

## **Elements of a Successful Therapeutic Relationship**

Kerry Krauss

Department of Counseling, Grand Canyon University

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Dr. Terri Collins

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## **Introduction**

I started my degree because I thought I could help people struggling with trauma and PTSD. However, I got a part-time job at my church, where most of the members are elderly. My role involves interacting with, ministering to, visiting, and organizing events for our senior church members. While I still want to counsel clients who suffer from trauma and PTSD, I also want to honor the role I have now in ministering to older adults. So that is what I will focus on for this assignment.

### **Role as a Clinical Mental Health Counselor for the Elderly**

My role in Adult Family Ministry is focused primarily on older adults. I have incorporated several things I learned about counseling while working with older adults. I quickly realized that they want to be heard, have a purpose, and be independent. The elderly struggle with self-esteem, dealing with loss, aging, dependence, and death (Atiq, 2006).

Within my role, I can collaborate with memory care facilities, assisted living facilities, and healthcare professionals to coordinate transportation, counseling, and support networks (Atiq, 2006). Building professional relationships will support collaborative care and referral making (Atiq, 2006). I need to engage in ongoing

education specifically for the elderly population to equip myself better to serve their needs (Atiq, 2006).

I will need to be a licensed professional counselor in the state of New Mexico, which requires a master's degree in counseling that includes a practicum or internship, passing the NCE exam, starting as an LMHC for two years (3000 hours) of supervision, and then passing the National Clinical Mental Health Counseling Examination (NCMHCE).

### **A Counselor Identity that Fosters Leadership and Advocacy**

To be an effective counselor, I need to develop a strong therapeutic alliance with my clients by providing a safe, nonjudgmental environment (Fagan, 2022). I need to be open-minded and focus on my client's well-being by seeing their world through their perspective without making assumptions (Fagan, 2022). Asking questions and allowing my clients to explore their feelings and experiences at their own pace will foster their sense of independence (Fagan, 2022). As much as I want to be empathetic and supportive, I also need to hold my clients accountable for achieving their goals (Fagan, 2022). I can't focus on one approach for all my clients; I need to be flexible in choosing and/or adjusting an approach to the unique needs of each client (Fagan, 2022). I will

need to continue challenging myself and my biases to ensure I am not imposing my agenda on my client (Fagan, 2022). Ongoing education, training, supervision, and collaboration are also important factors when treating and advocating for clients (Fagan, 2022).

### **Counseling Dispositions During Mock Sessions**

The counseling dispositions I feel I displayed most during my mock sessions were genuineness, amiability, and empathy (Grand Canyon University, 2022). I had a genuine concern for Markeila and her struggles at work. It was difficult to leave our session knowing she would have to face another difficult work week alone. It was easy to be amiable with Markeila; she has a very kind demeanor. I was able to show compassion, kindness, and humility easily in our sessions. I showed empathy towards Markeila by being fully engaged, using minimal encouragers like nodding, matching her facial expressions and body language, and verbally expressing understanding.

### **Counseling Skills Practiced During Mock Sessions**

- Summarizing – it was easy to summarize what Markeila was saying, and I found it helped us connect/build rapport.

- Open-ended questions – these don't come naturally to me. I must think about how to verbalize an open-ended question and then make a conscious effort to listen to the answer.
- Finding the underlying unmet needs – I would normally think that identifying unmet needs would come naturally to me, but in our sessions, it didn't. In fact, when she first told me about her struggles at work, I thought to myself that she should quit, and there wasn't a solution. I didn't say that, but I certainly was thinking it.
- Non-verbal cues – I could tell that she was uneasy when we talked about her fiancé and trust issues. She shifted in her seat, and her tone changed.
- Reframing – I found it easy to see Markeila's situation as an opportunity rather than a stuck, uncomfortable one.
- Giving homework - assigning homework came naturally. I also found that it gave her a sense of responsibility and hope. It helped her put my reframing of her situation into perspective. I wanted her to look at her situation as an opportunity for professional and spiritual growth. Her homework was to start building her portfolio, look for opportunities to grow and list them, and to pray for her colleagues.

## **Personal Model of Counseling**

I believe that I should be familiar with several counseling approaches. More than one theory suggests that a counselor is more effective with more clients (Mobley & Gazda, n.d.). However, my theory of choice is person-centered therapy. Person-centered therapy is a very empathetic approach focusing on the client (Mobley & Gazda, n.d.). I believe that it is one of the best representations of how Jesus displayed His love for me. That might be overestimating the approach, but some similarities spoke to me. The approach requires the counselor to hold the client in unconditional positive regard, view the world through the client's perspective, walk with the client through their experiences and pain, work with the client as a partner, and let the client lead and come to their own solutions with minimal assistance. Jesus loves me and sacrificed Himself to make me sinless/forgiven (unconditional positive regard). He became fully human to physically experience everything I do (client's perspective). Jesus lived alongside His disciples and followers, experienced physical and emotional pain with them, and for them and me (walking with the

client in their pain and treating them like a partner). He also let me make my own decision to either follow Him or not, submit to Him or not (client's autonomy). I want to be an effective counselor, and, more than anything, I want to extend God's lovingkindness as He did for me.

### **Utilizing Supervision**

Counselors-in-training need to be proactive under supervision, especially when their supervisor doesn't have goals for them (Murray, 2003). I will try to hold my supervisor accountable for our meeting times, showing my supervisor that I am committed and responsible, and that I expect them to be the same (Murray, 2003). I will have a list of questions and document the answers for future reference (Murray, 2003). I will be honest about my weaknesses and mistakes and use them as learning experiences (Murray, 2003). Instead of trying to be right all the time, I will try to be flexible and teachable (Murray, 2003). If I feel I am not getting the supervision I need, I will ask for it (Murray, 2003). I will try to pick a dedicated supervisor who believes it is an ethical responsibility to prepare competent CITs (Murray, 2003).

### **Conclusion**

I wasn't expecting to work with the elderly population of my church; however, I will use the skills I am learning to serve them to the best of my ability. I will continue to pursue a career in Clinical Mental Health and trust that God will direct my path to serve exactly where He wants me.

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