

PARAPHRASING

Paraphrasing occurs when the counselor states what the client has just said, using fewer words but without changing the meaning of what the client said. When utilizing this skill, you attempt to feed back the essence of what the person has just said. This skill is very helpful when you want to:

1. let the client know that you are listening and understand what they are saying,
2. clarify confusing content,
3. highlight issues by stating them more concisely, and
4. check out the accuracy of your perceptions as the counselor.

The following are some examples of accurate paraphrasing:

Client: "I don't know about her. One moment she's really friendly, and the next time I see her she's totally cold."

Counselor: "You haven't experienced her as being very consistent."

Client: "Every moment there is something new to do. There must be ten different things going on at the same time!"

Counselor: "There are a lot of activities for you to chose from."

Client: "He's really crummy. His degree is from a non-accredited school. He's had very little training, and he has a poor relationship with his wife."

Counselor: "You don't think he's very competent."

In these examples, paraphrasing looks pretty simple. It is actually more difficult than it appears. The reason is that the intention of paraphrasing is often to allow the client to continue speaking without interruption while communicating to the client that you are listening and that they are being understood. If the paraphrase is too long, the client will have to stop speaking in order to allow the counselor to finish. If the paraphrase is too short, it may not communicate enough of what was understood. If the paraphrase is inaccurate, it may lead to the response, "Huh?" Therefore, it is essential to practice paraphrases of different lengths, variations of content, or emphasis of the wording so that you are able to find what works best for the purpose you intend.

It is also important to recognize that an over reliance on paraphrasing to the exclusion of reflection often indicates a discomfort on the part of the counselor to encourage the client to be emotionally expressive.