

An A-Z of Counselling Skills

McLeod & McLeod (2011)



Core Counselling Skills

- Attending
- Attunement
- Body Awareness
- Boundary Management
- Caring
- Challenging
- Checking out Clarifying
- Giving Advice
- Immediacy
- Listening
- Making sense
- Naming
- Observing
- Offering feedback
- Process Monitoring
- Providing Information



Core Counselling Skills Continued:

- Questioning
- Reflecting/ restating
- Reframing
- Remembering
- Self Disclosure
- Self Monitoring
- Structuring
- Using Silence
- Witnessing



▪ **Attending:**

- Internal and external attention, focusing on the client. Internal means you are thoughtfully concentrating on the client and what and how they are speaking. This is externally conveyed in the body language, facial expressions and minimal encouragers of the counsellor (also known as 'active listening').

▪ **Attunement:**

- Tuning in to the client's experiencing. Being *with* the client.

▪ **Bodily Awareness:**

- Noticing and responding to non-verbal communication (both within and from the client and within and from the counsellor).



▪ **Boundary Management:**

- Containing the counselling conversation. Includes the environment, timing, frequency, contracting, confidentiality and nature of the relationship.

▪ **Caring:**

- Consideration, kindness, compassion.

▪ **Challenging:**

- Used cautiously, sensitively or tentatively highlighting incongruencies can be useful.

▪ **Checking Out/Clarifying:**

- Checking with the client that what is heard and understood is accurate. Don't assume.



▪ **Giving Advice:**

- A usual 'no, no' in counselling, there may be times when specific knowledge that the counsellor possesses (such as medical knowledge of the 'helper' is a nurse) may be useful to the client. Always check this out, however.

▪ **Immediacy:**

- Focusing on what is happening in the 'here and now' of the counselling process. Maybe in response to a change or shift in the client's body language, tone of voice or facial expression.

▪ **Listening:**

- Central skill. Necessary for attunement, it involves getting the *whole* of what the person is saying or expressing.



▪ **Making Sense:**

- Helping the client to gain an understanding about what is happening for them. Helping them to explore and untangle their confusion.

▪ **Naming:**

- Finding the right word to describe an experience. Labelling something can help to make it clear or 'legitimate' to the client.

▪ **Observing:**

- Similar to bodily awareness, observing characteristics, mannerisms, modes or speech, etc. any changes or fluctuations in these so you can reflect them to the client, can help deepen your understanding of the client's perceptual world.



▪ **Offering Feedback:**

- Being the mirror for your client. Sharing your experience of the client. Be careful, however, *how* you communicate your feedback, be respectful and non-judgemental. Own your observations.

▪ **Process Monitoring:**

- Being consciously aware of what is happening in the counselling space, for the client, the counselling and between the two. Noticing any shifts and changes in the feel and dynamic of the interaction.

▪ **Providing Information:**

- Sometimes directing clients to sources of information such as books, organisations or websites that are relevant or providing an educative element if you have expert knowledge or experience can be useful but check out your motivation.



▪ **Questioning:**

- A very skilled technique in counselling, used sparingly and with consideration. Closed questions for clarification, open questions for inviting further exploration but again, check your motivation.

▪ **Reflecting/Restating:**

- Saying back to the client the gist of what they have been saying. This demonstrates attention, clarifies meaning and gives the client an opportunity experience and reflect upon what they have been expressing.

▪ **Reframing:**

- Requires two steps: Identify how the client perceives or makes sense of their situation, and demonstrate your understanding and acceptance of this. Secondly, invite the client to consider an alternative view or perspective. Again, this needs to be used sensitively to avoid triggering the 'inner critic'.





▪ **Self-disclosure:**

- Sharing personal information with the client. Only use if you are sure that it is 'in the service of the client'. It can humanise and normalise but be careful of boundaries and roles.

▪ **Self-monitoring:**

- Listening to yourself as well as listening to the client. Noticing feelings and emotions, physical reactions, action tendencies, images, fantasies. Helps with ownership, bracketing and recognising when the counsellor needs to take action for him/herself.

▪ **Using Silence:**

- This can feel daunting and there is often a wish to fill a silence. However, silences can be highly significant and a lot may be going on for the client during them.



▪ **Witnessing:**

- Being fully present with another as they tell or express their story and experience can be very powerful. It can be affirming, validating and acknowledging and can communicate acceptance.


