

Specific Counselling for Depression Competences

Approaches to work with emotions and emotional meaning

Ability to help clients to access and express emotions

An ability to identify the ways in which clients manage and process their emotions, including the ability to recognise when clients are finding it difficult to access these

An ability to help clients experience feelings which may be out of current awareness, e.g.

by helping clients focus their attention inwards in order to become more aware of their feelings

by helping clients find ways of describing emotions which seem difficult to access

by listening empathically for feelings that are implicit and not yet fully in awareness

by focusing the client's attention on bodily sensations

by making empathic conjectures about feelings that have not yet been expressed

An ability to judge when it is appropriate to help clients reduce the extent to which they avoid experiencing underlying feelings

An ability to use methods that help clients increase contact with avoided emotion e.g.:

by helping clients explore what might be making it difficult for them to acknowledge and/or experience feelings

by identifying moments when clients seem to be having difficulty acknowledging and/or experiencing underlying feelings and drawing their attention to this

by helping clients explore the ways in which they avoid acknowledging and/or experiencing underlying feelings, and possible factors that may influence this e.g.:

previous negative experiences of expressing emotions to others

cultural and family attitudes to the expression of emotion

An ability to help clients achieve a level of emotional arousal that is optimal for exploring their feelings, e.g.:

helping clients who are overwhelmed by feelings e.g. by offering a calming and containing presence, containing imagery, or help to self-soothe

enabling clients who are out of touch with their feelings to increase emotional contact, for example by:

helping them review current concerns and focus on the most significant

helping them bring to mind and discuss previous episodes when they experienced heightened emotion

the counsellor using vivid imagery or language aimed at promoting feelings in the client

suggesting active methods that promote emotional expression (e.g. encouraging clients to repeat a phrase more forcefully)

An ability to help the client differentiate between feelings that are appropriate to

(and hence useful for) dealing with a current situation and those that are less helpful to them, for example,

because they are emotional responses relating to previous experiences rather than the present context

because they are reactions to other, more fundamental, emotions

Ability to help clients articulate emotions

An ability to help the client clarify and find appropriate words to describe their emotions

An ability to help the client verbalise the key concerns, meanings and memories which emerge out of emotional arousal

An ability to help the client identify and verbalise the wishes, needs, behaviours and goals associated with feelings and emotions (i.e. the 'action tendency' inherent in emotions)

An ability to suggest imagery and metaphor to help the client become more aware of and to articulate the meaning of their experiences

An ability to work with images or metaphors in a way that is helpful to clients:

by communicating in a manner that helps clients focus on their experiencing

by checking the 'fit' of images or metaphors with the client's experience

by working with the client to elaborate the image or metaphor

Ability to help clients reflect on and develop emotional meanings

An ability to help clients explore their implicit central assumptions about self, others and the world

An ability to help clients adapt central assumptions in the light of experience

An ability to help the client explore alternative ways of understanding their emotional difficulties and the ways in which they experience themselves and others

An ability to help clients explore and evaluate new perspectives on their experiences in order for them to:

develop alternative ways of understanding their experiences

revise their views of themselves

develop new narratives relating to themselves and their world

An ability to help the client develop metaphors for themselves that fit with their newly-emerging experience

An ability to help the client reflect on any new meanings that emerge:

to check the accuracy of meanings against experience

to assess the implications of the new meanings

to re-examine behaviour and where appropriate consider alternative forms of action

An ability to help clients evaluate new perspectives in terms of their social context, personal values and goals in life

Ability to help clients make sense of experiences that are confusing and distressing

An ability to recognise and to help clients reflect on reactions that they experience as problematic and/or incongruent (e.g. when they over- or under-react to an situation, or react in ways which they describe as being out of character)

an ability to help the client describe both their emotional reactions and the external situation, in ways that encourage the client:

to identify how they were feeling before they encountered the situation

to re-imagine the situation

to identify the moment when the reaction was triggered

to explore their reaction to the situation

to make links between their reactions and the way they construed the situation

to develop new ways of understanding the situation and their responses to it