

Handout - Steps and Phases in the Process of Counselling

Steps in the Process of Counselling

Step 1: Joining in and building a rapport and trust

Step 2: Exploring to understand the situation of the child/family

Step 3: Sharing and exploring the possible options among solutions

Step 4: Helping the child/family to arrive at the best solution in a given set of circumstances

Step 5: Continue the process or terminate the process, as per the circumstances

Step 6: Building self-esteem in the child and generating life skills for healthy social existence

Phases in the Process of Counselling

- i. Trust building and establishing the relationship
- ii. Exploration (understanding the problem)
- iii. Resolution (decision making)
- iv. Termination



Step 1. Trust Building and Establishing the Relationship

It is important to start building trust from the beginning of the relationship and to be consistent about it thereafter.

Do's

- ◆ Make sure the child feels safe and comfortable (do not touch the child without asking his/her permission, allow the child to decide where the child would like to sit, leave the door open, if the child so desires)
- ◆ Speak to the child in an age appropriate way
- ◆ Be honest with the child about the counselling relationship and what you believe is achievable
- ◆ Be positive but realistic (i.e. if a child is upset because his/her father left the family, don't repeat that fact before the child, say it is 'ok' and that his/her father will come back)
- ◆ Genuinely care about and be interested in the child

- ◆ Be sensitive to the child's language and cultural beliefs, respect the child's socio-cultural background (i.e. familiarise with the child using his/her cultural mores, if possible, making eye contact and try to be at the same emotional plane)
- ◆ Respect confidentiality – NEVER discuss the case of the child with your own friends and family, etc

Don'ts

- ◆ Judge or tell the child what to do.
- ◆ Appear interrogative while finding out general information about the child (i.e. likes, dislikes, hobbies, friends, talents)

Exploring to Understand

The purpose of "exploring" is to get a better understanding of the problem by helping the child to tell his/her story (i.e. to help the child to express his concerns, what worries him/her and why). The exploring stage will also never end as the lay-counsellor can always learn more about the child's situation from time to time.

Some examples of questions that can be asked to help a child express himself include:

- ◆ How are you doing today?
- ◆ Tell me about your family. Who lives in your home? How is it going?
- ◆ How is school? Do you like your teacher?
- ◆ What is your happiest memory? What do you hope for?
- ◆ Is there anything specific that is troubling you that you would like to talk about?
- ◆ What can I help you with?

It is very important to understand more about the child's life (home, family, school, friends, etc.) so that lay-counsellor can fully understand the context of the problem but also know how to help the child out of the present difficult circumstances that the child finds himself/herself in.

What Resources are available to the Child?

For instance, lay-counsellor may explore the following:

Family Life

- ◆ Who is the child's caregiver?
- ◆ Does the child have siblings?
- ◆ Are other relatives living with the child's family? Are all members of the family healthy? Have any close relatives passed away?
- ◆ What impact do these people have on the child?
- ◆ If the child has moved/run away from the family, what were the circumstances for doing so; who all were in touch with the child; what were the experiences of the child after leaving the family?

Social Life

- ◆ Who are the child's friends?
- ◆ Does the child go to school, temple/church/mosque/any other place of worship or other places in the community where he interacts with people?
- ◆ Have any close friends/family member passed away? What impact did the person have on the child and how did it affect the life of the child?
- ◆ Who was/is the child close to? What influence did/does the person have on the child?

Setting Priorities - If there are many issues raised or problems identified, it is the CHILD and not the lay-counsellor who should decide what is most important and thus what should be worked on first and the lay-counsellor should only facilitate such prioritisation.

Give the child some time - Do not expect a child to talk about the most sensitive areas of his/her life during the first session! Give him/her some time to open up to you.



Step 2: Sharing Possible Solutions



Our role, as lay-counsellor, is to help the child grow and learn problem solving skills, and we can straightaway start doing so at this stage! As far as possible let the child come up with the information and let the child work out what the related solution may be. The lay-counsellor would obviously have to use his/her judgment here – if the situation is severe or at crisis-level or if the child is too young, then the lay-counsellor would play a more active problem solving role than in cases where the child is older and needs only facilitative support.

Remember whilst we want the child's problems to be solved, it is an even bigger success if we can teach the child to solve his/her own problems – we are not here to be the hero or to get any compliments! The reward of the whole counselling process is the enhanced psycho-social competence of the child to cope with his/her personal difficult circumstances and emerge as a stronger individual, who no longer would need support as CNCP or CCL.



Step 3: Helping the Child Choose the Best Solution for Self

Not all solutions are good solutions! A solution that works for one person may not be acceptable to another! It is the role of the lay-counsellor to help the child work through the possible solutions to find out what IS BEST FOR HIM/HER.

Key things that must be considered for each possible solution are:

Four Key Questions:

- ◆ What are the pros and cons of each solution?
- ◆ What are the consequences of each solution?
- ◆ How will each solution make the child feel?
- ◆ What impact will each solution have on other people?

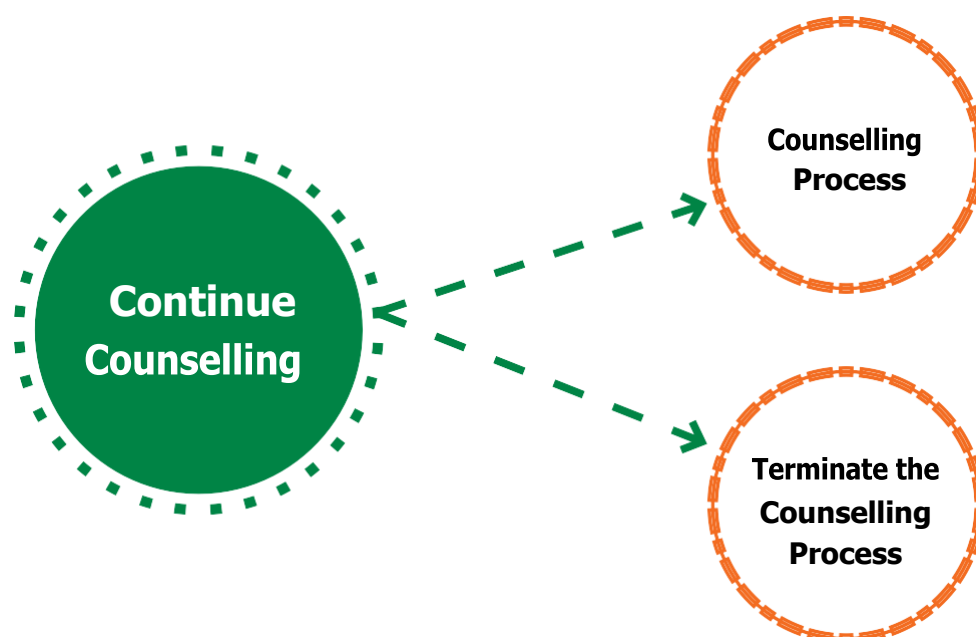
Once the child has narrowed down the solution/s he/she would like to pursue, help the child by asking action questions such as:

- ◆ How are you going to make this solution happen? What should the first step be towards solving the problem?
- ◆ Who could help you to bring about these changes?
- ◆ What could be a barrier (problem) to this solution and how will you deal with the barrier? (The reason for highlighting possible barriers is not to discourage the child, but to prepare him/her that the solution may not be easy or quick, to help him/her not give up when the first barrier is encountered.)



Step 4: Continue or Terminate

The following diagram demonstrates the most common next steps:



Continuing Counselling

- ◆ The child may not be able to express everything that is worrying him/her and work through all the solutions in one session! So you may need to see the child a few times! So long as you are making progress that's absolutely fine!
- ◆ It may be difficult to bring a session to an end if it has been particularly emotional, but ideally, a counselling conversation should be less than an hour – so that it is not overly exhausting for the child or the lay-counsellor, to give the child time to think through what has been discussed, so that the lay-counsellor has time to attend to other children and to his/her other duties.
- ◆ It is also difficult to get back to that 'deeper' area of concern that needs counselling support, in the next session after you have not seen the child for a few days. The technique of 'summarising' can help us bring one session to a close and start at the same place in the next session.
- ◆ Always remember to reassure the child that you are available, if something goes wrong before the next session and agree to a time and place for the next conversation/session/hearing/interaction.

Terminate Counselling

Counselling can be terminated when you and the child feel that the child is ready to move on without further assistance. Remember the purpose of counselling is to help them grow, to be able to cope with or solve their own problems – and certainly not to breed dependency.

The following is important to remember in preparation for terminating counselling:

- ◆ Is the child emotionally ready to end the relationship?
- ◆ How can the family be involved to offer continued support?
- ◆ Help the child consider other coping structures (i.e. an aunt, a friend, a pastor/a priest, or a peer group).
- ◆ Always explain and agree with the child that the counselling will be terminated (or reduced in frequency).
- ◆ Assure the child of continued support, as and when necessary.
- ◆ Before terminating counselling, it may help to meet with the child less often and wean him/her from the counselling relationship (i.e. if you met once a week for three months, meet once every two weeks for a month, and so on, before termination).



Step 6: Building Self-Esteem in Children

Appreciation – A child's self-esteem will suffer if he or she is not appreciated. A child will know if an adult or other young person is insincere and/or does not enjoy the child's company. When spending time with a child who has low self-esteem, it is vital to honestly enjoy his company, to express your enjoyment, to congratulate or thank the child when he has done something well. Appreciate the child's special skills and his uniqueness. Make the child feel wanted and important. It reduces chances of coming in conflict with law as an 'attention-seeker'.

Encouragement – A child's self-esteem is boosted by words of encouragement. Encouraging decision making in a child will also lead to feelings of confidence and independence in the child.

Praise – Self-esteem comes from what you think about yourself, while praise is an external expression by someone else. However, praise is also one of the ways for encouraging a child to value himself and his unique abilities. It helps reinforce positive behaviour in a child.

Mutual respect – A child's self-esteem will be strengthened when he is treated with respect and taken seriously, especially when expressing his views. When a child is treated as an intelligent individual with the capacity to understand things and to learn from his mistakes, the child will understand that he/she is respected and valued for who he/she is. The child also learns to show mutual respect towards other members of the society, thereby reducing the chances of the child coming in conflict with law under many circumstances.

Dealing with failure – If a child fails he must not feel that he is a failure. Remind the child that failure is only a temporary setback on the road to success. Never tell the child he has failed, let you down or cannot succeed. Be encouraging and help the child to believe in his ability to succeed, no matter how long it takes! When a child does not succeed in his endeavour, teach him that he can learn from the situation and encourage him to analyse the situation and understand what he can do better next time. Make the child appreciate that it may not be worthwhile to focus on an activity that the child did not succeed in and help the child to focus on another activity which may be more appropriate for the child. Also make a child appreciate that there can be disappointments in life, but these are not the end of the road for him, rather life is a combination of successes and failures, where we learn from our setbacks and make a new beginning. Let the child know and identify what is achievable and what is not achievable, and remodel his/her efforts and focus his/her energies accordingly.

Attitude – The way a lay-counsellor sees a child will make a big difference in the child's attitude. Although many children are dealing with very difficult situations, it is important that the counselling relationship be a place where the child learns to see his/her strengths, identify his/her weaknesses and threats and works to reduce those, capitalise on his/her opportunities using his/her strengths and acquired/upgraded skills. It is good to work with the child to undertake a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis to help the child emerge stronger and not persistently be in need of care and protection or repeatedly come in conflict with law. However, if the lay-counsellor pities him/her and only sees the negative in the child's situation, it can keep the child from growing and coming out of the difficult circumstances, be it a CNCP or a CCL. The attitude of the lay-counsellor strongly impacts the psyche of the child and the way a child looks at himself/herself and the circumstances that the child is in.

