

Introduction to Counseling Techniques

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Study guide – concise, organized, and easy to read

1. What Is Counseling?

Aspect	Description
Definition	A professional, collaborative process that helps individuals, couples, families, or groups explore thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to promote personal growth and problem-solving.
Core Goals	• Increase self-awareness • Develop coping skills • Resolve conflicts • Enhance emotional well-being
Typical Settings	Schools, hospitals, private practice, community agencies, workplaces, crisis hotlines.

2. Foundations of Effective Counseling

Pillar	Key Elements
Therapeutic Relationship	• Empathy – genuine understanding of the client’s perspective. • Unconditional Positive Regard – acceptance without judgment. • Congruence – therapist’s authenticity.
Ethics & Boundaries	• Confidentiality (with legal exceptions). • Informed consent. • Dual-relationship avoidance.
Cultural Competence	• Awareness of client’s cultural, racial, gender, and socioeconomic background. • Adaptation of language and interventions accordingly.

3. Major Counseling Approaches & Their Core Techniques

Approach	Central Theory	Signature Techniques
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Introduction to Counseling Techniques

Person-Centered (Rogers)	Humanistic – people have innate growth potential.	• Reflective listening • Summarizing • Unconditional positive regard
Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT)	Thoughts ? feelings ? behaviors.	• Thought records • Cognitive restructuring • Behavioral activation & exposure
Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT)	Change is goal-oriented; focus on solutions, not problems.	• Miracle question • Scaling questions • Exception-finding
Gestalt Therapy	Emphasis on present-moment experience and awareness.	• Empty-chair technique • Role-play • Body awareness exercises
Narrative Therapy	People construct meaning through stories.	• Externalizing the problem • Re-authoring conversations • Mapping the influence of dominant narratives
Motivational Interviewing (MI)	Enhances intrinsic motivation for change.	• Open-ended questions • Reflective listening • Summaries & affirmations
Family Systems Therapy	Individuals are best understood within relational systems.	• Genogram construction • Circular questioning • Reframing of relational patterns
Mindfulness-Based Approaches	Present-moment, non-judgmental awareness reduces distress.	• Guided meditation • Body scan • Mindful breathing exercises

4. Common Counseling Skills (Applicable Across Approaches)

Skill

How to Use It

Example

Introduction to Counseling Techniques

Active Listening	Fully attend, avoid interruptions, paraphrase.	"What I hear you saying is ..."
Open?Ended Questions	Encourage elaboration; avoid yes/no answers.	"Can you tell me more about ...?"
Summarizing	Capture main points to check understanding.	"So far we've discussed ..."
Clarifying	Seek specifics when statements are vague.	"When you say 'it's overwhelming,' what does that look like day?to?day?"
Affirmation	Recognize strengths and efforts.	"You've shown a lot of courage in sharing that."