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### Homelessness or inadequate housing

- ▶ Does the person:
  - have access to basic services such as welfare, clothing and blankets, meals, outreach, or a place to shower
  - have barriers to obtaining accommodation; for example, unemployment, race or culture issues
  - know what options are available to obtain housing
  - have other issues involved such as substance abuse or mental health issues?

### Unemployment

- ▶ Does the person:
  - need to access services such as Centrelink and Job Services Australia
  - need specialised support to learn résumé-writing skills
  - have barriers to employment such as age and lack of confidence
  - want to learn more about training options?

### Juvenile justice issues

- ▶ How is the person involved in the juvenile justice system? For example, are they in detention, under community supervision or probation, or a diversionary program?
- ▶ What is their family situation?
- ▶ Does the person:
  - need access to legal advice or an advocate
  - have family or other informal support
  - have special needs; for example, appropriate cultural support
  - have peer group or social factors that influence their situation
  - have other areas of concern such as homelessness?

### Communicable disease

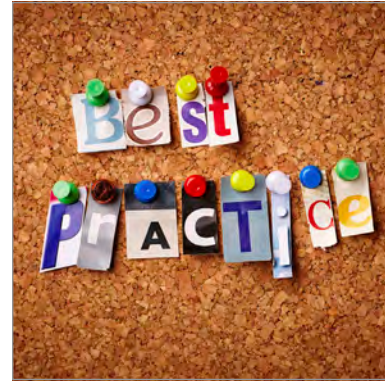
- ▶ Does the person:
  - receive appropriate health care
  - require support to manage their condition?
- ▶ Are staff aware of the need to take precautions to avoid contracting infectious diseases such as hepatitis or HIV/AIDs?

### Financial difficulties

- ▶ Is the person eligible for government benefits through Centrelink?
- ▶ Are they in a situation where they are being financially abused?
- ▶ Do they require financial counselling?
- ▶ What other support do they require; for example, employment services?

## Codes of practice/conduct

Codes of practice, sometimes referred to as compliance codes; provide practical guidance on how to meet the standards contained in Acts and regulations. Codes of practice are generally developed through consultation with representatives from industry, workers and employers, special interest groups and government agencies. They provide guidance on a range of matters, including duty of care, hazard identification, risk assessment processes and risk control. Although they are not enforceable by law, codes of practice should be followed unless there is an alternative course of action that achieves the same or better standards.



You must be familiar with the codes of practice that apply to the community services environment. Depending on the area that you manage, you may need to understand specific codes of practice that apply. For example, if you work with specialist family violence services for women and children, there is a specific code of practice that applies.

Codes of practice are available on the Safe Work Australia website ([www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au](http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au)) and from your state or territory's WHS authority. You can keep up to date with your state or territory's codes of practice by regularly visiting the website of the appropriate WHS authority.

## Identify ethical issues

There may be times when you must make a difficult decision based on an ethical, rather than a legal, situation. The ethical responsibilities of your service must be evaluated to ensure any ethical issues are resolved promptly and the service is delivered safely and fairly. Ethical issues may include the following.

### Maintain service user safety and security

- ▶ Some service users live in circumstances that are a threat to their own safety and security. They may refuse suggestions about changing their living arrangements. You have a duty of care to protect the service user from harm. However, it is not appropriate for you to enforce lifestyle changes or make demands of your service users.

### Deal with conflicting priorities

- ▶ Sometimes service users may try to coerce a worker into undertaking duties that are not within the scope of their job responsibilities. While this may be due to innocent misunderstanding, you and your team members must not cross professional boundaries at any time.

### **The right to have social needs met**

You must recognise that people in need of support also have social needs. For example, if you work in aged care, you and your team members should:

- ▶ support the rights of married couples to live a married life
- ▶ provide ease of access for families and other visitors with due regard for the wishes of service users
- ▶ recognise the needs of residents for social contact and provide opportunities for social interaction, including opportunities for developing new friendships within the residential care environment and the community.

### **The right to freedom of association**

Freedom of association is a principle contained in human rights conventions. The objective is to ensure people are able to meet and interact freely, without the interference of the state, or of others. You and your team members must not threaten, organise or take any action that applies undue pressure on another person. It is illegal to discriminate, threaten or otherwise victimise another person. People have the right to associate with whomever they wish and should be provided with the opportunity to do so.

### **The right to freedom of expression**

All service users, their carer, friends and family have the right to participate in decisions about the service they receive. For example, if a person would like to collaborate with you or one of your team members in developing their care plan, they must be provided the opportunity to express their ideas, opinions, queries and concerns. Listen carefully to the needs and preferences of service users to ensure their rights are upheld, and make sure you allow service users to express themselves without judgment.

### **The right to make a complaint**

All service users have the right to complain if they are dissatisfied with the way care is provided or have concerns regarding an aspect of the service, such as catering, financial matters, hygiene, security, activities, choice, comfort and/or safety.

A complaints procedure is a legislative requirement that all organisations must comply with. The procedure allows the service user to exercise their rights and also provides your organisation with useful feedback about the appropriateness of the service you provide. Everyone in your organisation needs to understand the complaints procedure. All complaints should be dealt with fairly and promptly and without fear of repercussions.

### **The right to an agreed standard of care**

People requiring support should be able to expect your organisation's service standards to:

- ▶ be reliable and dependable
- ▶ adhere to legislative requirements
- ▶ be inclusive of service user participation and collaboration
- ▶ be affordable and accessible
- ▶ be fair in regard to rights and responsibilities
- ▶ be individualised for each person and their particular needs.

**Comfort**

The person is seated comfortably.

**Security/Privacy**

The information being communicated is extremely private to that individual. The room should have a door that can be closed with signage to others that it is in use.

**Noise control**

No background noise. Information can be relayed through the silences of the communication. Mobile telephones should also be turned off as they can be very disruptive and distracting.

**Stimuli control**

The room should be neutral with minimal stimulation, light colours and decoration.

**Unhurried/supportive environment**

To encourage the person to communicate at their pace.

## Rules

The rules consist of following the six-step process for counselling:

- ▶ Connect
  - Make first contact.
  - Communicate appropriately.
  - Establish trust and confidentiality.
- ▶ Reassure
  - Be calm.
  - Provide accurate information.
  - Refer to appropriate services.
- ▶ Stabilise
  - Assist the person to understand their own reactions.
  - Recognise the signs of severe distress.
  - Refer to a specialist.
- ▶ Address needs and concerns
  - Gather accurate information.
  - Clarify the person's concerns.
  - Formulate possible solutions.
  - Provide practical assistance.
- ▶ Provide support
  - Help rebuild social networks.
  - Encourage the person to access external support.
- ▶ Facilitate coping
  - Encourage positive coping skills.
  - Identify negative coping.
  - Help manage anger.

## Sensory and other barriers to communication

As discussed, a person takes in the message through use of their senses. If these are impaired the message may not get through or may not be decoded correctly. This can be frustrating for both the sender and the receiver.

Here are examples of communication barriers and suggestions for overcoming them.

### Vision impairment

- ▶ When you greet a person who has a visual impairment make sure you identify yourself.
- ▶ If you are having a group discussion you should identify who you are directing a question towards by using their name as a vocal cue; for example, 'Sarah, what do you think?'
- ▶ Always give verbal warning about any physical movement that is about to take place in the person's immediate surroundings. For example, 'I am just going to bend down and pick up that pen for you'.
- ▶ Always announce when a conversation is over and you are leaving.
- ▶ Nonverbal behaviour conveys messages. Nonverbal messages that may be affected are include eye contact and body language.
- ▶ It is important to not let the communication process falter due to these constraints. The visually impaired person will be more alert to the spoken messages that are conveyed and the use of touch.

### Hearing impairment

- ▶ When speaking to someone with a hearing impairment, face them directly and speak clearly and slowly using a natural tone.
- ▶ Ensure that the person is wearing hearing aids and that they are in working order.
- ▶ Use written communication wherever appropriate.
- ▶ Provide actions and visual cues wherever appropriate.
- ▶ Raise your voice when necessary but never shout, as shouting can distort sound.

### Speech impairment

- ▶ Speech impairments can be due to a physical disability such as a stroke or other physical causes such as Alzheimer's, acquired brain injury or congenital disorder. Speech impairment can also be due to an emotional or psychological disturbance causing stuttering.
- ▶ When speaking to someone with difficulty speaking it is important to take an encouraging and non-corrective approach.
- ▶ Be patient and allow time for reflections and confirmation of their message.
- ▶ Don't ever pretend to understand if you don't. Instead repeat questions and break them down into short questions.



'From your point of view ...'

'I wonder if ...'



'Do you mean ...'

'Let me see if I understand ...'

## Allow sufficient time to hear the story

Counselling may involve working with more than one person in a session. At times the person seeking counselling may choose to come with a support person or there may be another person involved. The counselling session needs to be organised to address the type of session being conducted.

All discussion participants who want to contribute should have the opportunity to do so. This means the support worker must allow the right amount of time for the discussion, based on the issue and the number of people present. There must be enough time for everyone to speak without feeling rushed. A skilled counsellor gives everyone the opportunity to express themselves fully. The issues should be explored in-depth, not just at a superficial level.

Sometimes you may need to deal with talkative participants; sometimes one person will have more to say than others. Regardless, each participant must be equally valued and encouraged to contribute.

As the counsellor, you need to address group sessions by:

- ▶ identifying how long the meeting will last
- ▶ allocating enough time for participants to speak
- ▶ monitoring each person as they speak to ensure no-one goes over their allotted time
- ▶ encouraging reluctant speakers to express themselves.

## Respond appropriately to the story

Communication skills and techniques used to clarify aspects of the story and the person's understanding of their experience include asking open and closed questions; paraphrasing and reflecting feelings. A reflection of feeling is akin to paraphrasing; paraphrasing tends to focus on cognitive aspects or 'facts' while reflecting focuses more on identifying and clarifying feelings and emotions. Clarifying and understanding the person's feelings is an important basis for understanding the person's actions, thoughts and attitudes.

Interpreting events and experiences involves labelling and describing thoughts, feelings and behaviours. This works to integrate cognitive aspects and emotional aspects of the person's situation.

### Giving information/feedback

- ▶ Provide data or facts relevant to the person's needs.
- ▶ Ensure that the person is receptive to the information.
- ▶ Be direct, clear, specific, concise and concrete.
- ▶ Break the information into smaller chunks for the person to use.

### After giving information

- ▶ Check that the person has attended to the information provided.
- ▶ Evaluate the person's understanding and use counselling skills to address any misunderstandings.

### Using information

- ▶ Orient the person to the interviewing process.
- ▶ Provide instructions or directions.
- ▶ Present feedback.
- ▶ Provide alternative perspectives.
- ▶ Direct the person to other resources.

## Example

### Facilitate the client–counsellor relationship through selection and use of micro-skills

Here is an example of how counselling a person may progress.

#### Attend

Diego is the counsellor of a local community group and is running a workshop. He is busy welcoming participants and organising the start of the session when Mrs Dalazzi, a participant, approaches him and asks to speak with him. As Diego is balancing several tasks at once, he does not feel he can give Mrs Dalazzi his full attention. He makes a quick assessment to determine if the matter is urgent and then tells Mrs Dalazzi he will definitely speak with her in half an hour when the activities are underway. Mrs Dalazzi agrees.

When Mrs Dalazzi comes to Diego's office at the designated time, he makes sure the area is free from distractions. He tells the office assistant to hold any phone calls for him and closes the door to his office. He sits facing Mrs Dalazzi, maintains eye contact and gives her his full attention. He apologises for not being able to speak with her earlier and explains he wanted to be able to give her his full attention.

#### Acknowledge

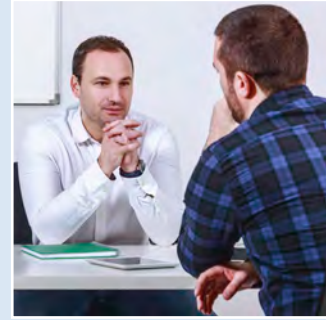
As Mrs Dalazzi begins to speak and express her concerns, Diego does not interrupt. He sits forward in his seat and nods his head to show he is listening. He makes sounds like, 'uh huh' and says 'Yes' to acknowledge what Mrs Dalazzi is saying.



**Example****Observe and respond to nonverbal communication cues**

Harry has been referred to Martin's AOD assessment and referral organisation as a condition of his suspended sentence for possessing heroin.

Harry is reluctant to cooperate and appears sullen and disinterested. Harry looks down at the floor and does not make eye contact. Martin notes that Harry's posture is slumped with arms crossed and his walk is slow. Harry takes the chair furthest away from Martin. Martin will be undertaking Harry's assessment. He meets with Harry to complete an intake assessment and provide him with information about the comprehensive assessment.



Martin begins the session with the following explanation:

'I've been asked to collect some initial information from you that'll help us to make sure you're given the best types of support we can offer. Tomorrow, I'll spend an hour or two talking with you in more detail so that we can properly understand your drug use and help you to avoid any further problems with the law. It's important that you know you're the most important person in this process. You can choose not to answer questions, but I give you my assurance that what you do tell me can help us work together so you can manage your situation in the future, whether you choose to continue to use heroin or try to get clean. Your decisions and input will guide how we work together.'

When Harry realises that Martin is not going to preach to him or force him to change, his attitude relaxes and he appears more willing to talk. Martin notes that Harry's arms uncross and he leans forward in the chair indicating interest in the conversation. Harry nods as Martin goes through the explanation and makes eye contact with him.

## Practice task 4

Re-read the previous example.

1. Describe three nonverbal communication cues that indicate that Harry is defensive.

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2. Explain how nonverbal communication can contribute to the communication process.

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## Relapse

The process starts again. The most likely initial outcome of stages of change is a relapse. This is when the person returns to old patterns behaviour. As part of the planning process, try to prepare the person for this stage in advance by explaining that relapse is often the most likely outcome and that it is both a normal part of the change cycle, and a learning experience.

After a relapse, a person may enter the change model at any stage. Where they enter largely depends on the way they perceive their relapse.

### Example:

- ▶ 'I tried relaxation therapies, but I went straight back to yelling when I got involved in an argument again.'

## Personality and communication

There will be various personality types present in each group. Researchers have identified a number of personality types as described here. You need to understand the person's personality to choose the type of communication strategy to use. This helps you ensure that the person will contribute to the counselling or communication approach. For example, some people are eager to participate in exploring and communicating their concerns to a counsellor; others need support and encouragement to assist them to participate. Identifying the person's personality is one of the factors that the counsellor needs to assess to encourage communication and develop a trusting relationship.

Researchers have identified a number of personality types, as described here.

### The talker

- ▶ Talkers have something to say about everything. If allowed, they will dominate the discussion and will need minimal encouragement to explore the issue. The counsellor should aim to slow talkers down, not silence them. The rotation technique is effective with talkers. This means they have to wait their turn. You can also try gently interrupting and presenting your own ideas.
- ▶ It may be necessary to use more closed questions to restrict the amount of talking the person does.

### The silent one

- ▶ For discussions to be effective, each person needs to participate. If a person is silent, the counselling session does not get the benefit of their input but the silences are still communicating a message. It is the counsellor's responsibility to encourage silent members to participate without being obvious or overdoing it. To build up silent members' confidence, counsellors should call on them with questions they can easily answer or ask a non-confrontational question to encourage participation.

### Initial requirements for counselling

- ▶ At the beginning of counselling, informed permission must be sought from clients and recorded.
- ▶ If counselling is mandated by a court order, clients are informed of the consequences if they choose not to participate or attend.
- ▶ Client expectations of the outcome of counselling and professional boundaries are fully discussed.
- ▶ Possible models and interventions which may be helpful for the client's presenting problem are explained.
- ▶ Alternatives and adjuncts to counselling are explored; for example, support groups.
- ▶ The risks of interventions are explained; feeling overcome by negative emotions discussing traumatic experiences.
- ▶ The limits of confidentiality are explained.
- ▶ Ethical codes of practice, agency policies and complaint processes are explained.
- ▶ The counsellor's qualifications, experience and role are discussed.
- ▶ Costs of counselling (if any) and cancellation policies are explained.

## Case note information

The information that should be in case notes will be outlined in the organisation's policy and procedures. If you are not certain about any requirements you should refer to the supervisor for clarification. All paperwork should be completed using the organisation's approved forms.

### Intake information

Intake information, including at a minimum who has referred the client to the service, contact details, date of birth and the nature of the presenting problem. It is also good to obtain a next of kin or contact person that can be contacted if there is a need.

### Initial assessment

Notes on assessment sessions are more detailed than ongoing session notes and are usually taken during the session to ensure the record is accurate and includes all relevant details. Details at this point can be added to the initial information recorded in the person's file.

The person-centred approach requires the following.

### Three elements required in a person-centred environment

#### Empathy

Demonstrate an accurate understanding of the client's experience.

#### Unconditional positive regard

Demonstrate that you are accepting and non-judgmental of the client.

#### Congruence

Demonstrate that you genuinely wish to help the client and you are not hiding behind the facade of an expert or judge.

## Aim of counselling

The aim of counselling is to provide the person with a confidential opportunity to explore personal and relational issues in safety. The role of the counsellor is to help the person through this process without judgment or telling the person what to do. It is to empower the person to make decision, institute actions and achieve stated goals. The counsellor may, on occasion, give the person information or offer suggestions. During counselling, the counsellor and the person set goals they have both agreed upon. The person agrees to work towards agreed goals. If at any time the counsellor believes they can no longer help the person, then they will refer the person to an appropriate service or person to assist them.

## Purpose of counselling

Counselling encourages the person to become more aware of their thinking, feelings and behaviour, and to develop alternative coping strategies for difficult situations. It is a process that encourages the person to look at their emotions, experiences and behaviours with a goal to facilitate positive change. Counselling assists and guides a person to resolve problems and difficulties.

Counselling requires talking and working together through issues. Being able to speak freely and openly enables the person to see things more clearly – possibly from a different viewpoint.

The counselling sessions provide an opportunity to get assistance clarifying what is important to the person through the prioritising of goals. Empathy from the counsellor allows them to ask appropriate questions and lead the person to positive outcomes. A relationship of trust is important for this to occur, based on a premise of confidentiality.

Counselling may have been recommended or mandated to the person or they may have chosen this direction for themselves.

Reasons for attending counselling:

- ▶ The person feels overwhelmed or depressed.
- ▶ The person needs someone to talk to outside of family and friends.
- ▶ There is an issue or situation affecting their day-to-day operations or life to the point they can't make important decisions and are not sure what to do next.
- ▶ The person is required to attend as a part of a court instruction.

This is also the time that responsibilities are discussed within the collaborative partnership; it may be the person's job to book a GP appointment and get a referral letter for an Addiction Medicine Specialist, and it might be the worker's job to complete a referral for residential rehabilitation and contact the person's corrections officer.

## Document the action plan

You may be required to prepare and present a document that summarises the reports. Organisational guidelines and protocols for communicating with people accessing the service will guide this process.

Present the options for service delivery to the person, focusing on areas to be prioritised. For example, a client with a disability and AOD issues should be informed about:

- ▶ relevant disability support and AOD agencies
- ▶ how to access the agencies
- ▶ the cost and whereabouts of the agencies
- ▶ how the agency can meet their needs.

## The right to make a complaint

Also inform the person about their right to make a complaint or refuse a service. Avenues for making a complaint need to be explained in detail, so the person is empowered to make a complaint or refuse a service if the need arises.

When liaising with the person about assessment results and service delivery options:

- ▶ be calm and courteous
- ▶ treat them with respect
- ▶ be fair; present the client with all alternatives and make available all information
- ▶ ensure the client has the support required to access and understand the provided information.

Always obtain consent from the person before actions are taken and before personal information is released to other agencies.

## Stage four of the counselling relationship

At this time the person now puts into place the actions that have been identified. At this stage the person may present with new concerns or be able to identify other areas of the problem that they previously did not acknowledge or where not consciously aware of. At this point new strategies or objectives may be built into the action plan. Revisiting difficulties and barriers in completing set tasks can be helpful when considering changes and new goals. We do not wish for the person to continually fail to meet the goals they set for themselves, so negotiating more achievable tasks is important.

Individuals may have difficulty completing interventions that were initially selected due to a number of factors, including:

- ▶ not properly understanding what is expected of them
- ▶ ambivalence about receiving treatment and lack of motivation
- ▶ preoccupation with other concerns such as financial issues
- ▶ not thinking the intervention meets their needs
- ▶ a lack of rapport with their counsellor
- ▶ existing conditions, such as mental illness, acquired brain injury or disabilities, that make it difficult for them to carry out the action plan.

### Use assessment feedback

- ▶ The aim is to help the person to develop a greater awareness concerning their behaviour and to make decisions about it. Always seek responses using active listening techniques. Guide the person towards talking and thinking about the issues, rather than attempting to provide them with answers. Reflect and re-state the person's own responses to encourage them to delve deeper and clarify their standpoint.
- ▶ Motivation for change usually grows when a person recognises a discrepancy between where they are and where they want to be. This recognition usually needs to be driven by the person's own thought processes, rather than you.

### Example

#### Select and use communication skills according to the sequence of a counselling interview

[Insert organisation's logo here]

#### Case Management Plan

(Short version)

Name:		Contact no.:
Ethnicity (circle):	Aboriginal	Torres Strait Islander
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander		Other (please specify)
Nominated support person:		Contact no.:
Case officer:		Contact no.:
Presenting issues:		
Assessment:		
Strategies/intervention to be used:		

## Example

**Use specialised counselling communication techniques**

Jackson sees Ben to develop a treatment plan for Ben's heroin use. Ben is a 32-year-old male originally from the Philippines and moved to Australia with his family at the age of 12. He reports a 10-year history of dependent heroin use (smoking). Ben has been directed to attend drug and alcohol treatment as part of a court order. Ben would like to cease smoking heroin and commence opiate replacement therapy but says that he finds the \$35 per week dispensing fee expensive. He is also concerned that if his parents become aware of his daily trip to the pharmacy they will realise he has been using heroin again and may kick him out of the house, as they had threatened this previously. Ben reports that his parents are extremely strict when it comes to drug use.



Jackson reflects that there were a number of barriers that need to be worked through for Ben to achieve his goal. These barriers are impacting Ben's ambivalence about making changes to his heroin use. Jackson and Ben discuss the good and not so good things about continuing to use heroin as he currently does. Ben states that using helps him to 'disappear' from his issues, but he acknowledges that his issues only get worse each time he uses due to increasing debts and the risk of further legal issues, including incarceration.

Jackson and Ben agree that his parents would be more disappointed if Ben went to jail than if they found out he has been using heroin again. Jackson finds some culture-specific family brochures that Ben can give to his parents. Ben is also reminded that \$35 a week is affordable if he reduces and ultimately abstains from using heroin.

Jackson and Ben continue with the development of the treatment plan.



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## 2D Identify and respond appropriately to strong client emotional reactions

In counselling the person is being guided to confront experiences that can be difficult to face. A counsellor needs to be aware of the impact of stress and trauma on the communication process and have the skills required to identify and respond to a person experiencing a strong emotional reaction.

At times when a person is experiencing strong emotional reactions, attention, concentration and memory may be impacted. The counsellor needs to devise strategies to manage these situations and achieve effective communication with a person.



### The brain and communication

The brain stores and codes the information that the person takes in through their senses. There are a number of models that have been proposed to explain the process of communication. Some of these are a linear model or a bottom-up model.

Here is some more information on types of communication models that a person may use to make sense of an experience.

#### Linear model or information processing model

- ▶ Consists of three stages:
- ▶ Input: Taking in and analysis of the information
- ▶ Storage: The information is stored in the brain and the coding and manipulation of the information
- ▶ Output:- An appropriate response to the information
- ▶ This model suggests that the information process is a series of steps that happen sequentially.
- ▶ This may happen singularly or in tandem with other information depending on the familiarity of the information for the person. The brain is able to perform parallel processing and the decoding of the information is also dependent on emotional and motivational factors.

#### Bottom up or stimulus driven models

- ▶ This model suggests that past experiences cause the person to process information from a conceptual framework of the subject. This causes a top down processing approach. It is reliant on us using a frame of reference to process the information.



## Attention

A person may be focusing on the memory of the problem and may not pay attention to new information being presented by the counsellor. Alternatively external distractors may pull attention away from the information that the counsellor is giving or the task the person is completing.

### Strategies:

- ▶ Hold counselling in a quiet room free from distractions.
- ▶ Give information on ways to absorb information.
- ▶ Focus and explore the issue.

## Concentration

To concentrate, the person will need to employ selective attention and focus on one stimulus. For the person who is dealing with trauma and stress, intrusive thoughts often direct their attention away from tasks.

### Strategies:

- ▶ Obtain commitment from the person and put effort into completing the task.
- ▶ Assist the person to have enthusiasm for the task; this might involve exploring with the person the goals or objectives.
- ▶ Skilled at the task - practise the task in a supportive environment.
- ▶ Ensure the person is aware of the importance of looking after their physical state.
- ▶ Ensure the environment is not too distracting.
- ▶ If having intrusive thoughts, explore relaxation and mindfulness techniques.
- ▶ Have a clear plan of action that the person has decided on in consultations.
- ▶ Break the task down into smaller components.

## Memory

When accessing their memory, the person who suffered trauma and stress may also bring back the strong emotions and feelings that were associated with the issue; they essentially relive the moment.

Dissociation may be used by some individuals to minimise the memory of the event and to limit distress.

### Strategies:

- ▶ Provide a supportive non-judgmental environment to discuss the issue.
- ▶ Provide the person with techniques to manage intrusive thinking.
- ▶ Create a trusting environment where the person directs the counselling/communication session.



## Topic 3

In this topic you will learn how to:

- 3A Reflect on and evaluate your own communication with clients**
- 3B Recognise the effect of your own values and beliefs on communication with clients**
- 3C Identify and respond to the need for development of your own skills and knowledge**

## Evaluate own communication

Community services work can be very challenging as it involves responding to complex human needs and difficult situations. Workers should be aware of their own limitations and seek opportunities to improve their skills and knowledge through personal and professional development opportunities. Practices that help workers assess their own skills include self-evaluation and supervision. Self-evaluation may take place in private periods of self-reflection, supervision sessions or group feedback exchanges with co-workers and supervisors. To benefit from feedback, workers must have a clear understanding of the protocols for giving and receiving open and evaluative feedback.

### Beliefs

- ▶ People from different cultures and backgrounds hold different beliefs, which may be about religion or spirituality or expectations related to roles or children. For example, a Jewish person may choose not to attend activities on a Saturday because in their religion Saturday is a day of prayer and family time.
- ▶ You may not have the same beliefs as some of your service users but you should uphold and respect their right to their own beliefs or those that differ from mainstream Australian society. Do what you can to ensure your service users do not feel ostracised because of their beliefs and try to learn as much as you can about them. This will help you and other team members gain a better understanding of the individual and provide a better level of service.

### Culture

- ▶ A person's culture influences how they experience life. People from the same cultural background share language, knowledge and traditions that are common to everyone within their group. Culture provides the group with rules for living and this is reflected in the values, attitudes and beliefs of each member of that group. Cultural difference should never be a barrier to service delivery.

## How to recognise own bias

Both participants in the counselling experience are individuals and bring to the session their own values and beliefs. Counsellors need to be able to identify their beliefs and values and reflect on the communication interactions to guard against bias.

Having high self-awareness allows counsellors to:

- ▶ provide high-quality services to all people accessing the service
- ▶ ensure their values, beliefs and experiences do not influence their interaction with the person; in other words, self-awareness helps the counsellor remain non-judgmental
- ▶ reduce the potential for biasing the person's decisions
- ▶ hear and understand the person's concerns
- ▶ offer genuine empathy and support
- ▶ skilfully and effectively manage the person's counselling session without being overly reactive to any points of difference they experience as difficult
- ▶ empower the person.

## Self-awareness

A way in which to prevent personal biases and values impacting the counselling session with other people is to become more self-aware. The counsellor needs to explore their own values and beliefs to be effective and non-judgmental when communicating with other people accessing the service.

## Summary

1. You can collect evidence of meeting agency objectives and relevant codes of ethics or practice to assess your own practice. Practice standards and personal attributes that are outlined in your position description can also provide valuable guidelines for evaluation.
2. To work effectively with others, you need a high level of self-awareness. This means understanding how your values, beliefs and behaviours may impact the people receiving support.
3. People who do not make the effort to examine their own cultural beliefs, biases and lack of knowledge about other cultures often resort to discriminatory behaviour and may hold views that are based on stigma and stereotyping.
4. Self-development is an ongoing process that requires an ability to plan how you want to develop your personal abilities, skills and knowledge. A personal development plan is an action plan for self-development. The plan should clearly establish what you want to achieve and how you will achieve it within a specific time frame.
5. Engaging in regular self-evaluation is an important element of professional development in community services work. Self-evaluation may occur through reflective practice or structured discussion and supervision with others.
6. Everyone has limitations of some kind. Being self-aware and understanding your strengths and weaknesses will help you become a more effective community service worker.
7. Most people are apprehensive about receiving feedback. You can improve how you respond to feedback by considering how it will benefit your practice and relationships with others.
8. Exchanging constructive feedback with co-workers is an important tool for improving personal performance. It encourages open communication between workers and helps build a supportive work environment.
9. Feedback is most effective when it is given in a respectful and courteous manner and according to clear guidelines. Destructive feedback or comments that seem more like personal attacks are not useful or constructive feedback.
10. Community services work is an industry that is rapidly expanding and evolving. It is important to keep abreast of developments in the industry and develop your skills and knowledge accordingly.
11. Community services workers benefit from seeking support and feedback from their own team members and others outside their team and organisation. Creating professional networks ensures you have a wide range of expertise and resources to support you in your work.
12. Your organisation will have specific guidelines in relation to professional development. It is important that you are familiar with them and seek opportunities for further learning and skills development that meet organisational requirements.
13. Keep up to date with industry developments to assess how you can apply these to improve your own work practices.