

It is often quite difficult to identify during a counselling session where myself as the counsellor may have made a good therapeutic judgement by using certain approaches or where there may be some room for improvement for future sessions, By reflecting on the recording of a session allows me to identify my areas of weakness and develop my skills further during this reflection. During this piece I will be reflecting on a counselling session that took place in my university where one of my class peers will be the client for a session duration of fifty minutes, using an online space of teams, by using teams this means the session will take place virtually. During this reflective piece the areas it will cover will include reflecting on the whole process of the session, how was it for myself as the counsellor, what was my reflection on it, what interventions or approaches were used during the session, also it will reflect on the relationship with the client, was there a therapeutic relationship or depth? then moving on it will identify any ethical considerations that may have come up, also it will be addressed how I felt it was for this session to take place virtually instead of face to face and exploring the use of supervision and peer supervision.

The session that I will be reflecting on will be with one of my class peers in the university setting, myself and this client have been working together during the past year virtually, the session which I will be reflecting on was from the 24th February 2021. During this session, the client was feeling quite overwhelmed, low and as though all the little things have been building up making the client feel stressed and tearful, the client has been feeling unappreciated from her family as the client was feeling as though she could not confide in any of her family members and has been managing all the stress and emotions on her own, the client feels as though the relationships with her family is very much one way. The client has also been struggling with family life at home and wanting to be in a happy family unit and finds it hard being a single mum having a lot of pressure on her to provide and support for her children physically and financially. As the session continues the client states how she is angry that she has had to live the way she has during the lockdown on her own with the

children without any extra support. During this session for the client, there was a running theme of the client feeling stressed, overwhelmed, under pressure to provide for her family and struggling from the effects of what lockdown has had on her.

To begin this session started with me as the counsellor welcoming the client back to the session and going over a gentle reminder of our contract in place, as this was not the first time that we met the contract that we drew up together was done in the first session, a reminder of the contract is always mentioned at the start of every session to ensure that the client is still aware and satisfied with it, having this contract in place protects both counsellor and client. Throughout the session I used the core conditions as addressed by Rogers (1957) with being congruent, empathic and showing unconditional positive regard, by using these three core conditions correctly can have a positive impact on the way the client feels and the therapeutic relationship as stated by Mearns, Thorne and McLeod (2013) "To be understood in this way is for many clients a rare or even a unique experience.". As we move through the session the client starts to open up about what's been going on for her at three minutes forty-five seconds and six minutes and five seconds, I ask the client "how does that feel for you" and "How was it having to sit with that feeling?" by using the person-centred approach at the very start of this session it was seen to allow the client to open up and look into how she was feeling rather than just telling a narrative. By just asking the client "how does that feel for you" and "how was it having to sit with that feeling" by acknowledging what the client is saying and stopping to ask how this feels for the client can be quite powerful in a session, as seen from this session, for the client to sit and think how it felt for her makes the client instantly feel listened to and for them to acknowledge the feelings coming up from what they have spoken about. Throughout the session, a person-centred approach runs continuously with evidence of other approaches used to help with the therapeutic movement.

A few minutes after the clients thinks about how it made her feel, I ask her at six minutes forty-eight seconds “Where were you feeling this feeling of lowness and tearfulness”, here I used emotion-focused therapy where the client is given the opportunity to address where these feelings were coming from and visualising them instead of them being unseen for the client, as stated by Greenberg:

Becoming aware of and symbolising core emotional experience in words provides access both to the adaptive information and the action tendency in the emotion. it is important to note that emotional awareness involves feeling the feeling, not talking about it.

(Greenberg, 2010)

By using emotion-focused therapy it is important that there is a good therapeutic relationship and that the counsellor is present in the session. By successfully using EFT with a client it is also about the counsellor using the core conditions throughout as by the counsellor being empathic, congruent and having unconditional positive regard this is the foundation for a good therapeutic relationship and for the client to feel safe and trusting in the counsellor. It is so powerful when used as stated by Casemore (2010) “Rogers had an unshakeable belief that if the client can experience these six essential conditions for therapeutic growth, then nothing else is required to enable change to take place in the client.”, Rogers believed that this on its own would be powerful to help the client but as addressed by Greenberg it is about a little more than just using the core conditions:

The kind of “presence” that seems to be therapeutic is the state of mind in which there is an awareness of moment-by-moment emotional reactions as well as thoughts and perceptions occurring in the client, in the therapist, and between them in the therapeutic relationship.

(Greenberg, 2014)

From reflecting on this part of the session I believe I used the core conditions and was fully present with the client, as the client trusted me to be able to share where she was feeling, which was lowness and tearfulness, for the client this seemed very beneficial for her as she goes on to described how her body was feeling and that was as though she was a water-filled brown/grey rock, for the client to describe how she was feeling this lead on for us to be able to discuss this feeling and look into why the client felt that way, I believed this had a shift in the therapeutic relationship as together we were able to visualise how the client was feeling and be able to feel that with her, for me this felt positive and I felt honoured the client wanted to share this with me. Referring back to what Greenberg addressed about sharing these moments and thoughts with the client builds on the therapeutic relationship and did for myself and my client during this session.

During this session I wanted to ensure that the six core conditions were used and that the client felt safe to confide and trust me with how she was feeling, throughout the session I believe that I have a gentle and welcoming tone and ensure during the session I am engaged and present with the client, even though this session was virtual I was still able to engage and to have an open body language, this links to following the BACP ethical framework (2018) this is the fundamental part of any counselling session and for me ensuring all these are in place I believe creates a good therapeutic relationship and depth, allowing some good therapeutic movement which I believed happened during this session for the client, this was identified simply for the client to say all what she has

been thinking and feeling out loud, by the end of the session the client felt as though she had a better understanding of how she was feeling and that a weight had been lifted. Throughout the session I was able to apply the skills of reflection, active listening and mirroring whilst also using non-verbal approaches, this is so important to portray especially with the session being online. The non-verbal communication has to be intensified to get it across over the screen, these included body language, tone of my voice, warmth and presence and phenomenological noticing, by using these skills it allows the thoughts and feelings to unfold from the client. Jumping forward to twenty-three minutes and thirty-eight seconds the client puts her head in her hands and runs her fingers through her hair, here I noticed the clients distress by doing this whilst talking about her son's father, here I use phenomenological noticing as this allowed the client to explore these feelings surrounding this person in her life even if she unconsciously didn't realise she was feeling this way, I feel as though this dialogue gave the client the chance to address these feelings she was expressing through her body language. Leading on from exploring these feelings the client may have been experiencing, I then use EFT again to explore where these feelings of tension may be in her body, what do they look like and feel for her.

As the session was going on it was clear that the client was getting quite emotional leading the client to start to cry, as this session is done online at first I felt quite unsure how to feel as it was virtually and when the client is emotional it was quite difficult as I felt as though I couldn't be as empathic and sit with the client and her emotions as well as what I could of in face to face, however, I do feel as though I was able to support the client when she got upset and held the space for her to talk whenever she felt ready. This links back to the importance of the therapeutic relationship as stated by Greenberg and Rogers, as the client felt comfortable and safe to let these emotions out and be vulnerable with me as the counsellor. Additionally, to using the person-centred approach and Emotion-focused, near to the end of the session I bring in a gestalt technique at thirty-

six minutes, here I invite the client to engage in an activity every morning if she felt comfortable to which was writing three positive things, three things she is grateful for and three things she is looking forward to for the day, to give the client something to focus on during these difficult times and to have some time to reflect on how she's feeling about herself and everything around her, the client seemed very interested by this technique and was willing to give it a go. I believe that if there was no therapeutic depth and a good therapeutic relationship between myself and the client this technique may have not been considered by the client, as stated by Clarkson and Cavicchia the therapeutic relationship is so important for this approach:

The Gestalt approach to counselling can embrace a wide variety of diverse but specific techniques within a holistic frame of reference which integrates mind and body, action and introspection within an appropriately supportive, challenging and attuned relationship between client and counsellor.

(Clarkson and Cavicchia, 2014, p.26)

However, from reflecting on what went well in the session there was also a few critiques, during the early part of the session I reflected "I noticed you put your hands on your head, going into yourself" and then carried on where instead I should have explored this with the client why they did this when they were saying about something? Here I feel as though we missed out on some good therapeutic movement and this could have been beneficial for the client. As well as this there were a couple of occasions where for example one incident at twenty-two minutes and five seconds I jumped in instead of giving the client some more time to reflect on how they were feeling, reflecting I can see here the client was just about to respond to what I had said but I jumped in too quick. As well as jumping in too quick and missing opportunities to explore some underlying feelings with the client I

feel as though I nodded and said “yeah” a lot during the session, even though it is very important to give non-verbal cues such as nodding, I feel as though for me it could have stopped part of the process and cut the client off talking.

Furthermore, as well as these critiques, this leads to the way that this session was portrayed which was virtually using a video call, this was used as a face to face counselling can not be done at the moment due to the current rules and regulations surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic, for me being a trainee counsellor and only counselled clients to face to face, changing to online was a bit of a change, to support my learning and develop my skills and to give my clients the best service I can, I did some online training with counsellor tutor surrounding online working, for me this was a big help and helped me learn skills to work competently online with clients. However even though I had this training, during the session online with the client it was sometimes difficult to read non-verbal cues as easily as what it could be face to face, when online it is almost as if the screen is in the way of stopping you from reaching the full potential of reading the clients non-verbal cues.

During the session with my client, the internet at one point did freeze and stopped the session for a few sessions, thankfully the client wasn't in a vulnerable position as if this had happened then the client could have felt abandoned or embarrassed for the counsellor not replying or being frozen on the screen. However, even though there are a few negatives there are some positives and as suggested by Barker “Disclosure may be enhanced by the perceived anonymity clients may experience by not being physically seen or by not having to reveal their identity.” (Baker and Ray, 2011).

In addition to working online some ethical considerations should be looked at, during this session I was counselling the client from home, as imaginable this can cause some issues and is so important to be mindful of anything that could happen from working from home. From completing

counselling tutors online working course, it highlights the ethical considerations that need to be addressed before any online working can be done, this is ensuring the counsellor has a safe and confidential space to work, having a clear background where no personal information about the counsellor or anything that can be offensive is behind them during the video call. For me, during this session reflecting, I should have put the effect of blur on my background as I was doing this in my room and having a blurred background would have been more professional.

In addition to this if I was to redo this session again for future recommendations I would suggest that I used more gestalt techniques such as letter writing for the client to write a letter to her gran and the use of the empty chair again to work with the feeling surrounding her gran and her family, by using the empty chair this could have helped the client with her feelings of guilt, as suggested by Nelson-Jones “Such unresolved negative feelings can contribute to anxiety and depression as well as being transferred into other relationships where they are inappropriate. (Nelson-Jones, 2000, p.172) As well as self-reflection upon this session, peer supervision and personal supervision are so important as stated by Carroll:

From ethical codes for supervision (British Association for Counselling, 1988; Association for Counsellor Education and Supervision, 1993) that supervision is being viewed as an increasingly important part of counselling training.

(Carroll, 2006, p.12)

Having peer supervision helped identify for me some things that I may not have been able to see from being in the session and from this I am very grateful to have as it allows me to work on areas I may not have know I needed to work on or even for the next session it allows me to work on this.

To conclude having the opportunity to reflect on the session I had with this client on the 24th February 2021, it helped me identify some areas of growth, what areas I did well in, how I may have used different approaches instead of the ones I may have used. From reflecting on this session I can see that some interventions and approaches that I used with the client lead to there being a therapeutic shift and helped the therapeutic relationship grow, as well as this it also helped the client identify how she was feeling and where she was feeling this feeling by using EFT, it allowed the client to visualise these feelings. As well as seeing the positives of this session it also identifies for my areas of growth and to use some more interventions such as the empty chair and letter writing as well as being aware of my background when working online and re-evaluating the way I hold my sessions via online working.

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