

Humanistic Counselling Skills Worksheet 1st April 2025

Developing foundational skills in congruence, validation, open-ended questions, and summarizing

1. Congruence (Genuineness)

Definition: Congruence refers to the counselor being authentic and transparent in their interactions with the client. This means that the counselor's words, emotions, and body language align with their true thoughts and feelings in the moment.

Why It Matters: When a counselor is congruent, they create a trusting environment where the client feels safe to express themselves. Incongruence (e.g., forcing a neutral tone when feeling sadness) can create a disconnect that clients may pick up on.

Examples:

- *Acknowledging emotional responses:*

"I can feel how painful this is for you, and I notice that I feel a heaviness in my chest as I hear your story."

- *Being honest about limits in understanding:*

"I haven't experienced that myself, but I can hear how much it's affecting you. I'd like to understand more about what this is like for you."

- *Matching nonverbal cues with verbal expressions:*

(With a calm but serious tone) **"I hear how angry you are about this, and that makes sense given what you've been through."**

- *Owning personal reactions without shifting focus:*

"That surprised me—I wasn't expecting you to say that. Tell me more about what you mean."

- *Expressing uncertainty instead of pretending to know:*

"That's a really tough situation. I don't have a perfect answer, but I'd like to explore your thoughts on what might feel right for you."

- *Genuinely expressing encouragement:*

"I can see how much effort you've put into this. It's really inspiring to witness, and I want to acknowledge that."

2. Validation

Definition: Validation is the process of acknowledging and affirming a client's emotions, thoughts, and experiences as real and understandable, without judgment.

Why It Matters: Clients often feel unheard or dismissed in their daily lives. Validation helps them feel accepted and understood, creating a foundation for deeper exploration.

Examples:

- *Validating emotions:*

“It makes sense that you feel overwhelmed. That’s a lot to carry on your own.”

- *Normalizing reactions:*

“Many people in similar situations feel the way you do. You’re not alone in this.”

- *Acknowledging difficulty:*

“That sounds like it was incredibly painful for you.”

- *Reflecting without minimizing:*

Client: “I know I shouldn’t feel this way.”

Counsellor: “It sounds like part of you is struggling with your emotions, but the fact that you feel this way tells me something really important is going on.”

3. Open-Ended Questions

Definition: Open-ended questions encourage the client to explore their thoughts and emotions more deeply. These questions cannot be answered with a simple “yes” or “no” and invite reflection.

Why It Matters: In humanistic counselling, open-ended questions focus on self-exploration, personal meaning, and client empowerment. The goal is to foster self-awareness, growth, and authenticity.

Encouraging Self-Exploration & Personal Meaning

- “What does this situation mean to you?”
- “How do you see yourself in this moment?”
- “What parts of yourself feel most alive right now?”
- “When do you feel most like your true self?”

Fostering Emotional Awareness & Expression

- “What emotions are coming up for you as you talk about this?”
- “How does it feel to say that out loud?”
- “If your feelings could speak, what would they say?”
- “What do you need most when you’re feeling this way?”

Promoting Growth & Self-Acceptance

- “What have you learned about yourself through this experience?”
- “What strengths have helped you get through difficult times?”
- “How can you offer yourself the same kindness you give others?”
- “If you fully accepted yourself, how might your life be different?”

Empowering the Client's Choices & Autonomy

- **“What feels most right for you in this moment?”**
- **“If there were no expectations or pressures, what would you choose?”**
- **“How do you want to move forward from here?”**
- **“What would it look like to trust yourself more?”**

4. Summarizing

Definition: Summarizing involves pulling together key points of a conversation to reflect back to the client, ensuring understanding and highlighting patterns or themes.

Why It Matters: Summaries help clients organize their thoughts, recognize progress, and feel that the counsellor is truly listening. They also provide a transition point in the conversation.

Examples:

- *Summarizing emotions:*

“So, from what I’m hearing, you’ve been feeling both frustrated and sad because you don’t feel like your voice is being heard at work.”

- *Summarizing patterns:*

“It sounds like this is a pattern in your life—wanting to speak up but feeling held back by fear of judgment. Does that seem accurate?”

- *Summarizing key takeaways:*

“We’ve talked about how you’ve been feeling overwhelmed, and you’ve also mentioned that setting some boundaries might help. It sounds like that could be a helpful next step for you.”

- *Clarifying understanding:*

“Let me see if I got this right—you’re saying that when your friend dismisses your feelings, it brings up old wounds from past relationships. Did I capture that correctly?”

Practice Exercise

Instructions: Pair up with a partner and take turns playing the role of the counselor and the client. Use the following client statements to practice each skill.

1. Congruence Practice:

- Client: “I feel like no one really cares about what I’m going through.”
- Counsellor: Respond authentically while maintaining a supportive presence.

2. Validation Practice:

- Client: “I know it’s stupid to feel this way, but I just feel so stuck.”
- Counsellor: Validate the client’s emotions in a way that helps them feel heard.

3. Open-Ended Question Practice:

- Client: “I don’t even know where to start with fixing this.”
- Counsellor: Ask an open-ended question to encourage the client to explore their thoughts.

4. Summarizing Practice:

- Client: “I’ve been struggling at work, feeling like I don’t belong. And then at home, I feel like no one understands me.”
- Counsellor: Provide a summary that reflects back the client’s main concerns.

After each role-play, discuss:

- How did it feel to use the skill?
- How did the client feel receiving the response?
- What would you improve?

Final Reflection

Take a moment to reflect on today's practice. What skill felt the most natural? Which one was challenging? How can you incorporate these skills into your developing counselling style?