

SELF-DISCLOSURE

When using self-disclosure, the counselor briefly and appropriately discloses information about him/herself in a facilitative manner. The purpose of self-disclosure is to enhance the relationship between counselor and client. Self-disclosure can be made in response to a request by the client for information or may be offered voluntarily by the counselor. Self-disclosure is usually of a factual nature. For example:

Client: Can you tell me a little about your training and qualifications?

Counselor: Sure. I am a counselor-in-training working on my graduate degree in counseling psychology at this university. I have completed the first year of my degree and I am working in this clinic as a part of my advanced training in psychotherapy.

Client: How many clients have you seen before?

Counselor: Since I began working in the field three years ago as an undergraduate I have worked with close to one hundred people. However, during the course of my graduate training I have been supervised in counseling about eight people.

OR

Client: It feels really weird to be thinking about going into psychology as a profession when I feel so screwed-up inside. You know, every time I read something in my abnormal psychology text about this personality disorder or that one I just see myself in every single one. It's scary.

Counselor: You know that's a very common reaction. In fact, when I was a graduate student, I once went to see a therapist because I was convinced that I had not resolved my Oedipal complex. I had an enormous crush on one of my professors who was twenty-five years older than me. As it turned out, I ended up staying in therapy for the rest of my graduate career and it did me a lot of good. You don't have to be sick to be helped by a little therapy.

It is essential that the self-disclosure on the part of the counselor be appropriate to, the context of the professional nature of the relationship. As such, it must not take away from the client's own course of disclosure of personally relevant material, but should facilitate the client's focus on him/herself. It is not appropriate for a counselor to share personal material if there is no context for doing so within the relationship that presently exists with a client. Self-disclosure can be used to establish similarity between a counselor and a client. However, there are important implications for the type of similarity being established and its impact on the counseling process. If you are not familiar with the literature regarding the impact of establishing similarity with a client, it may be better to withhold similarity information until it can be established to be facilitative.