Component

Introduction to Counselling Theory

(Y/617/4234) *For use in AIM centres*

Component level	Two
Component Guided Learning Hours (GLH)	15
Ofqual component reference number	Y/617/4234
Component sector	1.3 Health and Social Care

Component summary

This component introduces learners to the roots of counselling theory and how theory underpins counselling skills. It provides a rudimentary understanding of the three main areas of counselling theory and how they can relate to counselling practice.

This component has **five** learning outcomes

1	Understand the main elements of the Psychodynamic approach
2	Understand the main elements of the Humanistic approach
3	Understand the main elements of the Cognitive-Behavioural approach
4	Understand how theory underpins counselling skills
5	Understand differences between approaches in counselling

Syllabus outline

1) Main elements of the Psychodynamic approach

It is important that learners are introduced to a limited number of the most fundamental concepts listed below from classical Freudian psychoanalysis. Learners should be informed that the approach adopted by counsellors working psychodynamically today will differ in many ways from classical Freudian psychoanalysis.

Unconscious

Learners need to know that the idea that much of what goes on in the human mind is outside our immediate awareness, yet still influences our thoughts, feelings and behaviour, is fundamentally important in the psychodynamic approach. Freud developed his original ideas about the structure of the mind and came to see psychological problems as caused by conflict between three agencies of our personality, the Id, the Ego and the Superego. The conscious Ego develops to balance the unconscious instinctual drives of the Id with the demands of real life and of the partly conscious superego, or conscience.

Defence mechanisms

Freud noted a number of ways in which he believed the Ego defends itself against the unacceptable instinctual demands of the Id, or the prohibitive demands of the Superego. Anna Freud and others developed these ideas further, and they have become commonly used in psychology in general. Learners are likely to find them relatively easy to understand. At this level, it is likely to be possible to cover:

- Repression - the most fundamental mechanism. Repression is employed by the Ego to keep disturbing or threatening thoughts, for example sexual or aggressive fantasies, from becoming conscious at all.

- Denial - involves blocking external events from awareness by refusing to acknowledge it as real. An example would be refusing to admit that smoking cigarettes can be damaging to health.
- Projection - involves attributing one's own unacceptable thoughts, feeling and motives to another person. An example would be that one might start to have feelings of hatred towards another person, but one's Superego dictates that such feelings are unacceptable. A 'solution' could be to convince oneself instead that it is the other person who has the feelings of hatred.

Transference

At this level, it is likely to be possible only to ensure that learners understand the idea of transference at a basic level. Transference can be said to occur when a client experiences their counsellor 'as if' the counsellor was someone else – generally, an important figure from their past. The client is usually not conscious of this. Part of the counsellor's job is to point this out by means of what is known as an 'interpretation'.

Free association

Freud encouraged his patients to share thoughts, words and feelings that came to mind spontaneously without concerning themselves about whether what they express was 'appropriate'. The idea was that free association reveals hidden connections or memories without prompting or guidance from the analyst that might otherwise go undiscovered.

2) Main elements of the Humanistic approach

Humanistic psychology attends to the human capacity and natural impulse for growth, potential and self-actualisation, subjects which other approaches were seen to be neglecting. This 'actualising tendency' is a crucial concept. A number of theories are usually considered to contribute to the Humanistic approach to counselling. At this level, it is best briefly to focus on the essentials of the person-centred approach.

Carl Rogers's Necessary and Sufficient Conditions

Person-centred theory states that for change to take place in counselling, certain circumstances must be in place and to the extent that they are, change will happen. The well-known 'core conditions' of counsellor congruence, unconditional positive regard and empathic understanding are sometimes treated as if they were in themselves the whole of person-centred theory. It is useful to acquaint learners with all six of Rogers's Necessary and Sufficient Conditions from the outset of their learning. This can help avoid over-simplification and a tendency to imagine that the conditions are a 'technique' which once used can be forgotten about.

Conditions of Worth

Learners need to understand some of Rogers's ideas about the origin of the problems that clients may bring to counselling. Person-centred theory holds that human beings develop a 'self -concept', based largely on how significant others, especially their parents, value them. When a person's need for positive regard is met only conditionally, that is only when they fulfil the expectations of others, conditions of worth are acquired. Their experience may for example be "I am loved/wanted/safe as long as I do not express anger".

3) Main elements of the Cognitive Behavioural approach

Learners should be helped to understand that what is now termed CBT is itself the integration over time of several approaches, particularly Behaviourism and Cognitive Therapy. Aspects of CBT increasingly feature in coaching as well as counselling and are increasingly combined with mindfulness.

At this level, coverage of the following key concepts is advised:

- Irrational beliefs - a fundamental assumption in CBT is that a person's irrational thinking is the primary cause of many of the issues they bring to counselling. An important part of the counsellor's task is therefore to identify what appear to be important irrational beliefs which the client is holding.
- Problem solving and using goals and targets - the identification of specific, defined problems and helping clients to adopt a structured approach to solving them, are important aspects of CBT. The counsellor may teach clients skills to help them take a more active role in their lives, to take more initiative, and to seek to effectively make decisions and achieve particular agreed goals. Using this approach successfully with one specific problem can enable the client to apply it to other problems, thus empowering them to tackle their difficulties more independently. It is important that goals are clear, specific and measurable.
- Homework/tasks - an important feature of CBT is that following a session, the counsellor is free to set their client homework. The idea is that the client practices what has been discussed in sessions, for example trying to identify and record their own irrational beliefs and challenging them. This can then be worked on further in the next session. When successful, this can help the client take increasing responsibility for their own progress. Reluctance to engage with doing homework is considered a potential limitation of the approach.

4) How theory underpins counselling skills

In one of the following approaches:

a. Psychodynamic approach

b. Humanistic approach

c. Cognitive-Behavioural approach

It is useful to distinguish between the generic skills which are likely to be employed by any competent counsellor regardless of theoretical orientation, and the more specialist skills, interventions and ways of working relevant to particular approaches.

Generic skills tend to be concerned with effective communication and the management of sessions. They include:

- Contracting
- Reflecting
- Paraphrasing
- Summarising
- Questioning
- Immediacy
- Observation of non-verbal communication

- Using silence
- Ending
- Referral

Specialist skills associated with particular approaches include:

- Psychodynamic approach

  - Assessment of psychological mindedness

  - History taking

  - Interpretation of the transference

  - Interpretation of dreams

  - Use of countertransference

- Humanistic approach

  - Person centred practitioners prioritise the provision of a particular kind of relationship rather than the use of specific skills or techniques. This requires that they seek to provide and maintain a non-judgmental and congruent attitude and to communicate empathic understanding. It is important that students appreciate that Rogers saw the 'core conditions' as enduring relational qualities, rather than as skills or tools.

  - Gestalt counsellors may employ techniques including conducting 'experiments' within sessions, role play and chair work

- Cognitive-Behavioural approach

  - Establishing a collaborative relationship

  - Case formulation

  - Using socratic questioning

  - Educating clients about CBT

  - Identifying and challenging irrational beliefs

  - Setting and managing homework

5) Differences between approaches in counselling

Learners need to appreciate that differences between approaches are a matter of where they place their predominant emphasis, not of adopting rigid and inflexible 'positions' to the detriment of the client. Over simplified notions such as "psychodynamic theory is all about the past, humanistic about the present and CBT about the future" should be avoided.

At this level, the differences between theoretical approaches are best considered in terms of fundamental assumptions about the origins of clients' problems and how counselling may help. Discussing differences in the kind of relationship established between client and counsellor can be helpful.

Psychodynamic	Humanistic	Cognitive–Behavioural
Unconscious conflicts, both constructive and destructive drives Importance of including the client's history Insight Relative anonymity of counsellor Transference as an opportunity	Conditions of worth v actualising tendency; Innate human tendency to develop full potential Main focus on here and now Self-actualisation Warmth, congruence and UPR Transference as an obstacle	Learned dysfunctional behaviour; Schemas and irrational thinking Main focus on present and identifying goals Problem-solving Collaborative work and teaching Transference as an obstacle

Summary of assessment

The following methods **must** be used in the delivery of this component:

- Externally set and marked written examination

Learning and teaching strategies

Lectures, demonstrations, group-work, visiting lectures, guided individual learning, audio and visual resources.

Resources/indicative texts

Recommended reading

- Pete Sanders - First Steps in Counselling: A Students' Companion for Introductory Courses (4th Edition): Publisher: PCCS (2011)
- Linda Mather - Introduction to counselling skills and theory – Publisher: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform (2014)
- Margaret Hough - Counselling Skills and Theory (4th Edition) – Publisher: Hodder (2014).

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Notes
It is expected that before the component is delivered, the tutor/assessor will have read the specification to ensure all conditions regarding rules of combination, delivery, assessment, and internal quality assurance are fulfilled.