

SUMMARIZATION

In a summarization, the counselor combines two or more of the client's thoughts, feelings or behaviors into a general theme. Summarization is usually used as a skill during choice points of a counseling interview in which the counselor wants to draw connections between two or more topics. Otherwise, when the client appears to be jumping from one topic to another without any particular focus or direction, a summarization can help the client to decide which topic is most important. Summarization is also used as a way to close a session.

For example:

Client: "I really feel guilty about marrying her in the first place. It wasn't really for love. It was just the convenient thing to do. I feel like I've messed up her life, and now I feel obligated to her. Starting a family and having children has always been important to me and at my age I feel like I should get started soon. I don't want to be in my seventies before my children graduate from high school. Everything in my life feels so unsettled right now. I just started this new job and it won't start paying good until I get a promotion. In order to get a promotion I know that I'll have to work overtime and travel frequently. I just don't think that I can handle all of these responsibilities at the same time.

Counselor: "There are a number of areas in your life which make you feel overwhelmed with responsibility. So far you've indicated that your dissatisfaction with your marriage, the pressure you feel to start a family, and your new job each contribute to the stress you feel. Each area is related to the others by the degree of responsibility you feel and your ability to cope with those responsibilities."

A summary integrates elements of what the person has been discussing and serves at least three major functions.

1. It may help crystallize in a more coherent and integrated manner what the person has been talking about, and thus helps the person put facts and feelings together.
2. It may serve as a stimulus for further exploration of a particular topic or area.
3. It frequently serves as a necessary perception check for you because it pulls together materials discussed over an extended period of time and allows the client the opportunity to clarify any misconceptions you have in your thinking about him or her.

Summarizations are frequently used when:

1. You wish to structure the beginning of a session by recalling the high points of a previous session.
2. The client's presentation of a topic has been either confusing or just plain lengthy and rambling.
3. A client seems to have expressed everything of importance to her or him on a particular topic, and summarizing provides closure so you can move on.
4. Plans for taking the next step in counseling require mutual assessment and agreement on what has been learned so far.