

## Telephone Counselling Skills considerations (micro skills)

- **REMEMBER:** You already possess the necessary skills needed and you use these skills all of the time in your day-to-day work, whether it be in person on outreach or in your phone calls.
- **Things that you already do well:** remain calm, be flexible, fully attentive, be empathic, responsive and genuine
- If 70-80% of communication truly is non-verbal, in the absence of visual cues, the trick is to hone in the skills you already have to tune into your participant's voice
- Pay more attention to the nuances of their voice and their interaction with you
- Some skills to remember to facilitate the telephone counselling process:
- **Active listening:**
  - Show empathic, respectful and understanding use of language to clarify the nature and depth of participant feelings
  - Reflection of feeling, reflection of meaning
  - Paraphrasing and summarising
  - Open and closed questioning
  - Clarify, clarify, clarify
  - And perhaps most importantly for telephone counselling... manage your tone, pitch and pace of voice
- **Use of minimal encouragers:**
  - Minimal encouragers are small signals that show you are listening and understanding (words like uh-huh , yes , no , mmm) that show you are engaged in listening
  - Consider increasing your use of minimal encouragers beyond what you would normally use in face-to-face interactions to show that you are tracking the conversation (no one likes a silent listener)
- **Containment:**
  - One of the more important skills over the phone!
  - Consider containing the call by:
    - Setting an agreed appointment time for the call to occur ensuring you both have the capacity for the counselling call, as you would for face-to-face appointments
    - Setting a time limit for the call at the very beginning; be clear about how much time you have to offer (this applies to longer phone calls and brief ones too)
    - Setting an agenda for things to be discussed so that this can be referred to throughout the call if necessary to bring back and contain
    - Giving gentle time reminders throughout the call at halfway and towards the end (eg. 'we've got about 30/10 minutes left')
    - Sensitively manage a timely end to the call by facilitating transitions to ongoing self-care, follow-up actions or community support
  - Consider containing the:
    - Highly distressed/anxious caller by:

- Being patient
  - Offer appropriate reassurance
  - Deep breathing, grounding (particularly at end of call- refocusing on present, what they may be doing following the call)
- Angry caller by:
  - Focusing on the behaviour
  - Acknowledge the anger
  - Reassure that you are there to listen and support
  - Invite change
- **Empower:**
  - Empower participants to clarify options, seek other support and decide on next steps
  - Identify and affirm strengths and opportunities
  - Reframing
  - Setting realistic and achievable goals (for the call itself and for the participant and practitioner to address after the call)
  - Exploring options
- **REMEMBER:** You already possess the necessary skills needed and you use these skills all of the time in your day-to-day work, whether it be in person on outreach or in your phone calls. (Yes, I wrote this twice for emphasis).

## Environmental considerations (for phone and video)

- Discuss with your participant which medium feels right for them: phone or video chat
- Consider your surroundings for calls, including environmental noises and potential interruptions from “co-workers”:
  - Will this distract you or your participant?
  - What can you control for, and what can you not?
  - Can you give your participant a heads up of potential interruptions, if unavoidable? Be mindful of what you are willing to disclose
  - Ask your participant to consider the same – where are they taking the call? Are they alone and/or do they need to be? Will they feel comfortable talking openly with others present?
- Considerations for video chat:
  - Position your camera to ensure you only show what you are comfortable with showing; ie. What’s in the background? On the walls? Family photos, etc.
  - Optimise lighting
  - Consider positioning your chair on an angle to the camera so as not to sit directly square on with your camera/participant to be less confrontational, as you would in face-to-face
  - Test it out first! Call your co-workers, or “co-workers”, to see what the camera angles look like and experiment to find the best one
  - Business up top, party down below! Be mindful of your clothing (goes without saying really), including how lighting interacts with fabric (eg. Becoming unintentionally see-through)
- General tips:
  - Consider using headphones for privacy (share this with your participant)
  - Ensure your phone is in a stable position
  - Be plugged in, or have your phone charger handy, as longer video chats easily drain phone battery

## Structuring Brief Intervention Sessions (including reviewing, agenda setting)

- Working in a brief intervention capacity is no doubt very different to working in a longer term capacity as we have become accustomed to at Connexions. How you choose to structure single sessions or the series of 6-10 sessions will vary on a range of factors, including primarily what the participant hopes to gain from the sessions and your counselling style and experience. The following tips are by no means an exhaustive list of guidelines and suggestions. Remember to work collaboratively and use your counselling judgment and the relationship to guide you, and appropriately consult with your line manager in supervision.
- **Realistic goals:**
  - Hopefully throughout the Intake process we will be able to talk to young people about what they hope to gain from the Brief Intervention support
  - Goal setting will be crucial!
  - A recommendation would be to focus on 1-2 achievable goals across the 6 sessions; consider this as a fast-tracked case plan!
  - Consider goals that are S-M-A-R-T (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-based), including the hallmarks of knowing when they are achieving these goals
- **Agenda setting:**
  - In addition to goal setting, agenda setting should be considered at the beginning of each session to hold the individual session's focus/goals, as well as the broader focus/goals
  - As written above, agenda setting also facilitates any future required containment
  - For further suggestions on Agenda Setting have a look into Single Session Model work and Solution-Focussed Therapy
- **Reviewing:**
  - Don't forget to check-in regularly, as you normally would:
    - Are we talking about things that are important to you?
    - Are we addressing the goals you set out at the beginning of these sessions?
  - Similarly to giving gentle time reminders throughout the session, remember to give out session number reminders from time-to-time (eg. 'we've got 4 sessions remaining', 'this is our fourth session of six')
  - Consider throughout the process whether the participant may benefit from the additional 4 sessions, rather than wait until the sixth session
  - Discuss with your line manager the need for ongoing support as the Brief Intervention comes nearer to an end (including whether there is Connexions capacity to do so)
- **Modularised interventions:**
  - There are a couple Brief Interventions modularised interventions you could consider using as skills-based intervention:
    - *YouthAOD Toolbox* <https://www.youthaodtoolbox.org.au/>

- *Centre for Clinical Interventions*  
<https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/For-Clinicians>
- General tips for modularised interventions:
  - Brief Interventions with the highest evidence base are those which focus on **Problem Solving Skills** and **Behavioural Activation**
  - Use flexibly not rigidly, tailored to the participant's needs
  - Use to complement your own style of practice
  - Use in part-form or in its entirety, dependent on needs
  - Use together in session, or if the participant is confident and motivated enough to do so then consider giving material to the participant to look at in between sessions
  - Use in a single session or across several sessions
  - Again, be collaborative
  - Be creative and have fun

## **Self-care tips**

- Have a designated work space (and complete the Working From Home Checklist)
- Set boundaries between your work and home
- Create a meaningful routine and individual work plan
- Take time to move during the day
- Snack-attack and stay hydrated
- Use your headphones to free up your shoulders and move around
- Shake it off! Long phone calls can sometimes be taxing
- Stretch frequently (doing only what is comfortable for you and your body)
- Put break reminders in your calendar if needed and take a dedicated lunch break
- Set aside admin time
- Debrief and seek supervision