

## Counselling Skills for Effective Counselling in Schools

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**Abstract:** This paper explores various counselling skills Counsellors can use in the schools. Secondary data collected from both print and online publications were used for the paper. The paper pointed out listening, empathy, nonverbal communication, reflection, questioning techniques, summarization, feedback, rapport building, goal setting, trustworthiness, ability to interpret information skills, communication, interpersonal, understanding of ethics, patience, compassion, emotional stability, knowledge of laws and regulations, open-mindedness, trustworthiness, research skills, problem-solving, observational, reasoning and computer skills as counselling skills available for professional counsellors in the schools.

**Key points:** Counselling Skills, Counselling, Schools.

### Introduction

A counsellor is usually concerned with people's practical issues and providing them with support. They'll talk about and work through a person's problems to help them explore potential strategies to address and overcome them. Common issue that people seek guidance from a counsellor include stress, addiction, relationship problems, career issues and divorce. Counsellors become qualified by undertaking a counselling course that teaches them a variety of essential skills necessary to succeed as a counsellor (Olayinka 2012; Odediran 2014; ASU, 2020). Counselling is the process that occurs when a client and counsellor set aside time to explore difficulties which may include the stressful or emotional feelings of the client. The act of helping the client to see things more clearly, possibly from a different view-point. This can enable the client to focus on feelings, experiences or behaviour, with a goal of facilitating positive change. A relationship of trust. Confidentiality is paramount to successful counselling. Professional counsellors will usually explain their policy on confidentiality. They may, however, be required by law to disclose information if they believe that there is a risk to life (Skills you need undated). The role of the counsellor, therefore, is to help the client to develop their own understanding of their situation. According to the BACP, "Counselling skills are a combination of values, ethics, knowledge and communication skills used to support another person's emotional health and wellbeing." Counselling skills are technical traits that are used by counsellors to listen and better understand their clients. Using these skills, counsellors help their clients to overcome obstacles and do better in their lives. These skills also help to build and maintain rapport, establish trust and ensure that the clients feel heard and understood (Lead academy undated; Suleiman, Olanrenwaju and Suleiman 2019; Usman 2020). Counselling is the act of helping the client to see things more clearly, from a different view-point. This can enable the client to focus on feelings, experiences or behaviour, with a goal of facilitating positive change (Lead academy (undated)).

Counselling will enable the client to explore aspects of their life and feelings, by talking openly and freely. Talking like this is rarely possible with family or friends, who are likely to be emotionally involved and have opinions and biases that may affect the discussion. Talking to a counsellor gives clients the opportunity to express difficult feelings such as anger, resentment, guilt and fear in a confidential environment. The counsellor may encourage the client to examine parts of their lives that they may have found difficult or impossible to face before. There may be some exploration of early childhood experiences to throw some light on why an individual reacts or responds in certain ways in given situations. This is often followed by considering ways in which the client may change such behaviours. Good counselling should reduce the client's confusion, allowing them to make effective decisions leading to positive changes in their attitude and/or behaviour. The ultimate aim of counselling is to enable the client to make their own choices, reach their own decisions and act upon them (Skills you need undated). Counselors must possess in-depth knowledge and skills if they are to help clients effectively. On the job, these professionals use a specific set of counseling skills to treat one or more unique populations. These counseling techniques may vary depending on which group of people a counselor serves (e.g., Counseling techniques appropriate for school counselors may not work for grief counselors, Teach.com undated).

Lead academy (undated) noted that counselling skills enable counsellors and other professionals to relate better to the people they are talking to. Active listening is a part of counselling skills and the art of being listened to can be practised by almost anybody. The effectiveness of being actively listened to can have a huge impact on our lives as it can enable us to feel better about ourselves. Indeed (2022) viewed counseling skills as those soft (interpersonal) and hard (technical) attributes that a counselor puts to use in order to best help their clients work through personal issues and overcome obstacles that are currently preventing them from living a full and happy life. The following are some of the counseling skills; empathy, active listening, strength-based practice, cultural competence, assessment, client engagement, developing Goals and treatment plans, recognizing the effects of trauma, self-exploration and understanding, utilizing evidence-based practice.

There are many types of counselling skills. Some of them according to Ucp.ac.uk (undated) and ASU (2020) includes: listening, empathy, nonverbal communication, reflection, questioning techniques, summarization, feedback, rapport building, goal setting, trustworthiness, ability to interpret information

### **Skill 1: Active Listening**

Listening can be defined according to Indeed (2022) as the use of eye contact, facial expressions and gestures to imply that you are engaged and focused on the information the other person is saying. It can help a client feel like they've been heard and validated in the information they chose to share. Active listening through both verbal and non-verbal responses shows the client you believe what they have to say is important. Often folks come to counseling feeling that their loved ones or close friends are not listening to or understanding them. Utilizing techniques such as paraphrasing and clarifying questions, the counselor ensures the client feels heard and understood (Grosser 2020). Ucp.ac.uk (undated) maintained that active listening in counselling involves fully engaging with the client's verbal and non-verbal messages, and understanding their emotions and concerns. Key components include paying attention, showing empathy, reflecting on the client's words, and attending to non-verbal cues. Examples of active listening techniques include paraphrasing, summarizing, reflecting feelings, and using open-ended questions. Active listening establishes rapport, fosters trust, and empowers clients to explore their concerns.... As a counselor, a vital part of your job is to help clients feel heard, respected and validated. One way to do this is through active listening, which may include eye contact, nodding, facial expressions and body language. Active listening shows you're engaged and focused on what your client is saying. It's part of the job to ensure your body language, facial expressions and tone of voice don't inadvertently convey frustration, boredom or judgment. How you respond to your clients, both verbally and nonverbally, will affect how comfortable they are sharing with you and whether they choose to continue the counselor-client relationship.

## **Skill 2: Empathy**

Empathy can be described according to Grosser (2020) as the ability to see where the other person is coming from with genuine care and concern without judgment. The quality of the relationship between counselor and client can directly impact the outcome of therapy. The client must trust that the counselor truly cares and is committed to their wellbeing before sharing personal often painful information. A counselor needs to be able to see a client's situation from their perspective in order to best help them overcome their obstacles. Ucp.ac.uk (undated) noted that empathy in counselling involves understanding and sharing the client's emotions and perspectives. It creates a supportive relationship, validates experiences, and fosters trust. Teaching empathy includes active listening, observing non-verbal cues, and practising self-awareness. Empathy enhances therapeutic alliance and supports personal growth. ASU (2020) observed as a counselor, you need to display empathy, or the ability to look at the client's situation from their perspective to understand their experience. In essence, this means putting yourself in your client's shoes. You should also be genuine and authentic. Remember, the client must feel safe and nurtured. At the same time, healthy client–counselor relationships depend on the counselor being able to compartmentalize their emotions, maintain professional boundaries and prevent their own experiences or feelings from affecting how they treat clients. Self-disclosure can be one way to express empathy, but be judicious and try to bring the conversation back to the client. For example, you could say something like, "It's very common for new parents to feel overwhelmed. I certainly did. Do you think you're being too hard on yourself?"

## **Skill 3: Nonverbal Communication**

Nonverbal communication plays a significant role in counselling, conveying valuable information beyond words. It involves understanding and responding to nonverbal cues, which provide insights into the client's emotions and experiences. By paying attention to body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice, counsellors can better understand the client's thoughts and feelings. Effective interpretation of nonverbal cues requires sensitivity to individual differences and cultural backgrounds. Counsellors can respond by acknowledging and addressing these cues, creating a safe space for further exploration and understanding. By recognizing and effectively interpreting nonverbal communication, counsellors can enhance their ability to support clients and foster a deeper therapeutic connection (Ucp.ac.uk undated).

## **Skill 4: Reflection**

Reflection is a key skill in counselling that involves considering and restating the client's words, emotions, or experiences to deepen understanding and encourage self-reflection. Its purpose is to enhance understanding and promote introspection. Reflective statements affirm the client's experiences, while reflective questions invite deeper exploration. Examples of reflection in counselling include restating feelings or summarizing challenges. By employing reflection effectively, counsellors create a supportive environment that fosters insight and empowers clients to work towards positive change (Ucp.ac.uk undated).

## **Skill 5: Questioning Techniques**

Questioning techniques are essential in counselling as they allow counsellors to gather information, explore clients' perspectives, and facilitate self-reflection. Open-ended questions encourage detailed and meaningful responses, fostering exploration and self-expression. Closed-ended questions elicit specific and concise answers for clarification. When using questioning techniques, counsellors should use open-ended questions to promote deeper exploration, avoid leading questions, and maintain a balance between open-ended and closed-ended questions. Active listening while asking questions is crucial to formulate follow-up questions that delve further into clients' experiences. Effective questioning techniques enable counsellors to facilitate reflection, gain insights, and enhance clients' understanding of their concerns.

### **Skill 6: Summarisation**

Summarisation is a valuable skill in counselling sessions, involving condensing and restating client information to provide a concise overview of their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. It plays a crucial role in enhancing comprehension and promoting reflection within the therapeutic process. By summarising client information, counsellors facilitate understanding, help clients see the bigger picture, and identify common themes or patterns. Effective summarisation techniques include being concise, using clear language reflecting the client's words, and highlighting relevant themes. Summarisation serves as a reference point for both clients and counsellors, ensuring important details are not overlooked and guiding clients towards meaningful insights and positive change (Ucp.ac.uk undated).

### **Skill 7: Feedback**

Feedback is a vital skill in counselling, serving the purpose of offering guidance, validation, and support to clients. It plays a crucial role in facilitating personal growth and providing valuable insights. Constructive feedback in counselling follows principles of focusing on behaviour, and balancing positivity and critique. Strategies for delivering feedback in a supportive manner include considering timing, using "I" statements, and demonstrating respect and empathy. By providing effective feedback, counsellors empower clients to gain self-awareness, make positive changes, and navigate their personal journeys of growth and healing.

### **Skill 8: Rapport Building**

Rapport building is a vital skill in counselling that involves establishing a trusting and empathetic relationship with clients. It creates a safe environment for clients to explore their thoughts and emotions. Building rapport relies on active listening, a non-judgmental attitude, and demonstrating empathy and understanding. It enhances the therapeutic alliance, promotes client engagement, and fosters meaningful counselling sessions. However, challenges such as cultural differences, resistance, or lack of trust may arise. Counsellors can address these barriers by actively listening, validating clients' experiences, and being sensitive to their unique needs. Effective rapport-building establishes a strong foundation for communication, trust, and collaboration, enhancing the overall therapeutic process (Ucp.ac.uk undated). Indeed (2023) observed that an important skill for a counselor is to be able to build and maintain trust with their clients. This can affect a client's willingness to share information.

### **Skill 9: Goal Setting**

Goal setting is a crucial skill in the counselling process, providing direction and motivation for client growth. It plays a significant role in facilitating positive change and achieving desired outcomes. Effective goal setting adheres to the SMART criteria, ensuring goals are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. Collaborative goal setting involves working in partnership with clients to develop meaningful goals, considering their priorities, exploring options, and addressing potential challenges. By incorporating goal setting into counselling, counsellors empower clients to work towards their aspirations, foster motivation, and achieve meaningful changes in their lives (Ucp.ac.uk undated).

### **Skill 10 Trustworthiness**

Clients must feel like they can trust their counselor. The client needs to trust that the counselor will maintain confidentiality, respect their experiences and withhold judgment. By building a sense of trust, the counselor helps the client feel at ease as they share personal and difficult feelings and information. A client should never feel like a counselor is judging them for thoughts or behavior that don't align with the counselor's own personal sense of ethics, morals, religion or decorum. Some clients might rely on humor as a coping mechanism, so being able to relate to clients on a more personal level can also help establish trust (ASU 2020).

## **Skill 11 Ability to interpret information**

Your clients won't always say exactly what they're feeling or experiencing. You'll need to be able to interpret vague or nonverbal information, such as body language and facial expressions. Counselors also need to be able to perceive general expressions of distress, such as, "I'm just so angry all the time," in the context of the client's experience. This ability to read between the lines is essential to being a good counselor. What a client doesn't say, or seemingly avoids saying, is just as important — if not more so — than what they are saying. Many victims of intimate partner abuse, for instance, may not be forthcoming about their experiences or may try to downplay or make excuses for their partners' behavior (ASU 2020). This is any statement outside of what the patient has actually said or may even be aware of. When interpreting the counselor is able to provide a new perspective, provoke thoughts or feelings, or present an explanation for behaviors. Interpretations may help patients connect things that they have compartmentalized, reveal patterns or themes, and it can offer a fresh way of thinking. You want to be sure not to overuse interpretation; because this can come across as assuming or even accusatory (Mometrix.com undated).

According to Mae, (2019) counselling skills includes: communication, interpersonal, understanding of ethics, patience, compassion, emotional stability, knowledge of laws and regulations, open-mindedness, trustworthiness, research skills, problem-solving, observational, reasoning and computer skills

### **1. Communication skills**

You need excellent verbal communication skills to effectively talk to a range of different people. Counsellors will often have to question clients and conduct interviews, and they need to be skilful in doing so as to not further upset or cause stress to clients.

### **2. Interpersonal skills**

Counsellors need to be able to work effectively with different groups of people, including clients and colleagues. You may have to work with a client for months or even years, so having the talent for building relationships is also important. You should be aware of a client's reactions and understand the reasons behind them, as well as know how to persuade a client to change their mindset or behaviour.

### **3. Understanding of ethics**

You must have a solid ethical code and keep sessions with your clients confidential to ensure their safety and well-being. You should also be aware that your work can have significant effects on people, and you need to keep this in mind when dealing with others.

### **4. Patience**

You need to be patient when working with your clients. You should understand that a lot of time, like several months or even years, can pass before substantial results can be seen. Patience is key for true progress to be made, and you need the ability to keep yourself motivated even when results aren't instantly obvious.

### **5. Compassion**

You should have a desire to help others, be sympathetic, and be able to empathise with your client's pain and other problems. You need the ability to put your patients at ease and make them feel comfortable.

### **6. Emotional stability**

You must have a solid emotional footing and the ability to handle the stress and emotional turmoil caused by working with people who are distressed.

## **7. Knowledge of laws and regulations**

You should be familiar with the laws and regulations that control the industry in your state. You must also be able to work in the profession within the boundaries of the law.

## **8. Open-mindedness**

You need to be open-minded and tolerant of different people and situations. You should also be open to new research and new ways of thinking that could challenge your practices.

## **9. Trustworthiness**

You must be trustworthy and be able to inspire your patients to confide in you and with their problems, otherwise they won't improve or return to you.

## **10. Research skills**

You must know how and where to find the information you need and evaluate it effectively. This applies when you're trying to help a client by seeing what other solutions have been tested. You can look at scientific journals that have information from decades of research.

## **11. Problem-solving skills**

You need to be able to solve problems as they arise. You should have alternative strategies available and be able to implement them fast to ensure your client can move forward. There are specific problem-solving strategies that counsellors use.

## **12. Observational skills**

You should be able to observe a person's facial expressions, body language, and social interactions during appointments to find clues that determine their attitude and behaviour. You need to know how to conduct interviews, watch for specific behaviours, and observe your client thoroughly to be able to help them.

## **13. Reasoning skills**

You need reasoning skills so you can see subtle connections between problems that don't seem related. This means you must be able to take a broader view of human behaviours and find similarities or general principles at play instead of focusing on the individual details of a case.

## **14. Computer skills**

You should know how to use a computer so you can take notes and download and save large reports and client files. You also need to know how to use medical software for recording client information, spreadsheet and word-processing programs for writing reports, and billing programs for submitting and tracking invoices to your clients and insurers.

## **Counseling skills in the School Environment**

You should practice your counseling skills and monitor your effectiveness in order to use them in a school setting. Here are a few ways you can incorporate your counseling skills into your daily practices according to indeed (2022):

### **1. Be mindful of your body language**

You should be mindful of your body language at all times, especially during a counseling session. Depending on the context, a client might worry about being judged when they disclose particular information. Take this into consideration and make sure to maintain a warm expression and demeanor in order to reassure your client that you are there to listen.

### **2. Review client notes before and after sessions**

You should make sure to look over notes from previous sessions with a particular client in order to prepare for an upcoming counseling session. This can help with information recall, and it can help you better direct your questioning during your next session with them.

### **3. Refrain from discussing client information with coworkers**

You should refrain from discussing a client's personal matters with coworkers in order to uphold client confidentiality. If you want to consult with your coworker about a particular case, consider keeping the information you provide more general and do not disclose the client's name.

### **4. Do not press clients for personal information**

In an effort to build trust and increase client comfort, you should be sure to keep from asking clients too many questions. Use the information they offer to you to build a conversation around. In time, they may get more comfortable with you and give you more details.

School Counseling Techniques according to Teach.com (undated) includes;

#### **1. Problem-Solving and Conflict Resolution**

Without much life experience to pull from, primary and secondary school students lack developed problem-solving and conflict resolution skills (e.g., dealing with a bully, student-teacher conflict, etc.). As a result, counselors must help students identify and remedy problem behavior. When more than one student is involved, counselors use small-group counseling techniques.

#### **2. Group Counseling Theories**

Group counseling has many advantages in the school setting. One, it brings together students who may share a similar problem or were part of a conflict. Group counseling can also promote empathy among students. Finally, group counseling allows a counselor to help many students at once, freeing up more time for other responsibilities and tasks.

#### **3. Special Needs Counseling**

Students with special needs (e.g., ADD, ADHD, Autism-spectrum disorder, etc.) require highly trained counselors who can promote their academic success while working within the context of the disability. Counselors-in-training must examine the latest research and work with students with disabilities. On the job, counselors collaborate with parents, administrators, and faculty to ensure that students with disabilities receive the best education possible (Teach.com undated)..

#### **Benefits of using core counselling skills**

Incorporating core counselling skills brings numerous advantages to both clients and counsellors. These skills enhance communication, foster trust and rapport, promote personal growth and insight, empower clients, yield positive therapeutic outcomes, and contribute to the professional growth of counsellors. Through active listening, empathy, reflection, and goal setting, clients experience improved well-being, resilience, and self-esteem. Counsellors develop expertise in essential skills, deepening their effectiveness. The application of core counselling skills leads to transformative benefits, facilitating meaningful personal growth and successful therapeutic outcomes (Ucp.ac.uk undated). Lead Academy (undated) observed that good counselling skills are valuable since they help to create more meaningful, empathetic interactions with clients in a psychotherapy environment. A client visits counsellors when they face various issues in life and when they are unable to cope up with those issues. Counselling skills aid in identifying and solving the problems of clients in the most effective way. Counsellors without proper counselling skills often fail to understand their clients and cannot provide the right therapy. Clients, too, struggle to open up and stop trusting their counsellor. In such a situation, a counsellor loses clients and the clients suffer due to not having the proper treatment (Lead Academy undated). Some positive outcomes of using effective counselling skills include: better decision making, coping skills, improved outlook on life, ability to plan for the future (e.g., college and career preparedness), improve socialization with peers, teachers, and family and engagement with extracurricular activities

#### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This paper examines various counselling skills Counsellors can use in the schools. The paper concludes that listening, empathy, nonverbal communication, reflection, questioning techniques,

summarization, feedback, rapport building, goal setting, trustworthiness, ability to interpret information skills, communication, interpersonal, understanding of ethics, patience, compassion, emotional stability, knowledge of laws and regulations, open-mindedness, trustworthiness, research skills, problem-solving, observational, reasoning and computer skills as counselling skills available for professional counsellors in the schools.

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