

CLARIFICATION

When using clarification, the counselor has the client clarify vague or ambiguous thoughts, feelings or behaviors by asking the client to restate what s/he has just said or by stating to the client what the counselor has understood the client to have said. Clarification, therefore, can be either a paraphrase of the client's most recent statement or a question to the client about the content of what has just been said. Clarification is differentiated from a probe by the fact that it is a request for the client to make more clear what has already been said, whereas a probe requests information that has not yet been stated. Clarification can be differentiated from a paraphrase by its purpose: to gain clarity about vague or ambiguous material, whereas a simple paraphrase intends to communicate to the speaker that the counselor is listening, has understood what has been just said, and involves an invitation to continue speaking without interruption.

For example:

Client: I've been calling her night after night, trying to get her to understand that it was just a misunderstanding. She didn't come over to get back together, she came over because she wanted to give me back the ring I had given her. The problem was that she didn't stay around long enough once she realized that she was there to find out what the situation was.

Counselor: I'm having difficulty keeping the she's and her's straight. Who have you been calling and who came over to give you back the ring?

Client: Oh. Sorry. Julia, my girlfriend is the one I have been calling to try and straighten things out with, and Tina is my ex-girlfriend who came over to return the ring.

OR

Client: When I went over to her house there was this guy there, but it wasn't like we had been seeing each other for very long, so I wasn't sure if it was my place to be making a big deal about it then, you know. But later, I think that we had established a commitment and felt like it was best if I confronted her about it.

Counselor: So, when you first realized that she was cheating on you it wasn't clear if you had a commitment, but a month later when she did it again you felt like a confrontation was in order.

Client: Exactly.

Clarification can be an important tool when clients are extremely emotional and may not be thinking clearly enough to present details in a coherent manner. It can also be useful when first meeting with a client and the counselor is collecting a detailed life history. Normally, clarification is intended to gain some understanding of specific facts and circumstances in which a detailed description is necessary.