classes, run support groups and volunteer for the National Alliance on Mental Illness NAMI helpline (NAMI, 2020). Being an advocate for mental health also includes supporting my local counseling associations. The Arizona Counseling Association (AzCA) has many activities like seminars, webinars and trainings that local counselors can partake in to show their support. Another way that I can advocate mental health is taking pro-bono clients when applicable. My goal is to help as many people as I can. There are some cases in which a client is unable to afford counseling services. So, it is my ethical duty to offer pro-bono or provide different options for them to get the proper help they need.

References

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