**Elements of a Successful Therapeutic Relationship**

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To have a successful therapeutic relationship with clients, there are many elements that must be considered. In this paper we will discuss the counselor role, counselor identity strategies, counseling dispositions, counseling skills, and knowledge of counseling theories. The aim is to give insight into a healthy therapeutic relationship and how valuable they can be when counselors have competency within their counseling skills.

**Counselor Role**

Mental health practitioners (e.g., counselors; psychotherapists) work in a culture of one-way caring in which they are required to demonstrate empathy, compassion, and patience, without the expectation of receiving such care in return from their clients (Posluns, 2020). While this is a one-way profession, the focal point isn’t on the counselor needs but on what the client needs. The role of a counselor is to help others identify goals, to be a safe space to process, for the client to improve their coping skills, and any mental turmoil they may be experiencing. This role in the counseling relationship is critical to the health of the client and their well-being. When a client seeks out a counselor they are in need and are looking for expertise. Counselors are to be there to help clients manage stress, redirect thoughts, listen and truly comprehend, and challenge and probe the client to understanding their own selves on a deeper level. Counselors play a crucial role in not only building the relationship, but building the person up as well.

**Counselor Identity Strategies**

Strategies that will help a counselor develop starts with the counselor being self-aware. Identity and being secure in oneself as counselor must be established before helping others. When it comes to leadership and advocacy, there is a continual learning and alignment with colleagues and supervisors to remain competent. Therapists’ active learning increases treatment fidelity, but research is needed on supervisory strategies to engage therapists in active learning (Caron et al., 2020). In terms of leadership, this is developed over time by being submitted to someone with more experience. A counselor will continue to grow and build by being coached and learning from others in the field. Stepping outside of their comfort zone and leading group counseling sessions gives the counselor a chance to step more into a leadership role. This may be challenging but it will enable development of the counselor into a great leader and a reassuring of their identity. This fosters leadership and advocacy as they lean on their peers and resources they have. Counselors should be sure to take the strategic approach of building relationships with other professionals in the field. If there is a client that has an alcohol use addiction, having an advocate in the substance use disorder field will give insight to the counselor on how to manage some things they are facing and how to deal with that client.

**Dispositions**

Counselor dispositions set the foundation of what the counseling relationship will look like and the flow of how the sessions will be conducted. Dispositions are important because it displays the beliefs of the counselor and puts boundaries in place for the client and the counselor. Counseling dispositions that will be incorporated in the counseling relationship are parallel to the GCU dispositions. Starting with empathy, having the mental fortitude to take a step back in each session with each client, get into their perspective lens, and listening and connecting to their heart will set the tone for the relationship. Cultural diversity, acceptance, self-awareness, patience, and psychological fitness (GCU Dispositional Values, n.d.) are the other dispositions that will be incorporated as well. These are the chosen dispositions because it encompasses the whole person and what they may bring to the sessions. Being culturally aware and understanding what’s important to them is important for the counselor, accepting whatever the presenting issues may be and not judging, having self-awareness when things arise, being patient with each client as the counselor and client collaborate, and psychological fitness which is vital to the counselor health as they maintain their self-care practices.

**Counseling Skills**

Building rapport with clients and students start with the counselor and the counseling skills that present. It’s important to be authentic, an active listener, being able to show verbal and non-verbal cues, being empathetic and communicating effectively. These skills are important to have because authenticity shows the client that you will be honest, and the standard of honesty has been set for both parties. While the counselor shows verbal and non-verbal cues, it’s equally important that the counselor is aware of disassociation, facial expressions, or body language the client shows. An active listener doesn’t listen to respond but listens to listen and the counselor is able to repeat and articulate what they were said in summation because of it. Verbal and non-verbal cues disarm the client and probes the client to talk more and share more of their experience which will help get to the root of the presenting issue. These skills lead to showing empathy and communicating effectively which helps with the motivational interviewing therapy. MI has been defined as person-centered method of guiding to elicit and strengthen personal motivation for change (Resnicow & McMaster, 2012). All the counseling skills listed in this section are intertwined to help with person-centered therapy of motivational interviewing which is one of the primary reasons a counselor should be proficient in the skills listed.

**Theory Knowledge**

A counselor having knowledge of the different theories gives them the understanding of what each mean and how they are to be utilized and applied. With varying personalities and counselor beliefs, values, and morals, there are some theories that they relate to a can identify with that they will want to utilize as they practice. Knowing what theory to use takes time, research commitment and practice. If there is a theory that a counselor is trying to utilize, but they don’t have competency using it, this could be harmful for the client and will discredit the counselor. Developing a personal theory of counseling is essential for beginning counselors as it strengthens development of a personal theory of counseling by integrating life experiences and counselor developmental stages with theory building approaches (Spruill & Benshoff, 2000). An important factor to consider when talking through theory knowledge is life experiences. The environment in which a person is raised, their education level, and exposure leads to certain beliefs which make the theory that is chosen important and meaningful to them.

**Conclusion**

After discussing the counselor role, counselor identity strategies, counseling dispositions, counseling skills, and knowledge of counseling theories, it’s safe to say that these skills are needed in the therapeutic relationship. Being strategic and thoughtful while continually getting counseling skills and knowing what theory to utilize and when, puts the role of the counselor on display and shows how critical it is in any session with a client. Knowing these things puts counselors at an advantage in preparation prior to seeing their clients.

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