

Introduction to Counselling Skills

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Designed as a quick-reference guide for students, trainees, or anyone beginning to develop helping-person skills.

1. What Is Counselling?

Aspect	Description
Definition	A professional, collaborative process that helps individuals explore thoughts, feelings, and behaviours to promote personal growth and problem-solving.
Core Purpose	• Provide a safe, confidential space. • Facilitate self-awareness and insight. • Support clients in making informed choices and taking constructive action.
Typical Settings	Schools, community centres, health clinics, workplaces, private practice, crisis hotlines.
Key Principles	Empathy, respect, non-judgment, confidentiality, client-centred focus.

2. The Counselling Relationship

1. **Therapeutic Alliance** – The collaborative bond built on trust, mutual respect, and shared goals.
2. **Roles**
 - *Counsellor*: Listener, facilitator, guide, and sometimes educator.
 - *Client*: Active participant, the expert on their own experience.
3. **Boundaries** – Clear limits on time, scope, and professional conduct protect both parties and maintain effectiveness.

3. Core Counselling Skills

Skill	What It Looks Like	When to Use
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	• Gives full attention.	Throughout every session;
Active Listening	• Uses verbal cues (“I see,” “Go on”). • Mirrors tone and pacing.	especially when the client is sharing emotions.
Paraphrasing	Restates the client’s message in the counsellor’s own words.	To confirm understanding and show you’re following.
Reflection of Feeling	Identifies and names the emotion behind the client’s words.	When emotions are implicit or the client seems stuck.
Summarising	Concise recap of key points, feelings, and themes.	At the end of a segment or session to consolidate learning.
Open?Ended Questions	Questions that cannot be answered with “yes/no” (e.g., “What was that experience like for you?”).	To explore thoughts, feelings, and meanings.
Closed?Ended Questions	Yes/no or factual queries (e.g., “Did you call the doctor?”).	To gather specific information or clarify details.
Clarifying	Requests more detail or precision (“Can you tell me more about that?”).	When statements are vague or ambiguous.
Normalising	Communicates that the client’s reactions are understandable and common.	To reduce shame or self?criticism.
Exploring Options	Helps the client generate possible solutions or coping strategies.	When the client is ready to move toward action.
Goal?Setting	Assists the client in defining specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time?bound (SMART) goals.	Toward the end of the counselling process.
Silence	Intentionally pausing to allow the client to think or feel.	When the client needs space to process; also to encourage deeper reflection.

4. The Counselling Process (Typical Stages)

1. Engagement & Rapport Building

- Warm greeting, explain confidentiality, set agenda.

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2. Assessment & Exploration

- Use open-ended questions, active listening, and reflection to uncover the issue's context.

3. Goal Formulation

- Co-create clear objectives (SMART).

4. Intervention & Skill Development