

Chapter 3

Counselling Pprocesses

3.1. Phases of Ccounselling for Iindividual Ccounselling

Counseling process is the procedure and ways by which clients' problems are worked through. It is the procedure, which both the counsellor and the client go through as they seek to find solution to the problem of the client. Counselling process is therefore systematic and procedural since it is one stage of solution finding that leads to the other and so, it is not a one shot or single snap exercise. Proper counselling therefore involves careful step-by-step encounter to reach the stage when the client will feel satisfied and the counsellor feel accomplished that counselling services have been properly rendered.

The Counselling process is made up of four basic phases. Regardless of the type of client, client's problem or nature of Counselling, the process of counselling is basic and the same. The four basic phases are:

- ✓ Initial phase;
- ✓ Working phase;
- ✓ Termination phase; and
- ✓ Follow-up phase.

1. Initial Phase (Rapport Development)

The initial phase is the same thing as preparatory or preparation stage. Essentially it involves all the activities during the first meeting between the Counsellor and the client. This phase is important because it is at this stage that the client presents the problem, which necessitated the counselling encounter. An important factor or an essential ingredient in the stage is the readiness of the client to want to present his/her problem. Similarly, the nature of the problem and the client's personality are important for the initial phase to take place. Sometimes in order to facilitate a quick take-off in this phase, the Counsellor may start by welcoming the client and state why he was sent for (referral) i.e. your teacher sent a note to me that we (the counsellor and client) should

discuss about your poor performance in Mathematics. If the client came on his own, the counsellor start by welcoming him/her, and introduce each other. He/she will then find out why the client is interested in seeing him/her.

The initial phase is strictly for familiarization, problem presentation and awareness of the existence of the problem by the counsellor and the client. It is not the stage where problem is discussed or solved.

As often stated in definitions, counseling is a relationship. Furthermore, it is defined as a helping relationship. If it is to be a relationship that is helpful, the counselor must take the initiative in the initial interview to establish a climate conducive to mutual respect, trust, free and open communication, and understanding in general of what the counseling process involves. A relationship must be established with the client early in the counseling process, as this will often determine whether the client will continue in the therapy.

A counselor can establish good counseling relationship by creating conducive physical and psychological environment. To establish conducive psychological environment, the counselor should apply the concepts of person centered therapy like empathy, active listening, unconditional acceptance, genuineness and etc.

2. Working Phase (Assessment and Treatment)

Immediately after the initial phase during which counselling relationship has been established with an understanding that a problem to be discussed is in existence, then follows the working phase. The working phase is the problem discussion stage. In this phase, the counsellor assists the client to work through their feelings as they discuss their concern. Here, good techniques and professional skills must be used by the Counsellor as the client works through his/her problem to enable them gain better insights into them.

In this phase, the client should be able to gain better insight into his problem, understand various and alternative course of actions to be taken and take positive actions to solve his problems. Both the client and the counsellor may have an assignment to carryout in respect of the problem being discussed before the next phase. For example, the assignment may be to visit the parent, an industry, employment agency, an examination office or the teacher handling a particular subject that is constituting a problem for the client. Each person is however expected to give a feedback during the next session. The essence of the given assignments is to gather sufficient information or data that will enhance smooth transition into the next phase and ensure that a sound bases for the next stage is created.

Problem Identification and Exploration

Once an adequate relationship has been established, clients will be more receptive to the in-depth discussion and exploration of their concerns. At this stage, clients assume more responsibility because it is their problem and it is their willingness to communicate as much of the nature of the problem as possible that will determine to a large extent the assistance the counselor can give. During this phase, the counselor continues to exhibit attending behavior and may place particular emphasis on such communication skills as paraphrasing, clarification, perception checking, or feedback. The counselor may question the client, but the questions are stated in such a way as to facilitate the continued exploration of the clients concerns. The information counselors seek at this point are arbitrarily grouped into three main dimensions: The time dimension, the feelings dimensions, the cognitive dimension.

- *The time dimension* includes the client's experiences, especially those she/he may view as influencing experiences. The present dimension would cover how well the person is functioning presently, especially those current experiences that may have influence the client to seek counseling.
- *The feeling dimension* includes the emotions and feelings of the client toward himself/herself as well as toward significant others. Included are feelings about groups, attitudes, values and self concept.
- *The cognitive dimension* includes how the client solves problems, the coping styles she/he employs, rationality in making daily decisions, and capacity and readiness for learning.

The following are steps or stages in problem identification:

- ❖ *Define the problem.* The counselor, with the cooperation of the client, is seeking to describe or identify the problem as specifically and objectively as possible. It is important that the counselor and client have the same understanding of the problem.
- ❖ *Explore the problem.* The kinds of information needed to fully understand the problem and its background are gathered at this point. Once the kinds of needed information have been identified, counselor and client must determine how this information can be obtained, who will have responsibility for gathering it, and what the timeliness for gathering the data will be.
- ❖ *Integrate the information.* In this step all the information collected is systematically organized and integrated into a meaningful profile of the client and the client's problem. At this point it would be appropriate to begin the exploration of changes that may be needed and barriers that may exist to these changes.

In assessment, the counselor needs to use a variety of assessment methods like observation, interview, record analysis, administration of psychological tests and inventories.

Planning for Treatment

At this point, effective goal setting becomes the focus of the counseling activity. Mistakes in goal setting can lead to nonproductive procedures and client's loss of confidence in the counseling process. Certain steps are again suggested for clarity:

- ❖ *Define the problem.* It is important that both the counselor and the client view the problem from a similar perspective and have the same understanding of its ramifications.
- ❖ *Identify and list all possible solutions.* At this point, it is appropriate to brainstorm all possibilities. Both the client and counselor participate, but the client should be given the opportunity to list as many possibilities as may come to her/his mind. If there are some obvious solutions that are overlooked, the counselor may suggest to the client, "Have you also thought of _____?"
- ❖ *Explore the consequence of the suggested solutions.* Here the client, with encouragement and even with occasional suggestion from the counselor, will identify the procedures needed to implement each of the suggested solutions.

- ❖ *Prioritize the solutions.* Following stage three, the client with the counselor's encouragement, will prioritize the solutions from the best possibility down to least likely to produce the desired results.

After identifying and defining the client's problem/s, the next main activity is goal setting. Goal setting is the responsibility of both the counselor and client. Realistic and visualized goals should be set. After setting, the counselor in collaboration with client prepares treatment plan and practice.

3. Termination Stage

The termination stage marks the end of counselling process. This stage is necessitated:

- ✓ When client's problem have been successfully discussed and resolve;
- ✓ When client has been referred to another professional counsellor; and
- ✓ Due to client's lack of apparent problems.

4. Follow-Up Phase

This is about the last stage in the Counselling process. The Counsellor must have told the client during termination stage to keep in touch with him. Specifically, follow-up phase is a counselling activity in which the counsellor finds out whether the acquired behaviour by the client during the counselling session is maintained or not and whether the client has been able to solve his problem or not. As follow-up, the counsellor can visit the client to have dialogue on how his new behaviour has been maintained or has been helpful in his adjustment process. Peradventure there is no improvement observed in the client, reassessment of the problem can be done through exploration and new goals mapped out as they both go over through the counselling process all over again.

The counselling process could be very effective in solving client's problem if the various stages/phases are carefully observed and followed without necessarily rushing to take decisions that may make clients to repeat or that may not work out well for the client

