



Choices

**INTERVIEWING AND COUNSELLING SKILLS
FOR CANADIANS**

SEVENTH EDITION

BOB SHEBIB



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Seventh Canadian Edition

Choices

Interviewing and Counselling Skills for Canadians

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Dedication

*For my children and grandchildren,
Kevin, Jodie, Eli, and Audrey.*

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Brief Contents

Chapter 1	Professional Identity: Ethics, Values, and Self-Awareness	1
Chapter 2	The Skills, Process, and Pitfalls of Counselling	33
Chapter 3	Relationship: The Foundation for Change	66
Chapter 4	Listening & Responding: The Basis for Understanding	95
Chapter 5	Asking Questions: The Search for Meaning	126
Chapter 6	Empathic Connections	161
Chapter 7	Supporting Empowerment and Change	192
Chapter 8	Difficult Situations: Engaging with Hard-to-Reach Clients	235
Chapter 9	Mental Disorders and Substance Misuse	271
Chapter 10	Cultural Intelligence	310
Chapter 11	Neuroscience and Counselling	342

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Contents

Preface xiii

Acknowledgments xxiii

1 Professional Identity: Ethics, Values, and Self-Awareness 1

LEARNING OBJECTIVES 1

Professional Counsellors in Canada 1

Social Work and Social Justice 2

Ethics 3

Dual Relationships 5

Professional Boundaries 5

Confidentiality 6

Values for Professional Practice 8

Belief in the Dignity and Worth of People 8

Client Self-Determination 9

CONVERSATION 1.1 Gallows Humour 11

Rights of Children 11

Ethical Dilemmas 11

BRAIN BYTE Ethical and Moral Decision Making 11

Types of Ethical Dilemmas 12

Resolving Ethical Dilemmas 12

BRAIN BYTE Ethics and Neuroscience 13

Objectivity 15

CONVERSATION 1.2 Personal Feelings Get in the Way 16

CONVERSATION 1.3 Personal Involvement with Clients 18

The Competent Counsellor 18

CONVERSATION 1.4 I'm Just a Beginner 20

Self-Awareness 20

The Importance of Self-Awareness 20

Increasing Self-Awareness 21

Who Am I? How Do Others See Me? 22

Personal Needs 23

Personal and Cultural Values 25

Professional Survival 26

Summary 28

Exercises 29

Weblinks 32

2 The Skills, Process, and Pitfalls of Counselling 33

LEARNING OBJECTIVES 33

What Is Counselling? 33

BRAIN BYTE Counselling and the Brain 34

CONVERSATION 2.1 Counselling and Psychotherapy 35

Choices: The Need for Versatility 36

BRAIN BYTE Music 36

Brief Encounters 38

Trauma-Informed Practice 38

BRAIN BYTE Trauma 39

BRAIN BYTE Strengths-Based Counselling 40

Relationship Issues 40

Counselling Skills and Strategies 41

Relationship-Building Skills 43

Exploring and Probing Skills 45

Empowering Skills 46

Promoting Change Skills and Strategies 46

The Phases of Counselling 47

The Preliminary Phase 50

CONVERSATION 2.2 Helpful Friends and Counsellors 50

CONVERSATION 2.3 Should I Read the File? 53

The Beginning Phase 53

The Action Phase 56

The Ending Phase 57

Counselling Pitfalls: Barriers to Success 57

Client Variables 58

Counsellor Variables 58

Common Mistakes 59

CONVERSATION 2.4 Rescuing and Supporting 62

Summary 64

Exercises 64

Weblinks 65

3 Relationship: The Foundation for Change 66

LEARNING OBJECTIVES 66

The Counselling Relationship 66

BRAIN BYTE The Brain on Relationship 67

Definition 67

BRAIN BYTE Oxytocin 68

Relationship and the Phases of Counselling 68

Carl Rogers and the Core Conditions 69

CONVERSATION 3.1 Unconditional Positive Regard 71

Core Conditions: Implications for Counsellors 72

CONVERSATION 3.2 Genuineness 73

Counselling Contracts 73

Purpose of Contracting 73

Relationship Contracts 74

Anticipatory Contracts 76

Work Contracts 77

INTERVIEW 3.1 Contracting 79

Engaging with Seniors 81

Sustaining the Counselling Relationship 82

Immediacy 82

Transference and Countertransference 84

INTERVIEW 3.2 Immediacy 84

BRAIN BYTE Transference	86
BRAIN BYTE Childhood Abuse and Intimate Relationships	87
CONVERSATION 3.3 Counsellor Self-Disclosure	87
Ending the Counselling Relationship	88
BRAIN BYTE Endings	89
Dealing with Endings	90
INTERVIEW 3.3 Endings	91
Summary	92
Exercises	92
Weblinks	94

4 Listening & Responding: The Basis for Understanding 95

LEARNING OBJECTIVES 95

Listening for Understanding 95

The Power of Listening 96

Listening Barriers 97

BRAIN BYTE Listening 97

Overcoming Listening Barriers 98

BRAIN BYTE The Auditory Alarm System 98

BRAIN BYTE The Right Ear Advantage 100

Active Listening 102

Attending 103

Selective Attention 104

BRAIN BYTE Multitasking 105

Nonverbal Communication 106

Meaning of Nonverbal Communication 107

CONVERSATION 4.1 Problems with Listening and Responding 107

BRAIN BYTE Nonverbal Processing 109

Working with Nonverbal Communication 110

Metacommunication 111

Silence 111

The Personal Meaning of Silence 111

Silence in Counselling 112

BRAIN BYTE Silence 112

Nonverbal Cues and Silence 116

Encouraging Silence 116

CONVERSATION 4.2 Learning to Deal with Silence 116

Paraphrasing 117

Paraphrasing and Empathy 119

Summarizing 119

CONVERSATION 4.3 Effective Paraphrasing 119

INTERVIEW 4.1 Listening, Silence, and Summarizing Skills 122

Summary 123

Exercises 124

Weblinks 125

5 Asking Questions: The Search for Meaning 126

LEARNING OBJECTIVES 126

The Art of Asking Questions 126

Questions Support Counselling

Goals 126

Types of Questions 127

BRAIN BYTE Memory 127

Essential Questions: Some Options 130

Questions for Establishing Purpose 131

Questions to Define the Counselling

Relationship 131

Questions for Exploring and

Understanding 131

Questions for Problem Solving 133

Questions for Evaluating 134

BRAIN BYTE The Impact of Questions 135

Questioning Pitfalls 135

Leading (Biased) Questions 135

Excessive Questioning 136

CONVERSATION 5.1 Alternatives to Questions 137

Multiple Questions 138

Irrelevant and Poorly Timed Questions 139

Why Questions 140

Tailoring the Interview to the Client 140

When Clients Do Not Answer

Questions 140

Managing the Rambling Interview 142

Interviewing Youth 143

BRAIN BYTE The Adolescent Brain 143

Interviewing and Counselling Seniors 145

Senior Abuse 145

Cross-Cultural Interviewing 147

Beyond the Surface: Interviewing for Concreteness 147

The Need for Concreteness 147

BRAIN BYTE Neural Development and

Marginalization 147

Strategies for Achieving Concreteness 150

Making Choices 152

Interview Transitions 153

Natural Transitions 153

Strategic Transitions 154

Control Transitions 154

Phase Transitions 155

CONVERSATION 5.2 Note-Taking 156

Connect (Linking) Transitions 156

INTERVIEW 5.1 Interviewing Skills 156

Summary 158

Exercises 158

Weblinks 160

6	Empathic Connections	161
	LEARNING OBJECTIVES	161
	The Emotional Domain	161
	BRAIN BYTE Emotional Memories	162
	BRAIN BYTE Mirror Neurons	163
	The Language of Emotions	164
	Individual Differences and Cultural Context	166
	Ambivalence	166
	Affect	168
	Empathy	168
	Empathy Defined	169
	The Importance of Empathy	169
	BRAIN BYTE Location of Empathy	171
	BRAIN BYTE Selective Empathy	171
	Client Reactions to Empathy	172
	CONVERSATION 6.1 Increasing Empathic Vocabulary	173
	Types of Empathy	173
	Invitational Empathy	174
	Basic Empathy	175
	Inferred Empathy	176
	Preparatory Empathy	177
	CONVERSATION 6.2 When Not to Use Empathy	178
	Four Generalizations about Empathy	179
	Empathic Response Leads	181
	Why Achieving Empathic Understanding Is So Difficult	181
	Poor Substitutes for Empathy	182
	INTERVIEW 6.1 Poor Substitutes for Empathy	183
	Tough Empathy	184
	CONVERSATION 6.3 How Can I Be Empathic If I Have Not Had the Same Experience?	185
	INTERVIEW 6.2 Effective Use of Empathy	186
	Summary	187
	Exercises	188
	Weblinks	191
7	Supporting Empowerment and Change	192
	LEARNING OBJECTIVES	192
	Empowerment: Mobilizing Strengths for Change	192
	How Counselling Promotes Empowerment	193
	Anti-Oppressive Practice	194
	The Strengths Approach	194
	BRAIN BYTE Stress and Crisis	196
	Empowerment and Seniors	197
	Crisis Intervention and Empowerment	197
	Motivational Interviewing (MI)	199
	Empathy	201
	Developing Discrepancy	201
	"Rolling with Resistance"	202
	Support Self-Efficacy	203
	Stages of Change	203
	Risk Taking	203
	CONVERSATION 7.1 Working with "Lazy" Clients	203
	Cognitive Behavioural Counselling	207
	Helping Clients Recognize Thinking Patterns	209
	Unhelpful Thinking Patterns	210
	BRAIN BYTE The Emotional Brain	210
	Perfectionism	211
	Helping Clients Increase Helpful Thinking	212
	Reframing	214
	BRAIN BYTE Mindfulness	215
	BRAIN BYTE Creating New Neural Pathways	215
	BRAIN BYTE Cognitive Behavioural Counselling	217
	INTERVIEW 7.1 Cognitive Behavioural Techniques	217
	CONVERSATION 7.2 When Buttons are Pushed	219
	Helping Clients Make Behavioural Changes	219
	Goal Setting	219
	Developing Effective Goal Statements	220
	INTERVIEW 7.2 Goal Setting	223
	The Problem-Solving Process	225
	Step 1: Identify Alternatives	225
	Step 2: Choose an Action Strategy	225
	Step 3: Develop and Implement Plans	226
	Step 4: Evaluate Outcomes	227
	CONVERSATION 7.3 I've Tried Everything	228
	Brief Counselling	228
	Selected Brief Counselling Techniques	228
	Summary	233
	Exercises	233
	Weblinks	234
8	Difficult Situations: Engaging with Hard-to-Reach Clients	235
	LEARNING OBJECTIVES	235
	Resistance	235
	Signs of Resistance	236
	Understanding and Responding to Resistance	237
	BRAIN BYTE Resistance	241
	Resistance and Counsellor Self-Awareness	241
	CONVERSATION 8.1 Working with "Involuntary" Clients	242
	INTERVIEW 8.1 Dealing with Resistance	243
	Confrontation: Proceed with Caution	244
	CONVERSATION 8.2 Saying No	245
	Types of Confrontation	245
	The Misuse of Confrontation	246
	Principles for Effective Confrontation	247

Aggression and Violence 249

- Risk Assessment for Violence 251
- Violence and Mental Illness 253

BRAIN BYTE Head Trauma and Violence 254

- Violence Risk Assessment: Key Questions 254
- Managing Angry and Potentially Violent Behaviour 255

BRAIN BYTE Aggression 255

BRAIN BYTE Flight or Fight 256

- The Phases of Violence 257
- Critical Incident Debriefing 263

INTERVIEW 8.2 Violent Incident Follow-up 264

CONVERSATION 8.3 How to Handle an Assault 265

Counselling Angry and Violent Clients 266

- Prevention 266
- Assertiveness Training 266
- Cognitive Behavioural Counselling (Therapy) 267
- Anger Management 267
- Substance Misuse Interventions 267
- Psychiatric Intervention 267
- Reduction of Stressors 267
- Counselling Victims 267

BRAIN BYTE Children and Abuse 268

- Summary 269
- Exercises 269
- Weblinks 270

9 Mental Disorders and Substance Misuse 271

LEARNING OBJECTIVES 271

Mental Health in Canada 272

- Mental Health Assessment 272
- The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) 274
- Major Mental Disorders 277

CONVERSATION 9.1 Paranoia 281

BRAIN BYTE Neurotransmitters and Mental Illness 282

CONVERSATION 9.2 How to Respond to Hallucinations 283

BRAIN BYTE Depression 284

BRAIN BYTE Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) 289

- Child and Youth Mental Health 289

BRAIN BYTE Adolescent Marijuana Use 289

BRAIN BYTE Adolescent Drug Use 291

- Counselling and Working with People Who Have Mental Disorders 291

BRAIN BYTE Psychotropic Medication 293

CONVERSATION 9.3 When Clients Don't Take Their Medication 294

Substance Use Disorders 295

- Withdrawal from Drugs: Detoxification 296
- Substance Use Disorders and the DSM 298
- Brain Plasticity and Addiction 298
- Supporting Recovery from Addiction 299

BRAIN BYTE Pleasure Pathway 299

- Co-occurring Disorders 301

Suicide Counselling 302

- Warning Signs and Risk Assessment 302
- Summary 307
- Exercises 307
- Weblinks 309

10 Cultural Intelligence 310

LEARNING OBJECTIVES 310

Cultural Intelligence and Diversity: Working with Competence 310

- The Importance of Multicultural Involvement 312

The Canadian Context: Culture and Diversity 312

BRAIN BYTE Cultural Neuroscience 313

- Canadian Immigration 315
- Problems Faced by Immigrants and Refugees 316
- Sociopolitical Realities 318

Key Elements of Cultural Understanding 319

- Worldview 319
- Personal Priorities, Values, and Beliefs 321
- Identity: Individualism versus Collectivism 321
- BRAIN BYTE Culture and the Pleasure Centre 321
- BRAIN BYTE Individualism and Collectivism 323
- Verbal and Emotional Expressiveness 324
- Communication Style 325
- Language 325
- Relationship Expectations 326
- Beliefs about How People Should Act 327
- Time Orientation 327

Counselling Immigrants and Multicultural Clients 328

- Barriers to Culturally Intelligent Practice 328
- Controlling the Tendency to Stereotype 329
- Respecting Diversity and Individual Differences 330
- Learning from Clients 330
- Counselling Seniors 332
- The Importance of Counsellor Self-Awareness 332

Indigenous Clients 333

- Indigenous Values and Worldviews 333
- Working with Indigenous People 335
- Traditional Healing Practices 336

Spirituality and Counselling 336

CONVERSATION 10.1 Praying with Clients 339

- Summary 339
- Exercises 340
- Weblinks 341

11 Neuroscience and Counselling	342
LEARNING OBJECTIVES	342
The Remarkable and Mysterious Brain	342
BRAIN BYTE The Non-stop Brain	344
BRAIN BYTE The Amazing Brain	344
Neuroscience: An Emerging Force in Counselling	344
CONVERSATION 11.1 Mind and Brain	344
Six Key Forces in Counselling	345
Why Neuroscience is Important for Counsellors	346
Neuroscience Endorses Counselling	346
Studying the Brain	351
Brain Imaging	351
BRAIN BYTE Types of Depression	353
Neuroplasticity: An Empowering Discovery	353
How to Stimulate Neuroplasticity	354
Structure of the Brain	355
INTERVIEW 11.1 Helping Clients Harness Neuroplasticity	356
Hemispheres	358
BRAIN BYTE Right Brain/Left Brain	359
Brain Lobes	359
BRAIN BYTE White and Grey Matter	359
BRAIN BYTE Broca's and Wernicke's Areas	361
Brain Lobes and Counselling	361
The Limbic System	362
CONVERSATION 11.2 Male and Female Brains	363
BRAIN BYTE Psychopathic Brains	364
Cranial Nerves	365
The Endocrine System	365
BRAIN BYTE Endocrine System versus Nervous System	365
Neurons: The Brain's Information System	366
Major Neurotransmitters	370
BRAIN BYTE Endorphins	370
BRAIN BYTE Dopamine	371
Mirror Neurons	373
Glial Cells	374
Reward Pathway	374
Brain Problems	375
Mental Disorders	375
Meningitis	375
Encephalitis	375
Brain Tumours	376
Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease)	376
Cerebral palsy	376
Epilepsy	376
Huntington's disease	376
Multiple sclerosis (MS)	376
Parkinson's disease	377
Tourette syndrome	377
Dementia	377
BRAIN BYTE Sundowning	378
BRAIN BYTE Is it Normal or Dementia?	379
CONVERSATION 11.3 Counselling People with Dementia	380
Stroke	380
Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Acquired Brain Injuries (ABI)	382
Summary	383
Exercises	384
Weblinks	384
<i>Glossary</i>	385
<i>References</i>	392
<i>Tables, Figures, Conversations, Interviews, and Brain Bytes Index</i>	408
<i>Author Index</i>	410
<i>Subject Index</i>	414

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Preface



*“There is a crack in everything,
that’s how the light gets in”*

Leonard Cohen (1968)

Cohen’s iconic words are a message of hope reminding us that hardship, setbacks, and obstacles are opportunities for growth, change, and learning. His poetic insight inspires us to believe that we need not fear our imperfections because resilience and empowerment can grow from obstacles and hardships.

“Cracks” in *Choices* have enabled the evolution of seven editions and left me with the inescapable conclusion that it will forever remain a work in progress. In each new edition, user feedback, emergent research, and practice experience have helped me to re-examine my beliefs, discard outmoded ideas, and replace them with fresh perspectives.

The seventh edition of *Choices* maintains its basic format and its objective as an introductory textbook for students in counselling training programs and a practice reference for professionals in social work, criminology, nursing, child and youth care, addictions, psychology as well as professionals and volunteers in other professions whose work involves interviewing and counselling. A continuing best-seller in Canada, *Choices* combines theory, practice examples with sample interviews, and challenging self-awareness exercises in a comprehensive, yet readable format. It is aimed at professionals aspiring to gain a wide range of skills based on supported theory and evidence-based best practices. Although framed in the Canadian ethical and cultural context, the content of the book is designed to appeal to a broad international audience of professionals.

This book aims to contribute to the development of professional competence in five ways:

1. Introducing basic concepts and models to help learners understand the theory and philosophy of effective counselling intervention skills.
2. Providing realistic examples to illustrate concepts in action.
3. Offering challenging exercises that promote skill development, conceptual understanding, and self-awareness.
4. Promoting the importance of a range of skill choices for interviewing, rather than rules and recipes.
5. Presenting connections to relevant neuroscience research.

In the seventh edition of *Choices*, all chapters have been rewritten to improve clarity and include current research, with updated references and weblinks. This edition continues my commitment to producing a readable and practical text. As much as possible, I have avoided the use of unnecessary jargon, and I have tried to be transparent and explicit regarding my assumptions, a practice that parallels my approach to counselling.

Significant changes and enhancements to the seventh edition include:

- A new Chapter 11 exploring neuroscience and counselling
- Significant new content in many chapters related to understanding and working with seniors
- Updated references and content in all chapters
- New and/or updated success tips
- New and/or revised conversations, BRAIN BYTES, and sample interviews including the addition of a “reflections” section
- New material on counsellor burnout, vicarious trauma, and wellness
- Additional content on substance misuse including drug withdrawal, detox, and the opioid crisis
- Content related to understanding and working with paranoia
- Reconfigured Chapter 10: Cultural Intelligence

THEORY AND PHILOSOPHY

Choices promotes an eclectic approach that encourages counsellors to draw techniques and ideas from various theoretical models depending on the specific needs of the client and situation, not the comfort level of the counsellor. Counselling is a complex blend of skill, attitude, and creativity, with the work based on best-practice techniques that are supported by research. Core skills can be learned and practised, but they are not recipes. Based on individual client need and context, high-level professionals create, adapt, and customize skills and strategies, thus avoiding any “one-size-fits-all” approach. Among the models that have heavily influenced this book’s content are the following:

- Person-centred counselling, pioneered by Carl Rogers
- Trauma-informed practice
- Cognitive behavioural therapy/counselling (CBT)
- Motivational interviewing
- Short-term and solution-focused counselling
- Emergent insights from neuroscience

The term “cognitive reserve” describes the brain’s capacity to creatively find ways to cope with life’s challenges. Social workers and other counsellors who have high level of cognitive reserve can “switch gears” when one way of solving a problem does not work. Put simply, they have choices and they are not discouraged or defeated when one approach to working with clients fails. They can vary their approach to meet the unique needs of different clients, cultures, and situations. Over a lifetime of a professional career, through reflection, education and practice experience that builds on success and learns from failure, they can grow their counselling skills and cognitive reserve.

Every interview requires an intelligent choice of skills and strategies. To make wise choices, counsellors need to develop a wide range of practice skills based on supported theory (science) and proven practice (evidence-based best practice). When counsellors have a repertoire of skills, they can make knowledgeable choices based on the unique needs of clients and situations, rather than their own personal comfort levels or established routines. In simplest terms, the more choices counsellors have, the greater their ability to match their work to the needs and wants of their clients, and the less their need to repeatedly use the same skill. Effective counsellors are wise enough to know when to—and when not to—use particular skills. Similarly, the goal of

counselling is to help clients achieve versatility in their capacity to solve problems and achieve goals.

Skill and technique can be impressive, but alone they are insufficient. Compassion, caring, empathy, an ability to suspend judgment, objectivity, professionalism, self-awareness, and sufficient psychological health are some of the personal qualities and commitments that must operate in tandem with knowledge and skill. Counsellors need to be genuine, maintain warm and caring regard for their clients, and recognize the inherent worth of people. Kadushin (1990) discusses the important mix of skill and feeling:

Many might say that if they had to choose between feeling and technique they would choose feeling as the more important prerequisite. Perhaps so, but if one has to make a choice between these qualifications, an injustice has already been done to the client. It should be possible to offer the client an interviewer who is both attitudinally correct and technically proficient. (p. xii)

Respect for Diversity and Culture

Diversity includes differences in such major variables as race, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, physical and mental ability, economic capacity, language, culture, values, beliefs, preferences, and ways of thinking and behaving. The diversity of today's counselling caseloads requires that counsellors develop a range of interviewing and counselling skills. Competent counsellors are able to vary their style depending on the unique culture and worldviews of their clients.

Choices emphasizes cultural competence. Since everyone is unique, each with his or her own mix of values and beliefs, culture is a variable for work with all clients. When working with clients from visible minorities and those who are marginalized by poverty or discrimination, counsellors must examine the sociopolitical realities that frame the clients' circumstances. They also need to develop sufficient self-awareness to escape or manage any tendency to be culture-bound—the assumption that all clients share their values, perspectives, and ambitions or, worse still, that client differences represent deficiencies. By sustaining a multicultural perspective that recognizes and prizes diversity, counsellors can avoid the pitfalls of ethnocentrism (the belief that one's own views and culture are superior). Culturally competent counsellors view cultural differences as opportunities to widen their horizons and deepen their versatility. They remember to be humble enough to learn from their clients.

Phases of Counselling

This book divides the counselling relationship into four phases: preliminary, beginning, action, and ending. Each phase involves common as well as unique tasks and skills. For example, the beginning phase focuses on relationship development and problem exploration. Predictably, skills for developing relationships, like active listening, are most useful in the beginning phase, whereas skills such as confrontation are not recommended. But the subsequent action phase focuses on helping clients develop new perspectives, set goals, and implement change strategies; thus, skills such as reframing and confronting are used extensively in this phase.

The four phases are developmental, with success at one phase dependent in part on success at previous phases. For example, clients are more willing to accept confrontation in the action phase if a solid relationship or trust has already been established in the beginning phase. In general, reference to the four-phase model allows counsellors to make some predictions about the climate of the interview and to determine which

skills and tasks will be needed. However, practitioners must be cautious in applying the model too rigorously to every counselling interview because there are always circumstances for which the sequence of events will differ sharply from the model.

Values and Ethics

Ethics are principles of acceptable conduct. Professional associations such as the Canadian Association of Social Workers and the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association have formal statements that define ethics and standards of practice for their members. Similarly, *values* are ideas and principles that individuals and groups consider important or worthwhile. In counselling, certain core values are of particular importance:

1. Belief in the dignity and worth of people
2. Respect for the client's right to self-determination (i.e., for freedom of choice and the right to control one's own life)
3. Commitment to work for social justice

The Counselling Relationship

All editions, including this one, have prioritized the importance of the client/counselor relationship as a major determinant of success. The counselling relationship is something very special. It's negotiated. It's non-reciprocal. It has a purpose. It is designed to recognize and mobilize strengths. It requires counsellors to abandon their biases and suspend any tendency to give advice in order to listen and respond in a manner that creates the conditions for trust, growth, and change.

Counselling should empower clients and strengthen their self-esteem. It has very little to do with giving "good advice," but it might involve providing information and assisting clients to evaluate alternatives in order to support them to make informed and self-determined choices. Best-practice counselling draws on the expertise of clients to participate in decisions related to the goals and process of counselling. For this reason, counsellors should demystify their work through open discussion of their methodologies, assumptions, and intentions. Moreover, commitment to client self-determination restrains counsellors from abuse of power or control. In promoting client self-determination, counsellors use a strengths approach that empowers clients by assuming their capacity to cope and change.

The counselling relationship creates the conditions for change to occur and the motivation for change to proceed. The counselling relationship nurtures the natural need that everyone has to grow and change. **The cornerstone of this is empathy, a unique and powerful way of listening that alone is sufficient to help many people.** It is not a technique that we activate when counselling, but rather an empathic approach to life that Roger's describes as a "way of being."

Counsellor Self-Awareness

Effective counsellors are self-aware, open to feedback, and willing to learn. As counsellors become deeply involved in a relationship with their clients, they need to control their own biases, and constantly monitor their feelings and thoughts so that they are able to separate their experiences and feelings from those of their clients.

Knowledge of self, including consciousness of one's values and beliefs and the impact of one's behaviour on others, is a prerequisite for effective counselling. Counsellors who lack self-awareness may confuse their clients' feelings with their own. When counsellors are unaware of their own needs, including those that are unmet,

they risk unconsciously using their counselling relationships to meet personal goals instead of client goals. In addition, without self-awareness, counsellors will be ignorant of those areas of practice in which they are competent and those in which it will be difficult for them to work with objectivity.

Competent professionals know themselves, and they ensure that their values and beliefs do not become a burden to their clients. They accept that exploring and reflecting on one's competence and the limits of one's role and expertise are fundamental to professional practice. For counsellors, this process of self-examination continues throughout their careers.

Neuroscience and Counselling

In recent years, neuroscience has emerged as an important new force in counselling. Since the 1990s new technologies have spawned an explosive interest in the brain. These imaging technologies have resulted in enormous progress in our understanding of the brain. One of the most relevant and exciting findings is the discovery that our brains are “plastic” and in a constant state of change. Life experience, adversity, trauma, risk taking, and learning shape and reshape the brain in ways that help us cope with the challenges in our lives. Or, alternatively, they may drive us to depression, anxiety, and substance abuse.

A growing body of neuroscience research has confirmed the validity of counselling by demonstrating in dramatic ways how counselling changes the brain. Counselling works! Now, we have the science to prove it. We have learned how counselling basics such as listening, empathy, asking questions, and the establishment of relationship counselling harness brain plasticity and promote positive brain growth. It's already exciting, even though we are still at the beginning stages of what is certain to be an avalanche of profound developments in coming years. Neuroscience is providing answers to the question, “How can counselling help create conditions that promote positive, empowering brain growth or repair?” As a result, I think that in the near future college and university counselling programs will require courses on the brain and neuroscience.

Social Justice and Advocacy

Although the topic is beyond the scope of this text, counsellors should also consider their responsibility to extend beyond their role as counsellors to social and political action. As advocates for social justice, they should strive to reduce gender, cultural, and other forms of discrimination. They should also promote changes in social policy as well as modification in the functioning of formal organizations and institutions to meet the needs of clients.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The book is divided into 11 chapters.

Chapter 1 explores professional identity and introduces readers to the basic concepts of ethics, values, and self-awareness.

Chapter 2 explores the basic nature of counselling skills and strategies. In this chapter, four major skill clusters are introduced: relationship building, exploring/probing, empowering, and challenging. The four-phase model of counselling (preliminary, beginning, action, and ending) is proposed as a model for understanding the evolution of the counselling relationship. As well, the important components of a trauma-informed approach are introduced and discussed.

Chapter 3 examines the helping relationship and considers the core conditions of effective counselling. Sessional and relationship contracting are featured in this chapter.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 explore the active listening skills of attending, silence, paraphrasing, and summarizing (Chapter 4), questioning (Chapter 5), and empathy (Chapter 6). Specific ideas for interviewing and working with youth are discussed in these chapters.

Chapter 7 is concerned with action-phase skills that motivate clients to think differently and make changes in their lives. Two important theoretical models, cognitive behavioural counselling and motivational interviewing, are featured.

Chapter 8 presents information on working in difficult situations, such as when clients are resistant or potentially violent.

Chapter 9 looks at concepts for working with various populations, including those who are dealing with mental disorders, contemplating suicide, or who have addictions.

Chapter 10 explores important concepts and issues related to counselling clients from different cultures. This chapter includes a discussion of spirituality and counselling, reflecting a growing interest in and acceptance of spiritual issues in counselling. In this chapter, multicultural competencies for Canadian counsellors are introduced.

Chapter 11, new to this edition, explores issues related to neuroscience and counselling including a discussion of brain problems.

Features

People learn in different ways, so this book includes a range of features designed to assist learners in understanding at the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural levels. Each chapter contains the following elements:

- **Learning Objectives:** key concepts that will be addressed in the chapter
- **Summary:** a short review at the end of each chapter that summarizes important ideas
- **Conversations:** a unique feature presenting teacher–student dialogues about frequently asked questions
- **Sample Interviews:** annotated interview excerpts that illustrate and explain chapter concepts
- **Success Tips:** short, practical ideas for counselling success
- **Illustrative Figures:** diagrams that support or embellish chapter concepts
- **Brain Bytes:** short links to interesting and relevant neuroscience
- **Exercises:** end-of-chapter reflective questions to give readers practice developing self-awareness, practice skills, and conceptual knowledge
- **Weblinks:** links to websites related to the chapter’s material
- **Glossary:** definitions of key terms

SUGGESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

If you are studying this book as part of a course on counselling skills, you will probably have the opportunity to develop skill competence in a number of different ways:

- Watching instructor demonstrations
- Conducting practice interviews using role-played or (preferably) real-life scenarios
- Completing the chapter exercises

- Receiving feedback and evaluation from instructors and student colleagues who observe your work
- Using audio and video recordings to understand and assess your verbal and non-verbal responses
- Working with clients in practicum field settings

In most counselling skills courses, learning groups are used to practise skills. Usually, these learning groups use classroom simulations and practice interviews in which you assume the roles of client, counsellor, and observer. Each of these roles offers unique challenges and opportunities for learning.

Practice Interviewing: When You Are the Client

The client's role offers a powerful opportunity for you to understand client feelings and expectations. You may find that your reactions are similar to those that clients you will work with in the field experience:

- Ambivalence about sharing feelings or details about personal issues
- Feelings of vulnerability and fear of being judged, embarrassed, or ridiculed

As a client, it will be up to you to control how much you wish to disclose; however, by taking reasonable risks, you can enhance your learning opportunities and insights. However, you should remember that a training environment does not provide the time or setting to address complex problems.

Practice Interviewing: When You Are the Counsellor

When you are asked to practise your newly learned skills as a counsellor, you may feel clumsy and insecure as you take risks to change established communication patterns or experiment with new skills and strategies. As a student with limited training, you may be reluctant to ask questions that seem to invade the privacy of your colleagues. Moreover, when dealing with sensitive issues you may fear that your lack of experience will damage your clients. You may also fear that your colleagues will judge you as inept. As well, when you are being observed by others, the intense focus on your work can be unsettling and anxiety-provoking. But all these reactions are common, and you will probably find that your colleagues feel the same way. Most professional counsellors take many years of practice and study to become competent and comfortable using a full range of skills. What is important is that you persist and avoid the natural temptation to stick with familiar patterns of communicating. Skills that are awkward in the beginning will, with practice, become part of your natural and preferred style.

SUCCESS TIP

If you create the right conditions, others will help you with feedback that will support the development of your skills and self-awareness.

Practice Interviewing: When You Are the Observer

Student observers are responsible for watching the interview and providing feedback to student colleagues who are practising their counselling skills. At first, you may be reluctant to offer feedback, perhaps worrying that your remarks will generate anger or

hurt feelings. But keep in mind that the observer's role gives you an excellent opportunity to develop the skill of giving feedback and practise this skill.

Helpful feedback is energizing and does not detract from another person's self-esteem. As people learn and practise interviewing and counselling skills, they may feel vulnerable and awkward. Hence, it is important to remain sensitive to their emotional and psychological needs, while balancing their needs for information and correction.

Observer feedback may be of two types: supportive or corrective.

- **Supportive feedback** recognizes strengths. Consider how you respond differently when your strengths are acknowledged rather than when your weaknesses are targeted. Yet despite how obvious this idea seems, many students and professional counsellors are very problem-oriented and fail to acknowledge client or colleague strengths. Supportive feedback must be genuine (true) and delivered without rescuing or patronizing. If you lie to others to avoid hurting them, your credibility as a source of feedback will diminish.
- **Corrective feedback** challenges others to examine or change behaviour. But before giving corrective feedback, consider your relationship with the other person. If your relationship is based on trust and caring, corrective feedback has the potential to be effective. However, if your relationship has unresolved conflict, corrective feedback is more likely to be perceived as an attack. If people think your feedback is harsh, demanding, or controlling, there is a higher probability that they will resist. Here are some general feedback guidelines:
 - Be specific. Avoid generalities such as, "Your interview was great." Anchor your assessment by identifying the specific behaviours and responses that you observed that contributed to the success of the interview.
 - Don't use corrective feedback as a means to control, impress, or punish. Pay attention to your tone of voice and other nonverbal behaviour. Make sure that you avoid lecturing and pointing fingers.
 - Timing and pacing are important variables. Supportive feedback is more useful when self-esteem is low. In addition, feedback is most effective when given as soon as possible, but ensure that you protect personal privacy.
 - Avoid overwhelming student counsellors by providing too much feedback. Watch for nonverbal cues or ask them to let you know when they would like to stop the process.
 - Ask people to self-evaluate before offering your opinions. You may be surprised to find that they already have insight into the problem areas; thereby reducing the number of areas in which you have to provide direct feedback.
 - Feedback has the most potential for success if it is invited or targeted to perceived areas of need. Contract with others to deliver feedback. Ask questions such as "Would you like me to offer my ideas on what happened?" or "Are there specific issues that you're concerned about?"
 - Everyone is different. Some people prefer feedback to be direct and to the point. Others may prefer it "sandwiched" between positives. Others need time to reflect before responding, or they may profit from visual and written illustrations. Discuss preferences with student counsellors, then respond accordingly.

Some people have an immediate reaction to feedback that will differ from their reaction once they have had time to ponder what you have said. For example, a person who responds defensively or even with anger may, on reflection, come to accept your input and see things differently. The opposite can also be true—people who react favourably may later develop other feelings, such as resentment or confusion. Checking back during future encounters is one strategy for keeping abreast of others' reactions.

Remember that giving helpful and caring feedback is one way of developing and strengthening relationships. If you are honest and supportive with others, you greatly increase the probability they will be honest and supportive with you when you ask for their helpful feedback.

Developing an Effective Learning Group

When you work with student colleagues in each of the three roles, discuss your fears as well as your expectations of one another. You will need to work to develop a contract or agreement on how you will work together. Practice interviews are powerful learning opportunities when they are based on real rather than role-played feelings and issues. Consequently, it will be important to establish a climate of safety, where confidentiality will be respected. Some important principles to remember:

- Colleagues who are in the client's role are disclosing personal issues and feelings, so it is essential to respect their dignity and right to privacy.
- Everyone has different capacities for intimacy. Do not expect that all members of a learning group will disclose at the same level. Accept individual differences.
- Learning the skills of counselling requires a willingness to give up familiar patterns of communication and attempt new approaches. Expand your limits by taking appropriate risks to try new skills and be tolerant of colleagues who are engaged in similar risk-taking.
- Feedback from others is an important part of learning. Therefore, try to make it easy for others to give you feedback by consistently responding nondefensively. Help others give specific feedback by asking targeted questions.

SUCCESS TIP

Expect that the process of learning and experimenting with new skills will result in a period of awkwardness and self-consciousness. For a time, it may seem as though your capacity to counsel others is regressing.

Keeping a Personal Journal

A personal “for your eyes only” journal can be a significant adjunct to your learning. The journal is a tool for introspection that provides a private means for documenting and exploring your thoughts and feelings related to the development of your counselling skills. There are no rules for journal writing other than the need to make entries on a regular basis and to try to avoid self-censorship.

Using This Book

If you are using this book as part of a course on counselling, your instructor will propose a suggested reading schedule that structures your reading over the semester, and he or she will assign or adapt the chapter exercises to fit your learning needs. Another way to use the book is on an “as you need it” basis, using the index or chapter headings to locate specific content. As well, you are encouraged to use other books, journals, and tools, such as Internet research, to supplement your learning. However, you should read this book (or any book) critically and seek to understand and explore the ideas and try them out.

Counselling Skills as a Way of Life

You may be surprised to discover that the skills of counselling are also the skills of effective everyday communication, and that the process of developing your counselling competence may begin to influence your personal relationships. As counselling skills become part of your style, you may find yourself becoming a little more inquisitive and more sensitive to the feelings of others. However, you may find that others in your life do not welcome the changes in your manner and style. When you change, others around you have to accommodate your changes. If you become more probing in your questions, they must be forthcoming with their answers. When you become more empathic, their feelings become more transparent. These changes move the relationship to a deeper level of intimacy, which may be frightening for some, particularly if the pace is too fast for their comfort level.

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Customized workshops and staff training based on this book are available. Contact the author at shebibb@telus.net for details.

Chapter 1

Professional Identity: Ethics, Values, and Self-Awareness



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Stuart Miles/123RF

- Identify the Canadian professionals that provide counselling services.
- Identify how counsellors can work within the limits of their competence.
- Define and describe professional ethics, including standards related to dual relationships and confidentiality.
- List and describe the core values of counselling.
- Identify principles for understanding and resolving ethical dilemmas.
- Understand the importance of counsellor objectivity and self-awareness.
- Understand and manage personal needs and values in counselling.
- Recognize and address burnout and vicarious trauma as workplace hazards.

PROFESSIONAL COUNSELLORS IN CANADA

Many professionals, such as social workers, child and youth care workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, nurses, and psychiatric nurses, do counselling work. Most are members of professional associations like the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) and the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA; see Table 1.1).

TABLE 1.1 Professional Associations in Canada

Canadian Addiction Counsellors Certification Federation	www.caccf.ca
Canadian Art Therapy Association	www.catainfo.ca
Canadian Association of Music Therapists	www.musictherapy.ca
Canadian Association of Rehabilitation Professionals	www.carpnational.org
Canadian Association of Social Workers	www.casw-acts.ca
Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association	www.ccpa-accp.ca
Canadian Criminal Justice Association	www.ccja-acjp.ca
Canadian Indigenous Nurses Association	www.anac.on.ca
Canadian Nurses Association	www.cna-aic.ca
Canadian Psychiatric Association	www.cpa-apc.org
Canadian Psychological Association	www.cpa.ca
Canadian Therapeutic Recreation Association	www.canadian-tr.org
Council of Canadian Child and Youth Care Associations	www.cyccanada.ca
Psychosocial Rehabilitation Canada	www.psrrpscanada.com

As members, they are subject to codes of ethics governing acceptable professional behaviour. Membership in these associations usually requires a university degree and, in some cases, a master's degree or Ph.D.

Social workers generally have university training with a bachelor's degree in social work (BSW) or a master's degree in social work (MSW). In addition, they may have specialized training in areas such as family therapy or group work. Social workers might work in private practice or be employed in hospitals, prisons, schools, or community social service agencies. Many social workers also work for government agencies investigating incidents of child abuse and neglect. Social workers are the largest professional group providing support and counselling to people with psychiatric disorders. Increasingly, with the aging of the Canadian population, social workers are deployed to work with seniors.

Counselling psychologists are usually qualified at the Ph.D. level, but some jurisdictions allow registration for those with a master's degree. They may work as counsellors or may specialize in other areas, such as in administering and interpreting psychological tests. Psychologists are often employed in private practice, but they may also work in settings such as prisons, hospitals, schools, and private industry.

In contrast, psychiatrists are medical doctors with advanced training in psychiatry. They are specialists in the treatment of people with mental disorders. Psychiatrists are the only counselling professionals licensed to prescribe medication. Psychiatric nurses generally have two to four years of training. Historically, they worked in psychiatric hospitals and wards, but today, increasingly, they are working in community based mental health settings.

Community college graduates with one to two years of college training also provide counselling services in settings such as transition homes, addiction centres, employment counselling agencies, and community mental health. The nonprofit social service sector also uses volunteers to deliver services in settings such as crisis phone lines, where people in distress call for assistance or referral. In addition, the professional counselling community is often supported or replaced by an array of self-help support groups, such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) or Narcotics Anonymous (NA).

Social Work and Social Justice

Like other professionals in the helping professions, social workers counsel clients to help them develop insight, solve problems, deal with emotional pain, and enhance

relationships. They may also support clients by providing information, social skills training, or resources. One special feature that distinguishes social work counselling from that performed by other professionals is its dual focus on working with individuals as well as their social environment (Dale, Smith, Norlin, & Chess, 2009). Social workers assume that an individual can be understood only in the context of his or her environment; thus, they pay particular attention to the interaction of the person and the environment.

Unique to social work is the important professional responsibility to promote social justice or “fairness and moral rightness in how social institutions such as government, corporations, and powerful groups recognize and support the basic human rights of all people” (Sheafor & Horejsi, 2008, p. 6). Social justice commitment involves advocacy to promote human rights and more equitable income redistribution, political action to change oppressive legislation or policy, public education to shape public opinion, and efforts to build community. Social workers recognize that social problems arise, at least in part, from ineffective social systems.

While counselling is important in helping individuals cope, it is insufficient in dealing completely with these great challenges. Thus, because this book explores only the counselling component of social work practice, practitioners are cautioned to approach this task with the broader mission of social work in mind. Value 2 of the *Code of Ethics* of the Canadian Association of Social Workers (2005) outlines the obligations of social workers to advocate for social change:

Pursuit of Social Justice

As a result, social workers believe in the obligation of people, individually and collectively, to provide resources, services and opportunities for the overall benefit of humanity and to afford them protection from harm. Social workers promote social fairness and the equitable distribution of resources, and take action to reduce barriers and expand choice for all persons, with special regard for those who are marginalized, disadvantaged, vulnerable, and/or have exceptional needs. Social workers oppose prejudice and discrimination against any person or group of persons on any grounds, and specifically challenge views and actions that stereotype particular persons or groups.

Principles:

- Social workers uphold the right of people to have access to resources to meet basic human needs.
- Social workers advocate for fair and equitable access to public services and benefits.
- Social workers advocate for equal treatment and protection under the law and challenge injustices, especially injustices that affect the vulnerable and disadvantaged.
- Social workers promote social development and environmental management in the interests of all people. (p. 5)

ETHICS

Ethics are the principles and rules of acceptable or proper conduct. All professions have ethical guidelines, designed to protect both clients and members. Ethical codes define the limits of permissible behaviour and the sanctions or remedies for member violations of ethical standards. Codes of ethics serve the following broad purposes:

- Professionals can use their codes to assist them with decision making and as a reference for their practice.
- Ethical codes help shelter clients from incompetent and unethical practice by members of the profession. Ethical codes recognize that clients may be vulnerable and subject to manipulation and abuse of power by professionals, so they constrain professionals from taking advantage of clients.

ethics: Guidelines that define the limits of permissible behaviour.

- Ethical codes also provide guidance on how counsellors can deal fairly with colleagues and their employers, including the responsibility to address the unethical conduct of colleagues.
- Codes outline the philosophical and value principles of the profession. For example, the code of the Canadian Association of Social Workers has six core social work values:

Value 1: Respect for the Inherent Dignity and Worth of Persons

Value 2: Pursuit of Social Justice

Value 3: Service to Humanity

Value 4: Integrity of Professional Practice

Value 5: Confidentiality in Professional Practice

Value 6: Competence in Professional Practice (CASW, 2005, p. 4)

These ideals are echoed by the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association, which articulates the following fundamental principles as the basis for ethical conduct:

- a. Beneficence: being proactive in promoting clients' best interests
- b. Fidelity: honouring commitments to clients and maintaining integrity in counselling relationships
- c. Nonmaleficence: not willfully harming clients and refraining from actions that risk harm
- d. Autonomy: respecting the rights of clients to self-determination
- e. Justice: respecting the dignity and just treatment of all persons
- f. Societal interest: respecting the need to be responsible to society (CCPA, 2007, p. 2)

Unethical behaviour typically arises from issues related to one or more of the following: breaking confidentiality; misrepresenting or working beyond one's level of expertise; conducting improper relationships, including sexual activity with clients; and causing conflicts of interest, such as entering into business or other dual relationships with clients.

Professional associations are responsible for monitoring their own policies and for investigating and resolving violations of ethical conduct. The CASW and CCPA are examples of professional bodies that can formally discipline members who violate their codes of ethics. As well, counsellors who are not members of professional associations may work with agencies that provide guidelines for ethical behaviour and decision making.

In addition, legislation defines and restricts the use of certain titles, such as social worker, psychologist, and psychiatrist, to those who have the appropriate degree or training. The clients of these professionals can report misconduct or concerns to the appropriate professional association; however, there may be no legislation preventing people from offering counselling services under a wide range of other titles, such as counsellor, personal therapist, family and marital counsellor, and personal growth consultant. These practitioners may not have had formal preparation or training, and clients should be cautious when they seek their services.

Although the codes are the primary source for professional decision making, counsellors should also consider relevant theory, research, laws, regulations, and agency policy. When faced with ethical dilemmas, they should consider consultation with colleagues, supervisors, professional associations, and legal counsel. In addition, the CCPA has published an ethics casebook (Shulz, 2000) designed to assist counsellors in clarifying ethics and standards of practice, and the CASW has published *Guidelines for Ethical Practice* (2005) as a reference point for social workers on ethical practice.

Dual Relationships

A **dual relationship** is a relationship in which there is both a counselling relationship and another type of relationship, such as a business relationship, a friendship, or one of sexual intimacy. The essential purpose of counselling is to meet the needs of clients, but dual relationships lead to the risk that counsellors could misuse (or be perceived to be misusing) their professional relationships for personal gain. In dual relationships, the counsellor has a personal interest that may conflict with the client's interests. This may lead to intended or unintended exploitation, harm, manipulation, or coercion of clients. To prevent these problems and any conflict of interest, dual relationships must be avoided because of their potential harm to clients and the risk of damage to the image of the profession.

Not surprisingly, the codes of ethics for the various counselling professions strictly prohibit certain types of dual relationships, especially those of sexual involvement. Generally, they also prohibit sexual intimacies with former clients for a specified period after terminating the counselling relationship, but this injunction may extend indefinitely "if the client is clearly vulnerable, by reason of emotional or cognitive disorder, to exploitative influence by the counsellor. Counsellors, in all such circumstances, clearly bear the burden to ensure that no such exploitative influence has occurred and to seek consultative assistance" (CCPA, 2007, p. B12).

dual relationship: A relationship in which there is both a counselling relationship and another type of relationship, such as friendship or sexual intimacy.

Professional Boundaries

Despite ethical guidelines, boundary violations and abuses do occur. Reviewing the available research, (Thoreson and colleagues 1993) found that the incidence of sexual contact between counsellors and clients ranges from 3.6 to 12.1 percent. Conducting their own study, the researchers found after surveying 1000 randomly selected male members of the American Counseling Association (ACA) that 1.7 percent of the respondents reported engaging in sexual contact with a client during a professional relationship, and 7 percent reported engaging in sexual contact after a professional relationship (Thoreson et al., 1993).

Physical Contact The CASW's *Guidelines for Ethical Practice* (2005) offers this guidance on the issue of physical contact with clients:

Social workers avoid engaging in physical contact with clients when there is a possibility of harm to the client as a result of the contact. Social workers who engage in appropriate physical contact with clients are responsible for setting clear, appropriate and culturally sensitive boundaries to govern such contact. (p. 12)

While the CASW guidelines do not define appropriate physical contact, common sense needs to prevail. Fear of the implications and repercussions of touching has led some settings to become "no touch" environments; however, this practice may negate the needs of some clients, particularly children who need physical contact. In an editorial on the importance of touching in child and youth care settings, Tom Garfat (2008) emphasized the importance of touch when working with youth, but he also stressed that workers need to learn when not to touch. He distinguishes "between those who would touch youth in the most normal and healthy of ways; a pat on the back, a touch on the shoulder, a comforting hug when the world is a difficult place, a hand held in a moment of crisis, and those who use the opportunity to touch a young person as an opportunity to satisfy their own needs and desires" (p. iii). Garfat strongly endorses the elimination of inappropriate touching, but urges us to remember that "touch is part of human nature, touch is developmentally necessary, touch is part of healing, touch is a form of communication, and touch builds bridges" (p. x).

While sexual intimacy is clearly unethical, the appropriate boundaries of other relationships may be less clear. As Reamer (2002) observes,

Other dual and multiple relationships are more ambiguous and require careful analysis and consultation. Examples include social workers in rural communities who cannot avoid contact with clients in social settings, social workers who are invited by clients to attend an important life event, social workers' relationships with former clients, and social workers' unanticipated encounters with clients at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting when both parties are in recovery. (p. 66)

Miller (2007) discusses the challenges that professionals who work in rural or small towns face when applying and interpreting ethical standards such as "the need to maintain professional boundaries and at the same time achieve a sense of personal belonging in the community" (p. 168). She also notes the vulnerability that workers feel, due to their high visibility, when their actions are scrutinized by members of the community.

Pierce and Schmidt (2012) suggest that rural dynamics and culture affect how professional boundaries are defined:

For example, over time, the professional may be invited to community events, a wedding, or a celebration for which attendance is viewed as significant by the community. Not attending may cause disharmony or barriers between the practitioner and the community. (p. 248)

Confidentiality

The rules regarding confidentiality are integral to every code of ethics. Ethical guidelines stress that the confidentiality of clients must be protected. Indeed, most clients enter counselling with an expectation that what they say will be kept private. For the most part, counsellors can assure clients that they will keep their disclosures confidential; however, often it is not so simple. **Absolute confidentiality** means that client disclosures are not shared with anyone. **Relative confidentiality** means that information is shared within the agency with supervisors or colleagues, outside the agency with the client's permission, or in courts of law owing to legal requirements, such as child abuse legislation. Usually, clients can be assured only of relative confidentiality.

To provide optimum service to clients, counsellors must share information about them within the agency. To monitor the quality of work and help counsellors improve their skills, supervisors need to review client files or consult with counsellors by reviewing audio and video recordings of their interviews. Other counsellors within the agency also have access to files.

Many people believe that counsellors and other professionals enjoy "privileged communication," that is, they are legally protected from having to share information that they have obtained while exercising their professional duties. However, the courts can subpoena counsellors' records because Canada has no legislative protection for licensed or unlicensed psychotherapists.

There are valid reasons, including some legal requirements, for sharing information. For example, all jurisdictions in Canada have legislation that requires counsellors to report suspicions of child abuse and neglect to the appropriate authorities. Similarly, counsellors might have to break confidentiality when they believe that clients might harm themselves or others. Counsellors need to become familiar with the precise wording of relevant statutes in their area since laws may vary significantly among jurisdictions.

One often-quoted legal precedent is the 1976 Tarasoff case, in which the client told his counsellor of his intent to kill his girlfriend, Tatiana Tarasoff. The counsellor told the campus police of the threat, but he did not warn his client's girlfriend or her family.

absolute confidentiality: An assurance that client disclosures are not shared with anyone.

relative confidentiality: The assumption that client disclosures may be shared within the agency with supervisors or colleagues, outside the agency with client permission, or with others because of legal requirements, such as those contained within child abuse legislation.

The client, a student at the school, subsequently carried out his threat and killed the young woman. The young woman's parents brought a successful lawsuit against the counsellor and the university. This litigation established that, when counsellors believe that a client represents "a serious danger of violence to another," they have a **duty to warn** potential victims (cited in Nesbitt, 2017.).

duty to warn: The professional responsibility that counsellors have to inform people whom they believe a client may harm.

SUCCESS TIP

Become familiar with the legislation in your area that requires you to report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect, but remember it is not your job to conduct an investigation unless you are legally assigned this role.

Since the Tarasoff decision, there have been numerous Canadian applications and legal precedents that address the duty to warn issue. The CASW's *Guidelines for Ethical Practice* (2005) allows for disclosure when "necessary to prevent serious, foreseeable, and imminent harm to a client or others" (p. 6). The guidelines also obligate social workers in such circumstances to notify "both the person who may be at risk (if possible) as well as the police" (p. 8). The CCPA Code of Ethics (2007) has a similar duty to warn obligation that requires counsellors to "use reasonable care to give threatened persons such warnings as are essential to avert foreseeable dangers" (p. 7).

Clients have a right to be fully informed regarding the limits of confidentiality, including any legal or ethical responsibilities that require counsellors to share information. Through discussions regarding confidentiality, counsellors can reassure clients that computer and file records are safe.

Counsellors can take a number of steps to protect client confidentiality. They should discipline themselves not to discuss clients in public places and at parties or other social events. Counselling work is demanding, and an important part of dealing with the stress of the job is to unwind by talking about difficult cases and personal reactions with colleagues and supervisors. This is a healthy and necessary component of professional wellness. Unfortunately, time pressures and large caseloads may leave little or no time for this process during the working day, so it is easy to fall into the trap of discussing clients over lunch or in other settings where confidentiality cannot be ensured. The obvious risk is that the conversation will be overheard. Even when names are not used, accidental listeners may think that they know the person being discussed. In addition, they may decide that they will never go for counselling because what they say would soon be spread all over town.

Although it is tempting for counsellors to discuss clients with family and friends because they are available as supportive listeners, they should avoid doing so. Family and friends are not bound by the same ethics as counselling professionals. They could easily disclose what they have heard, perhaps with a seemingly innocent observation or comment.

Sometimes counsellors breach confidentiality by failing to take simple precautions. For example, taking phone calls during a counselling session can lead to careless breaches of confidentiality and suggest to clients that the counsellor treats their private matters casually. In addition, counsellors should remove all case records, phone messages, and notes from their desk. This prevents clients from seeing the names of other clients and reinforces the fact that the counsellor will not leave private records in public places.

SUCCESS TIP

When leaving phone messages for clients, give just your first name and say nothing about the nature of the call. Clients may not have informed room-mates or family members that they are seeing a counsellor.

TABLE 1.2 Confidentiality Guidelines

- Review professional guidelines such as the CASW's *Guidelines for Ethical Practice* and the CCPA's *Code of Ethics*.
- Involve clients. Keep them informed and seek their permission to release information. Remember that freedom of information statutes may give clients the right to access your files.
- Become familiar with relevant legal statutes (e.g., child abuse or mental health legislation) that define and limit confidentiality. Disclose only the information that is required.
- Protect client records with secure filing systems. Do not leave files, notes, or phone messages about clients out where they may be read by others. Ensure that electronically stored data is protected.
- Ensure that consultations with others concerning clients are legitimate and conducted in a private and professional manner. This precludes conversations about clients at social gatherings or in public places such as restaurants.
- Ensure that interviews are private and free from interruptions.
- Discuss clients only with supervisors and use only support staff for processing necessary paperwork and documentation.
- Never use client names, initials, or identifying data in emails or text messages.
- Exceptions to the rules may, and sometimes must, be made when there are suspicions of child abuse or neglect, when required by law (such as a subpoena), and when there is a risk to self or others (suicide threat or threat of violence).
- Never use social media to discuss clients, even if you change names and identifying information.

The interview itself should be conducted in private, not where other staff or clients may overhear. When greeting a client in the waiting room, counsellors should refrain from using surnames; however, they need to be sensitive to the fact that many seniors and people from some cultures are insulted by the casual use of their first names.

Sometimes counsellors meet clients by chance in public places. When this happens, counsellors should ensure that they maintain confidentiality, even when the client appears unconcerned. They should gently shift the conversation to a neutral topic or suggest a private time and place to continue the discussion. At that time, counsellors can explain why they avoided a public discussion.

Table 1.2 outlines some important confidentiality guidelines.

VALUES FOR PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

values: What individuals and groups consider important or worthwhile.

Values are principles or qualities that individuals and groups consider important or worthwhile. Ethics are derived from values. Values represent beliefs about what is desirable and good. Personal values describe what individuals consider desirable and what they believe is right and wrong. Professional values describe fundamental beliefs that the profession holds about people and ways the work of the profession ought to be conducted. Clearly, professional values (as reflected in ethical codes of conduct) and personal values have a major impact on shaping the practice of counselling professionals. Two key values of counselling are the belief in the dignity and worth of people and the client's right to self-determination.

Belief in the Dignity and Worth of People

Belief in the dignity and worth of people is the core value of counselling. This value commits counsellors to ensuring that their clients are treated with regard for their rights. It obligates counsellors to demonstrate acceptance of the individual and to uphold

confidentiality. Counsellors who value the dignity of their clients appreciate diversity and reject stereotyping, labelling, and other dehumanizing practices.

Counsellors must treat clients fairly, regardless of personal feelings toward them. For example, counsellors must resist the natural temptation to spend more time with clients they favour and less time with those whom they find difficult. Counsellors are expected to apply their skills and knowledge at an optimum level for each client, regardless of their personal reaction toward any client. Clients may have behaved in ways that counsellors perceive to be offensive, but this belief does not give counsellors licence to be disrespectful or to withhold services. Discriminatory practices are strictly prohibited by both major codes:

- Counsellors actively work to understand the diverse cultural background of the clients with whom they work, and do not condone or engage in discrimination based on age, colour, culture, ethnicity, disability, gender, religion, sexual orientation, marital, or socioeconomic status. (CCPA, 2007, p. 9)
- Social workers recognize and respect the diversity of Canadian society, taking into account the breadth of differences that exist among individuals, families, groups and communities. (CASW, 2005, p. 4)

These ethical guidelines underscore the need for professionals to learn about other cultures. Such learning increases sensitivity and awareness of how values, beliefs, and worldview define one's behaviour and thinking. This topic will be explored in more depth in Chapter 10.

Counsellors, especially those who work with high-risk clients (such as those with chronic addiction problems) need to be careful that their view of, and attitudes toward, clients do not become jaded. Jaded counsellors often have a cynical and pessimistic perspective on the willingness and capacity of their clients to change and grow. Counsellors who believe that clients are incapable of growth are likely to invest less energy in supporting change. Moreover, they may be more prone to using controlling responses because of their expectation that the “clients cannot do it on their own.” What would you predict to be the likely outcome of a counselling session when the counsellor labels the client “a hopeless alcoholic”? Conversely, belief in the dignity and worth of people is expressed through positive practices:

- involving clients in decision making, goal setting, and problem solving
- adopting a strengths approach
- maintaining an optimistic view of human nature, including the belief that people are capable of change and growth

Client Self-Determination

Self-determination is the principle that clients have a right to autonomy and freedom of choice to make their own decisions, insofar as is possible. Counsellors have a duty to respect and promote this right even when they disagree with the decisions of their clients. Moreover, choice is an integral part of client self-determination. When clients have no choices, or believe that they have none, self-determination is not possible; however, adherence to the principle does not prevent counsellors from helping clients understand how their actions might violate the rights of others. Nor does it prevent counsellors from helping clients appreciate the potential consequences of their actions. Some clients, such as people with mental disabilities and young children, may be unable to make competent choices. If so, counsellors may need to prevent them from acting in ways that are potentially harmful to themselves or others.

Sometimes beginning counsellors are misinformed about the nature of counselling. They believe that their role is to listen to their clients' problems and then offer helpful

self-determination: The principle that promotes the rights of clients to have autonomy and freedom of choice.