

## Supplemental Module 6: Review of Counseling & Communication Skills



## Module 6: Learning Objectives

- Describe the importance of effective communication and counseling skills in PMTCT care and treatment settings
- Discuss the basic principles of counseling and challenges to putting these principles into practice
- Discuss what is meant by shared confidentiality and why it is important
- Reflect on your own attitudes, values, and beliefs, and discuss how these may affect the quality of counseling
- Demonstrate the 7 key counseling and communication skills
- Understand the main components of a counseling session

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## What is counseling?

- Counseling is a two-way communication process that helps people look at their personal issues, make decisions, and plan how to take action



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## Counseling Includes:

- Establishing supportive relationships
- Having conversations with a purpose (not just chatting)
- Listening carefully
- Helping people tell their stories without fear of stigma or judgment
- Giving correct and appropriate information
- Helping people to make informed decisions
- Exploring options and alternatives
- Helping people to recognize and build on their strengths
- Helping people to develop a positive attitude toward life and to become more confident
- Respecting everyone's needs, values, culture, religion, and lifestyle

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## Counseling Does NOT Include:

- Solving another person's problems
- Telling another person what to do
- Making decisions for another person
- Blaming another person
- Interrogating or questioning another person
- Judging another person
- Preaching to, or lecturing, another person
- Making promises that cannot be kept
- Imposing one's own beliefs on another person
- Providing inaccurate information

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## Why Do We Do Counseling?

- To help people talk about, explore, and understand their thoughts and feelings
- To help people work out for themselves what they want to do and how they will do it



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## Confidentiality

- In order for clients to trust health workers with their feelings and problems, it is important for them to know that anything they say will be kept confidential
- This means that members of the multidisciplinary care team will not tell other people any information about the client
- Confidentiality is especially important in HIV programs because of the stigma surrounding HIV and discrimination against PLHIV
- Because multidisciplinary teams take care of clients, sometimes they need to discuss a client's needs and health status with one another to provide the best care possible. This is called **SHARED CONFIDENTIALITY**.

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## Discussion Question:

- Even though we know what good counseling is, why don't we always provide good counseling?

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## Values Clarification Activity

- What do we mean when we say "self awareness?"
- Why is it important for health workers to be aware of their own values, attitudes, and prejudices?

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## Remember:

- Although we ALL bring certain values and attitudes to our work, we must not let these values and attitudes affect the quality of counseling we provide to clients
- By striving to be self-aware, counselors can make sure they are equally supportive of all of their clients

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## 7 Key Counseling and Communication Skills

1. Use helpful non-verbal communication
2. Actively listen and show interest in the client
3. Ask open-ended questions
4. Reflect back what the client is saying
5. Empathize – show that you understand how the client feels
6. Avoid words that sound judging
7. Help the client set goals and summarize each counseling session

See Appendix 6A: Counseling and Communication Skills Checklist

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## Skill 1: Use Helpful Non-verbal Communication

- Make eye contact
- Face the person
- Be relaxed and open with your posture
- Sit squarely facing the person. Do not sit behind a desk.
- Use good body language—nod your head and lean forward
- Smile
- Make the client feel that you have time
- Do not look at your watch, the clock, or anything other than the person you are counseling
- Try not to write during a counseling session
- Turn your mobile phone off

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## Skill 2: Actively Listen and Show Interest

- Listen in a way that shows respect, interest, and empathy.
- Show the client you are listening by saying “mm-hmm” or “aba.”
- Use a calm tone of voice.
- Listen to what the client is saying—do you notice any themes?
- Listen to how the client is saying it—do they seem worried, angry, etc?
- Allow the client to express her emotions
- Never judge or impose your own values on a client
- Find a private place to talk and keep distractions to a minimum
- Do not do other tasks while counseling a client
- Do not interrupt the client
- Ask questions or gently probe if you need more information
- Use open-ended questions
- Summarize key points during the counseling session

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## Skill 3: Ask Open-ended Questions

- Open-ended questions cannot be answered in one word. People answer open-ended questions with more of an explanation. Examples of open-ended questions are, “*Can you tell me more about your relationship with your partner?*” or “*How does that make you feel?*”
- Open-ended questions are the best kind to ask during counseling and group education sessions because they encourage the client to talk openly and they lead to further discussion
- They help clients explain their feelings and concerns, and also help counselors get the information they need to help clients make decisions

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## Change into Open-ended Questions:

- Do you have safe sex?
- Do you have more than one sex partner?
- Do you use condoms?
- Do you drink alcohol when you are upset?
- Did your partner get tested?
- Do you want to have children in the future?
- Do you have someone you can talk with about taking your medicines the right way?
- Do you know how to prevent transmission of HIV to your baby?
- Do you exclusively breastfeed your baby?

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## Skill 4: Reflect Back What the Client is Saying

- Provides feedback to the client and lets her know that she has been listened to, understood, and accepted
- Encourages the client to say more
- Shows that the counselor has understood the client’s story
- Helps the counselor check that he or she has understood the client’s story
- Provides a good alternative to always answering with another question
- Can reflect the client’s feelings and include a summary of the content of what the client has said (sometimes called paraphrasing)
- When reflecting back, try to say it in a slightly different way

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## Formulas for Reflecting

- “You feel \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.”
- “You seem to feel that \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.”
- “You think that \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.”
- “So I sense that you feel \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.”
- “I’m hearing that when \_\_\_\_\_ happened, you didn’t know what to do.”

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## Reflect Back to these Statements:

- I missed a lot of my pills this month and I feel hopeless.
- My boyfriend does not know my test results—I’m scared to tell him.
- I feel like a bad mother because my baby does not want to suckle from me.
- My husband would just get angry if I asked him to use a condom, so I am not going to ask.
- My husband thinks it’s dangerous to give the baby medicines and I am afraid of disobeying him.
- I am worried because my mother-in-law will assume I am living with HIV if I don’t give the baby herbs.
- I feel so happy that my baby is growing well.

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## Skill 5: Empathize—Show That You Understand How the Client Feels

### Empathy or empathizing:

- Is a skill used in response to an emotional statement
- Shows an understanding of how the client feels and encourages the client to discuss the issue further
- Is different than sympathy. When you sympathize, you feel sorry for a person and look at the situation from your own point of view.

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## Skill 6: Avoid Words That Sound Judging

### Judging words include:

- *"right"*: You should do the right thing.
- *"wrong"*: That is the wrong way to feel.
- *"badly"*: Why are you behaving badly and missing appointments?
- *"good"*: Be a good girl and tell your boyfriend to use condoms.
- *"properly"*: Why don't you take your medicine properly?
- *"these people"* or *"those people"*: Those people are irresponsible and should not have children.
- If a counselor uses these words when asking questions, the client may feel that she is wrong, or that there is something wrong with her actions or feelings.
- Sometimes, however, counselors need to use the "good" judging words to build a client's confidence.

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## Skill 7: Help the Client Set Goals and Summarize Each Session

### Next steps and goals:

- Should be developed by the counselor and client together
- Can empower the client to achieve what she wants by agreeing to realistic short- and long-term goals and actions
- Should provide direction and must be results-oriented
- Must be clear enough to help the client measure her own progress (people feel good when they achieve something they have set out to do)
- To start, the counselor could say, *"Okay, now let's think about the things you will do this week based on what we talked about."*

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### Summarizing:

- The counselor summarizes what has been said during a counseling session and clarifies the major ideas and next steps.
- Can be useful in an ongoing counseling session or in making sure you are clear on important issues raised during a counseling session
- Is best when both the counselor and client participate and agree with the summary
- Provides an opportunity for the counselor to encourage the client to examine her feelings about the session
- The counselor could say, *"I think we've talked about a lot of important things today. (List main points.) We agreed that the best next steps are to \_\_\_\_\_. Does that sound right? Let's plan a time to talk again soon."*

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## The 4 Phases of a Counseling Session

1. Establishing the relationship
2. Understanding the problem
3. Supporting decision-making
4. Ending the session

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## 1. Establishing the Relationship

- The room should be quiet with doors that close and where there are no interruptions
- **Introduce yourself:** Say your name and explain your role and the length of time you have together
- **Ask the client to introduce herself or himself**
- **Explain that what is discussed will be kept confidential**
- Ways to begin a counseling session:
  - *Can you tell me why you came here today?*
  - *Where would you like to start?*

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## 2. Understanding the Problem

- Let the client talk about the thoughts, feelings, and actions around her or his issues or problems
- Use the 7 essential counseling and communication skills
- Help the client decide which issues or problems are the most important to talk about in the session

## 3. Support Decision-Making

- Support the client to make her or his own decisions on next steps and focus for the future
- The health worker can help the client explore the options, but it is ultimately the client's decision to make

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## 4. Ending the Session

- Summarize what was discussed during session
- Review the client's next steps
- Give the client a chance to ask questions
- Make referrals, if needed
- Discuss when the client will return and make sure she or he has an appointment



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## Case Studies and Role Plays in Small Groups



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## Module 6: Key Points

- Counseling is a way of working with people to understand how they feel and help them decide what they think is best.
- Health workers are not responsible for solving all of their client's problems.
- The role of health workers is to support and assist the client's decision-making process.
- It is important for clients to know that what they say will be kept private. Practice shared confidentiality.
- Ensure that there is private counseling space available and that counseling sessions are not interrupted for any reason.

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## Module 6: Key Points, con't.

- Our own attitudes, values, and prejudices should not be a part of communication and counseling with clients and other communities.
- There are the 7 key counseling and communication skills health workers should use.
- There are 4 main phases of a counseling session.
- There can be many challenges to providing quality counseling in PMTCT and ART clinics, including lack of time and lack of private counseling space.
- Improving counseling skills takes practice, as well as continuous self-exploration of our own values and attitudes.

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## Any Questions?



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