



Counselling skills competence framework

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Design by Steers McGillan Eves.

The full listing of competences for counselling skills is available online at www.bacp.co.uk

Areas of competence

Professional context	Empathy	Skills and techniques	Working alliance	Personal qualities
Ability to use counselling skills within legal, ethical and professional guidelines	Ability to use counselling skills to communicate empathic understanding	Ability to use a range of listening and responding skills appropriately	Ability to use counselling skills to establish, maintain and end the work	Ability to use counselling skills with self-awareness
Ability to work within professional boundaries appropriate to role and setting	Ability to use counselling skills empathically, to understand and respond appropriately to those experiencing painful and distressing emotions		Ability to use counselling skills collaboratively	Ability to draw on helpful personal attributes
Ability to use counselling skills to enhance but not change the primary role	Ability to use counselling skills to work empathically with a diversity of persons, settings and situations		Ability to use counselling skills in interactions with other professionals, carers, friends and family of the person you are working with	
Ability to offer appropriate care and support				
Ability to identify, assess and respond to risk and emergency				
Ability to make use of professional support and guidance				

Professional context

1. Ability to use counselling skills within legal, ethical and professional guidelines

Commit to working ethically and safely.

Follow policies and procedures relevant to role and setting.

2. Ability to work within professional boundaries appropriate to role and setting

Maintain a professional role appropriate to the setting.

Communicate and work within personal and professional limits of ability, maintaining ongoing personal awareness of own capacity and limitations.

Ability to establish and maintain agreed time boundaries.

Ability to explain to the person you are supporting why boundaries are important.

Ability to explain and maintain confidentiality and its limits including:

- legal limits to confidentiality, for example, safeguarding, terrorism
- ethical limits of confidentiality, for example, risk of harm
- agency or organisational confidentiality policies (where relevant)

Ability to breach confidentiality safely and appropriately where necessary, acknowledging that sharing relevant information with relevant people at the right time may be necessary.

Work sensitively to try to gain someone's consent if confidentiality needs to be breached, to share confidential information where needed and work together to access appropriate services.

Comply with data protection law and protect privacy according to role and context.

3. Ability to use counselling skills to enhance but not change the primary role

Ability to:

- integrate counselling skills into a primary role
- remain focused on the purpose of the primary role
- use terminology specific to role and setting
- identify and manage any potential tensions when embedding counselling skills in a primary role

4. Ability to offer appropriate care and support

Assessment

Ability to:

- support someone to identify what they need and want; understanding how care and support could help them achieve those outcomes
- assess the needs and wants of the person you are working with, identifying what support the person needs and wants
- reflect on own limits of ability to ensure the provision of appropriate and adequate care and support
- regularly review the work, to ensure that the support you offer is responsive to someone's needs and circumstances

Referral and signposting

Make appropriate referrals to relevant services by:

- using knowledge of own role, capacity and limitations when making referral decisions
- drawing on knowledge of a range of professions and professional roles and how they work together to provide the care and support someone needs
- communicating with other relevant agencies and organisations

- identifying external resources and supporting an individual to access and make the best use of these resources
- involving the person in the process, being sensitive to their need for privacy and confidentiality; unless the level of risk precludes this

5. Ability to identify, assess and respond to risk and emergency

Ability to identify areas of risk, and work with someone to monitor and manage the risky and (or) harmful behaviour(s) by:

- ensuring appropriate support is in place and making referrals where necessary
- supporting someone to make a safety plan, identifying steps and resources needed to stay safe

Ability to assess and respond to thoughts of suicide.

Ability to respond appropriately to emergency and crisis situations by:

- following risk and emergency procedures
- calming the situation where possible and looking for ways of reducing or removing risk
- informing relevant services or organisation(s) where appropriate

6. Ability to make use of professional support and guidance

Engage with professional support and guidance, for example:

- consultative support
- supervisory support and guidance
- line-management
- mentoring
- coaching

Use professional support and guidance to:

- monitor own personal and professional wellbeing
- reflect on the effectiveness of the work and the relationship

Use reflection and self-appraisal to review own use of skills.

Develop a professional development plan.

Be open to receiving constructive feedback to improve and develop own use of skills.

Empathy

1. Ability to use counselling skills to communicate empathic understanding

Communicate empathic understanding and acceptance.

Demonstrate the qualities of empathy, unconditional positive regard and genuineness.

Ability to apply empathic understanding to communicate kindness, compassion and consideration.

Use empathy, self-awareness and counselling skills to respond appropriately and in a timely manner to meet the needs of the person you are working with.

Ability to respond appropriately by being aware of own evoked feelings when working with others.

2. Ability to use counselling skills empathically, to understand and respond appropriately to those experiencing painful and distressing emotions

Listen to difficult and challenging emotions and let the person know you have heard and understood.

Listen to someone talk about difficult and challenging emotions without trying to change the subject or avoid painful feelings.

3. Ability to use counselling skills to work empathically with a diversity of persons, settings and situations

Facilitate choice; supporting people to make their own decisions wherever possible to promote and maintain autonomy, dignity, choice and independence.

Focus on the person's priorities and wishes, by identifying and being sensitive to difference, and responding to their unique cultural, emotional, psychological and spiritual needs and offering understanding, respect and acceptance.

Understand and work within the spirit of the Equality Act 2010, by:

- recognising own values, beliefs and principles and acknowledging that they may differ from other peoples
- recognising and addressing own prejudice, bias, stereotypes and assumptions
- recognising and addressing the impact of judgment, discrimination, bullying and harassment
- challenging discrimination in self and others
- appreciating and being curious about different cultures, values and beliefs
- listening with an open mind without judgment or opinion

Skills and techniques

1. Ability to use a range of listening and responding skills appropriately

Use a range of listening and responding skills appropriate to the role and setting; including both verbal and non-verbal communication.

Provide clear and straightforward information and communication, avoiding jargon and overly complicated terminology.

Use a range of counselling skills effectively, for example:

- listening – to verbal and non-verbal communication
- paraphrasing – to communicate attention and understanding of content
- reflecting – to acknowledge feelings and emotions
- restating – repeating back to the person to acknowledge what has been said and to encourage the person to continue
- summarising – giving an overview of what has been said
- focusing – supporting someone to prioritise what to talk about or work on
- minimal encouragers – using small gestures or verbal comments to acknowledge listening and offer encouragement for someone to continue talking, for example, nods, saying mm..., facial expressions, hand gestures
- non-verbal communication – for example, open posture and appropriate eye contact
- reframing – to offer a different view
- questions – use a range of different types of questions: open questions to support someone to explore their situation. Closed questions to gather facts, details and information
- self-disclosure – a rarely used counselling skill and only appropriate when the self-disclosure is for the other person's benefit and not used to coerce, induce or direct
- immediacy – the ability to use what is happening in the moment for someone's benefit
- silence – to allow someone the time and space to think things through in a safe and supportive environment

- challenge – to gently bring someone’s awareness to something they may have avoided or overlooked
- attend to verbal and non-verbal cues with understanding and insight

Ability to facilitate appropriately paced communication, offering both space and structure.

Ability to provide a safe and private space for someone to talk about their concerns and (or) worries.

Ability to work collaboratively and be actively and flexibly engaged in motivating, encouraging and supporting the wellbeing of others.

Ability to recognise and understand how unhelpful responses can impact on others, for example:

- giving unsolicited advice
- interrupting and talking over
- asking too many questions
- placating
- controlling
- rescuing

Ability to recognise and address own blocks to listening, for example:

- own emotions, thoughts, problems and issues
- physical discomfort
- thinking of what to say
- judgment and prejudice

Use counselling skills and their related values and principles in other areas of communication, including:

- writing
- telephone and text
- internet and social media

Working alliance

1. Ability to use counselling skills to establish, maintain and end the work

Ability to establish and foster a facilitative relationship.

Establish a relationship appropriate to role, setting and desired outcomes.

Form an effective relationship informed by the other person's needs and wants.

Let the person know exactly what they can expect from you.

Proceed at the other person's pace, giving them space to talk.

Maintain the focus of the conversation on the other person's agenda and follow their lead.

Build rapport and trust, acknowledging that a strong relationship is key to supporting well-being.

End the relationship and work safely and appropriately by:

- giving someone notice that your time together is coming to an end
- exploring how they feel about ending
- understanding that endings can be painful and challenging
- identifying coping strategies

Ability to:

- reflect on the effectiveness of the relationship and the work
- use counselling skills to learn about someone's life and situation
- work with people with a range of different support needs
- draw on knowledge of a wide range of life issues
- respond to difficult and challenging behaviour and situations

2. Ability to use counselling skills collaboratively

Ability to:

- actively engage someone to work together
- negotiate a meaningful focus for your time together
- understand the role empathy, acceptance and empowerment have on working collaboratively

3. Ability to use counselling skills in interactions with other professionals, carers, friends and family of the person you are working with

Ability to:

- collaborate and communicate with colleagues and other services and organisations in ways that respect and value the person at the heart of the work
- communicate appropriately with carers, friends and family of the person you are working with:
 - within the boundaries of confidentiality
 - with the person's consent.

Personal qualities

1. Ability to use counselling skills with self-awareness

Ability to:

- acknowledge how personal feelings can both help and hinder the use of counselling skills
- see past own feelings and experiences to clearly and accurately focus on the other person
- identify areas for personal development and access appropriate resources, for example: counselling, training, coaching, colleague support

2. Ability to draw on helpful personal attributes

Ability to support others with:

- kindness and care
- compassion and consideration
- integrity
- patience and tolerance
- emotional maturity

Ability to acknowledge the importance and practice of self-care to protect oneself from the emotional impact of working with others and to foster personal resilience.