

Introduction to Counselling Techniques

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Key concepts, core approaches, and practical guidelines for beginners

1. What Is Counselling?

Aspect	Description
Goal	Help clients explore thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to promote personal growth, problem-solving, and well-being.
Setting	Usually a confidential, one-to-one conversation (can also be group or family).
Role of the Counsellor	• Active listener • Facilitator of insight • Non-judgmental supporter • Guide toward realistic change.
Ethical Foundations	Confidentiality, informed consent, respect for autonomy, cultural sensitivity, and professional boundaries.

2. Core Counselling Skills

Skill	How to Use It	Example Phrase
Active Listening	Give full attention, reflect content and emotion.	"It sounds like you're feeling overwhelmed by the workload."
Empathy	Convey understanding of the client's internal experience.	"I can see why that situation would be frustrating for you."
Open-Ended Questions	Encourage elaboration; avoid yes/no answers.	"What was going through your mind when that happened?"
Summarising	Condense key points to check understanding.	"So far you've said that the conflict at work is affecting your sleep."
Paraphrasing	Restate in your own words to show you've heard.	"You're saying you feel stuck because you don't know which direction to take."
Silence	Allow space for reflection; avoid filling every pause.	(pause)

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Skill	How to Use It	Example Phrase
Clarifying	Seek specific details when something is vague.	"When you say 'they're distant,' do you mean they avoid eye contact or stop calling?"
Normalising	Reduce shame by showing the experience is common.	"Many people feel anxious before a big presentation."
Goal?Setting	Collaboratively define realistic, measurable objectives.	"Would you like to reduce your anxiety level by 30?% over the next six weeks?"

3. Major Counselling Approaches

Approach	Founder(s)	Core Assumptions	Typical Techniques
Person?Centred (Humanistic)	Carl Rogers	People have an innate drive toward growth; therapist provides a non?directive environment.	Unconditional positive regard, empathy, congruence; reflective listening.
Cognitive? Behavioural Therapy (CBT)	Aaron Beck, Albert Ellis	Thoughts, emotions, and behaviours are inter?linked; maladaptive thoughts cause distress.	Thought records, cognitive restructuring, behavioural experiments, exposure.
Solution?Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT)	Steve de Shazer, Insoo Kim Berg	Clients already have resources; focus on solutions rather than problems.	Miracle question, scaling questions, exception? finding.
Psychodynamic	Sigmund Freud, later object? relations theorists	Unconscious processes and early relationships shape current behaviour.	Free association, interpretation of transference, dream analysis.
Gestalt	Fritz Perls	Awareness of present experience leads to change; integration of fragmented parts.	Empty?chair work, body awareness, "here?and? now" dialogue.

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Narrative Therapy	Michael White, David Epston	Problems are stories; people can re-author their lives.	Externalising the problem, mapping the influence of the problem, unique outcomes.