

CONFRONTATION

When using confrontation, the counselor highlights incongruities between the client's verbal and nonverbal communication or within the client's verbal communication in order to facilitate the client's awareness of conflicts associated with specific issues of topics. This is considered an advanced skill because confrontation involves more of an intervention than a component of effective listening, and it is essential that its use be timed appropriately in order for the client to receive maximal benefit. Often times clients may have difficulty expressing certain emotions and may describe an emotion without the appropriate affect associated with it.

For example:

Client: (Smiling) It makes me so angry to even think about what he did to me.

Counselor: I can understand how angry that would make you feel. Were you aware of the fact that you were smiling when you stated how angry you were? I wonder if you can say that you're angry and express some of your anger when you do so?

Client: (Screaming) Ahhhhhh!!! It really makes me angry that he did that to me!!! (Laughing). Wow. That felt good!

Counselor: (Smiling) That's a start. Maybe in the future we can concentrate on doing that in the moment, when the feeling is immediately coming out.

Client: (Tearful) I'm not sure. I'm a little afraid. Anger scares me. It reminds me of when my father used to get angry when I was a little girl. . .

An important point to remember is the power of such therapeutic interventions. Often such responses may lead clients into material that is much more emotionally laden and difficult to express.

Timing is always important with respect to the development of a therapeutic trust, as well as the client's ability to handle advanced techniques with respect to his or her progress in counseling. Confrontation is not an effective tool in the initial stage of counseling when a therapeutic context does not exist in which the client can understand the meaning and purpose of the confrontation. It is also essential that the client is ready to deal with the specific material being confronted. For instance, if the client above had never been able to even say that she was angry in the past, a more appropriately timed response might be to acknowledge the fact that she had done so and praise her for her accomplishment. Confronting the discrepancy between the client's verbal and nonverbal expression of her anger can wait until later.

It is important to remember that confrontation should not be used for the sake of demonstrating your own clinical prowess or skill. Any intervention should be used with the client's goals for counseling and best interests in mind.