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Outlines an organisation's obligations when an individual requests to be given access to personal information held about them by the organisation.

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Outlines an organisation's obligations in relation to correcting the personal information it holds about individuals.

A workplace code of conduct might include:

▶ a statement of purpose

▶ related legislation

▶ disciplinary action for breaches of the code

▶ a summary of the workplace values

▶ roles and responsibilities of accountable persons named in the code

▶ worker rights and treatment under the code

▶ general applications of the code

▶ application of the code to specific work circumstances.

Discrimination

An important principle underpinning counselling work is to treat every person with the same respect and provide a level of service that meets their individual needs regardless of who they are or their issues or background.

Discrimination occurs when an individual is treated less favourably than others because they belong to or identify with a particular group or are perceived to have certain traits or attitudes. People may also be discriminated against because of associating with others who have attributes that may be discriminated against.

People may be discriminated against because of their:	
▶ disability	▶ age
▶ gender	▶ ethnic origin
▶ pregnancy	▶ religion
▶ politics	▶ marital, parental or carer status
▶ sexual preference	▶ physical features.

Discrimination legislation

Discrimination is illegal throughout Australia. The Acts that set out the relevant federal (Commonwealth) legislation regarding the various forms of discrimination include the following:

▶ *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*

▶ *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*

▶ *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*

▶ *Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999*

▶ *Racial Hatred Act 1995*

Additional legislation exists in each state and territory.

To research anti-discrimination legislation, use the Australasian Legal Information Institute database at: www.austlii.edu.au.

For additional information on equity and discrimination in Australia, visit the Australian Human Rights Commission website at: www.humanrights.gov.au.

Duty-of-care responsibilities

Part of duty of care that counsellors and other workers have to the people they support, is to ensure that the work they do does not harm anyone and keeps the person safe. Understanding the limitations of the role and the extent or level of authority is essential for this to occur. If a person does not have the skills, knowledge, qualifications and authorisation to conduct a task, then they are in breach of their duty of care.

Here are some strategies that will help clearly define professional boundaries.

Maintain professional boundaries

▶ Maintaining professional boundaries in a work role means keeping to the specifications of the job role and organisational policies and procedures. It also means maintaining adequate personal boundaries in professional relations with people you are supporting.

Know what not to do

▶ Community services workers should not attempt to carry out work that:
- – is not specified in their job description
- – cannot be performed safely due to lack of training or practical experience
- – is unethical, illegal or outside the policies and procedures of the organisation.

Do not blur the distinction

▶ Workers must make sure they do not blur the distinction between being a professional and a friend when dealing with people and their families. This is often difficult for new workers, who may at times feel overwhelmed by the problems faced by their people and feel that they need to take on the role of rescuer. This is definitely not the role of a support worker.

Act as a facilitator

▶ The goal of all effective community services workers should be to act as a facilitator rather than rescuer. In this way, the worker helps people to learn skills to help themselves. New workers may find it a difficult balancing act providing the right amount of support while fostering the person's sense of empowerment and independence.

Not being a friend

▶ When workers allow people to think of them as a friend, they confuse the people that they provide support to and risk losing their respect. People with support needs who consider themselves a personal friend of a worker may develop unrealistic expectations about what the worker can do for them and may become disappointed and disillusioned with the service when this does not happen.

Human rights and principles

When providing any community service, people have rights that underpin the delivery of all services. The principles of human rights should be considered in all dealings with people in counselling and other services delivered.

Here are the principles outlined in detail.

The right to dignity

Service users have the right to be spoken to and treated with respect and concern for their feelings and entitlements. Maintaining a person's dignity means not talking down to them and having regard for their individual, cultural and religious rights.

People should be able to retain their personal, civic, legal and consumer rights and be assisted to achieve active control of their own lives within the community. Factors that contribute to a person's dignity include a sense of control over their own decisions.

The right to privacy

There needs to be respect and value placed on a person's privacy. Privacy is applied to a person's physical environment and possessions, their physical and bodily needs, and their personal relationships, information and needs. Privacy relates to many areas including the right not to be watched, listened to or reported without consent; and not to be the focus of uninvited public attention. Privacy is protected by legislation.

The right to confidentiality

A person will entrust a great deal of information to a community services worker. In return, the worker must make every effort to ensure this trust is not abused in any way. Help protect the interests of people requiring support by not passing on information to others who are not entitled to receive it, or discussing service users outside of the work setting.

People have the right to expect that their personal information will remain confidential and secure. They also have the right to access their own health and personal information. This includes all care records and personal information shared with you by the person and others, as well as communications from other agencies and medical information from health professionals.

The right to make an informed choice

Relevant and sufficient information should be supplied to people requiring support so they can make decisions and choices based on correct information provided to them. Service users have the right to be involved in decision-making that affects their care and wellbeing. They must be given enough information that allows them to make an informed choice. Workers should encourage service users or their representatives to take responsibility for their actions and choices, and choose a service or care plan that best meets their needs and preferences.

Focus on the needs and preferences of the person. Take into account any lifestyle choices, as well as cultural, linguistic and religious preferences. Encourage the involvement of the person in the planning, development and management of the service to ensure they understand and are able to exercise their rights.

The right to make a complaint

People using a service have the right to complain if they are dissatisfied with the way the service is provided or have concerns regarding an aspect of the service.

A complaints procedure is a legislative requirement that all organisations must comply with. The procedure allows the service user to exercise their rights and also provides your organisation with useful feedback about the appropriateness of the service you provide. Everyone in your organisation needs to understand the complaints procedure. All complaints should be dealt with fairly and promptly and without fear of repercussions.

The right to an agreed standard of care

People requiring support should be able to expect your organisation's service standards to:

▶ be reliable and dependable

▶ adhere to legislative requirements

▶ be inclusive of service user participation and collaboration

▶ be affordable and accessible

▶ be fair in regard to rights and responsibilities

▶ be individualised for each person and their particular needs.

Example

Encourage clients to identify and explore their aims, requirements and ideas

Vera works with an organisation that assists disadvantaged women to rebuild their confidence and skills so they can start to create the life they want for themselves. Hannah is in her 40s and has had a difficult life. In the past she has suffered domestic violence and alcohol abuse. She now wants to put this behind her and make a new life for herself.

Vera explains to Hannah that the counselling will begin by exploring her current situation and identifying her strengths and resources she has available to her. Following this, they will identify how Hannah pictures her life being in the future and work together to identify her aims and assist her to reach these. Finally, Hannah will be able to develop some personal goals and action plans with strategies that Hannah can use to make the changes she wants in her life.

Vera can see that Hannah is looking like she has some questions. Hannah says, 'I thought you would be asking me questions about my childhood so you can work out why I have had all these problems in my life.' Vera explains that the counselling she provides focuses on the present and future, not the past. She offers to refer Hannah to a therapist who can help her explore how her childhood experiences impacted her life if this is what she wants. Hannah says, 'No, thank you. I like the idea of not having to dredge all that stuff up and just focus on a better future. When can we start?'

1C Assist clients to identify practical goals and requirements and discuss how goals might be modified based on strengths

Counselling requires collaboration, where both parties work together to identify practical and achievable goals. The goal-setting process requires that the counsellor uses open communication and effective listening skills to assist the person to identify goals that are meaningful and achievable. Goal-setting may also help to identify and clarify concerns relevant to the counselling service. Goal clarification is done with consideration of the needs and objectives of the person and takes into account the resources available to meet those goals.

Setting practical goals makes it more likely that a person will achieve their aims. It is the person themselves who best understands their goals and personal aspirations and how they want their life to be. They may require some assistance in modifying goals into aims that are more practical and achievable based on their access to resources and their particular strengths. It is also useful to determine a time frame for achieving them.

Types of goals

Articulating a personal goal means identifying how things could be in the future and exploring what might need to be different in order to make that goal possible. The end result is that the person will have identified an outcome that they can work towards. With a clear statement and aims, a person is more likely to be motivated to establish some structure to work towards and achieve those goals. When goals are established, both the counsellor and the person have a better understanding of what is to be accomplished. Clarity of purpose means that the counsellor can work directly to address the person's problems or concerns.

Goals can be grouped into two main types: process goals and outcome-based goals. Process goals are activities or smaller steps that help achieve outcomes or goals. They are helpful in outlining what needs to be done or accomplished to reach goals. These types of goals are measurable and time bound. For example, a person may identify that they want to have finished their five course assignments by May and to have completed their course within six months.

Outcome-based goals focus on the desired outcome, not the process for achieving the goal. Outcome-based goals require a person to set a structured picture of a solution; it is solution-focused. An example may be that a young person is disruptive in class

S

Specific:

Target and clearly define a specific area that you want to improve.

M

Measureable:

Suggest an indicator of progress; quantify if possible. Determine how you will know the goal has been achieved.

A

Attainable:

Agree what the goals should be and keep them achievable in the time frame.

R

Realistic:

Identify what results can realistically be achieved given the available resources, knowledge and time.

T

Time framed:

Specify when the result can be achieved; make sure there is enough time to achieve the goal, but not too much time.

Goals in action

Here are some examples of goals that do and do not meet the SMART principles of goal-setting framework.

SMART principle	Poor goal-setting according to the SMART framework	Good goal-setting according to the SMART framework
Specific	Goal: Improve health. Reason: This is not specific enough. Does the goal refer to mental health or physical health?	Goal: Improve physical health by losing weight. Reason: This is more specific. You should discuss how much weight loss is appropriate and achievable.
Measurable	Goal: Participate in regular therapy sessions. Reason: What does regular mean? One person's idea about what is regular might be quite different from another person's.	Goal: Participate in therapy once a week. Reason: This is far better. A clear measure of success is provided.
Achievable	Goal: Complete a degree and become qualified as a paramedic this year. Reason: This is just not achievable. It takes far longer than a year to complete a degree.	Goal: Undertake a bridging program to become eligible for tertiary entry this year. Reason: This is attainable.

Referral options

Some problems require referral to another specialist organisation that can provide expert guidance and support to the person. Referral options depend on the nature of the agency providing counselling services. Some small organisations specialise in one service; for example, services to people such as carers or women experiencing domestic violence. Larger agencies are more likely to be able to access a diverse range of services, have more-specialised staff and greater access to financial and material resources to assist the people they service.

Here is a list of some of the issues that may fall outside of the scope of counsellors.

Issues that require referral
▶ Child protection issues
▶ Suicide prevention or intervention and self-harming behaviours
▶ Issues with alcohol and other drugs
▶ Family violence
▶ Mental health issues
▶ Physical health concerns
▶ Homelessness
▶ Financial difficulties and problem gambling
▶ Legal issues
▶ Employment or career services

How to make a referral

Every organisation has their own procedure for making referrals. The following steps are an example of a general process.

Example steps of a general process
▶ Discuss the need for referral with the person.
▶ Provide information about appropriate referral sources and explore options with the person.
▶ Help the person to make a decision about the service that best meets their needs.
▶ Ask the person if they are prepared to sign consent form to provide their basic details to the new service provider.
▶ Make contact with the chosen service provider to check eligibility requirements and whether they have vacancies in their service.
▶ Document information according to your organisation's policies and procedures.

Rights of people

All of the rights of the person should have been discussed in the initial interview and before the person agreed to the counselling process. One of the most important ways to show a person that they are respected and that the assistance is genuine is to meet the responsibilities owed to them. This can be done by working to the following principles.

Counsellors have an ethical responsibility and duty of care to ensure they provide people with information about what they can expect from the service and how they can address any grievances.

Rights of the person receiving counselling services:

▶ To be treated with respect and dignity

▶ To have their confidentiality and privacy maintained

▶ To make a complaint and have it addressed in a timely and appropriate manner

▶ To be given appropriate information about options and services available to them

▶ To be treated fairly and without any form of discrimination

▶ To make decisions about matters that affect them

▶ To obtain the assistance of an advocate if they require it

Responsibilities of people

People in need of support from the service you provide have legal and ethical responsibilities they must adhere to in order to access and use services. They also have a responsibility to uphold the rights of workers and others in an organisation.

The following are examples of a person's responsibilities.

Providing information

▶ A person has a responsibility to provide correct and necessary information to the best of their ability. If the worker feels a person has not revealed adequate or complete information, it should be explained to them why the information is required and continue to ask questions until they are confident (to the best of their ability) that accurate information has been obtained.

Keeping appointments

▶ A person using a service has a responsibility to keep appointments made by them or by the service on their behalf, or to notify the service of their inability to attend where relevant. The person should be provided with information about who to contact if they cannot attend appointments and about any financial penalties or other consequences that may be imposed.

Following safety procedures

▶ To observe safety procedures in order to ensure their own safety and the safety of workers and other people accessing services, and visitors to the organisation. This includes following emergency evacuation procedures and observing no-smoking signs.

Rights and responsibilities of employers

Here are some aspects of employer rights and responsibilities that they should expect to happen as a part of their job as an employer of staff.

Employer rights

▶ Organisations have the right to expect that their information is kept confidential.

▶ Organisations have the right to expect employees to meet all reasonable and legal requests of their employee.

▶ Organisations have the right to expect employees to carry out their job function.

▶ Any person within an organisation, including managers and board members, has a right to work in an environment free from discrimination and harassment.

Employer responsibilities

▶ Organisations have the responsibility to provide a safe and healthy workplace.

▶ Organisations should not discriminate against employees and promote freedom from discrimination and harassment.

▶ Organisations have a responsibility to conduct operations and manage staff in accordance with legislation.

▶ Organisations have a responsibility to provide clear and accessible policies and procedures to employees so all staff understand their obligations.

▶ Organisations must provide clear information about employment conditions and regular payment advice to staff.

Example

Identify situations where aims and requirements cannot be met, and make referrals for guidance and support

Tim is a counsellor who is getting advice from his supervisor:

'As you know I have been working with a person who has been referred to our service because they need help with their 'personal problems'. This man, named Alf, is middle-aged and has been seeking political asylum in Australia on the grounds that he has been the victim of torture in his own country.

'It soon became apparent that he was in need of expert help. Some of the descriptions of his symptoms and concerns sounded like they could be those of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). As you know, this is out of my job role and I want to refer him to a psychologist who specialises in this area. Can you possibly give me some names of people I could use for a referral?

'I suggested to this man that I am not the best person to work with him, and that I want to refer to someone who can provide the help he needs. He became very angry and said he knows his rights and that I am discriminating against him. He said he will be complaining about me and that he is sick of being passed from person to person and everyone saying they cannot help him.

'What do you think I should do?'

2A Identify collaboratively potential courses of action for meeting individual aims and requirements

Once the person receiving support has decided on realistic goals and discussed the requirements needed to meet those aims, it is important to help them to identify how each of these might be achieved. The counsellor has worked with the person to identify some keys goals that meet the person's individual strengths, now they can work together to identify some possible courses of action to meet those aims and requirements.

Identify potential courses of action

The various options and potential courses of action that will be explored need to match closely with the person's individual aims and requirements, and take into account their personal strengths and any constraints that may prevent the goal from being met.

When goals are being used to direct a course of action, they may need to be prioritised and divided into those goals that the person can work towards in the short-term, and those that are more long-term. It can be fairly easy to work make decisions and find suitable solutions to solve problems when priorities are clearly laid out. This also helps keep the person motivated to work towards achieving their goals. When goals are clearly stated, and priority decisions made, both parties might have a better understanding of what is to be accomplished. It can also be used as a measure of the progress of the achievement of goals.

Time frames help ensure goals are achievable and measurable. If the person can achieve a goal within a set time frame, they may be encouraged to pursue other goals. The counsellor can assist the person to establish which goals are short-term and which are long-term. Once this is done, the person can anticipate how long they need to achieve each goal and can set decision-making time lines.

Make decisions

Counsellors can use decision-making processes to help recognise appropriate courses of action to meet goals and help the person identify solutions to their problems. Making a decision involves choosing between alternative courses of action. As a person works through problem-solving with a counsellor to identify and select a course of action, decisions are being made several times as a part of this process. This will require an examination of the consequences of each alternative,

Ethical decision-making

Another type of decision-making is referred to as ethical decision-making. One example is the PLUS ethical decision-making model, which includes steps similar to the rational model but with a filter overlaying the selection of alternatives and used in the analysis of information. In making an ethical decision, it is necessary to perceive and eliminate unethical options and select the best ethical alternative. At key steps in the process, the person needs to work through the following, ensuring that the ethics issues embedded in the decision are given consideration.

The PLUS acronym stands for:

▶ Policies – Is it consistent with my organisation's policies, procedures and guidelines?

▶ Legal – Is it acceptable under the applicable laws and regulations?

▶ Universal – Does it conform to the universal principles/values that I hold?

▶ Self – Does it satisfy my personal definition of right, good and fair?

Steps in ethical decision-making

Here is a sample of the steps involved in ethical decision-making.

An ethical decision-making process

1 **Explore and assess the situation to determine the circumstances and facts and define the problem**
The most significant step in any decision-making process is describing why a decision is called for and identifying the most desired outcome(s) of the decision-making process.

2 **Identify available alternative solutions to the problem**
The key to this step is not to be limited to obvious alternatives or what has worked in the past but to be open to new and better alternatives. All alternatives should be on the table.

3 **Evaluate the identified alternatives**
Likely positive and negative consequences for each alternative are explored. One alternative might appear to be better than the others depending on ethical considerations, resources and past experiences.

4 **Make a decision**
Make the decision based on ethical principles.

5 **Implement the decision**
The action itself is the first real, tangible step in changing the situation. It is not enough to think about it or talk about it or even decide to do it; actions must be taken.

6 **Evaluate the decision**
The final test of any decision is whether or not the problem was fixed. Did the actions taken change the problem appreciably? Is it better now, or worse, or the same? Did it create new problems?

Obstacles to decision-making

Some people find it difficult to make a decision on an option and move forward in the decision-making process. They may find excuses or put obstacles in the way, making it difficult to make decisions. By communicating effectively, the counsellor can work with the person to identify personal barriers that may be limiting their ability to decide on courses of action to help solve their problem.

Here is a list of possible obstacles or barriers to decision-making.

Obstacles or barriers to decision-making

▶ Problem-focused and not solution-focused. The person may require encouragement to look beyond their problems and be reminded of their goals for the future.

▶ The person may consider the personal risk to them or others required to make a decision may be too high.

▶ There may be feelings of shame regarding a particular behaviour they have/had, an emotional crisis they experienced or needing help to manage a problem.

▶ The decision is difficult or creates discomfort to themselves or to others.

▶ The fear and anxiety at getting a decision wrong. There is no way to know which is the best decision until it has been implemented and trialled.

▶ A person may have always deferred to another person for final decisions and have not had experience making decisions for themselves.

▶ A person may be used to ignoring advice: this could be based on bad past experiences.

▶ A person may be used to making decisions without considering the consequences of their actions (on themselves and others).

▶ The person may have lived with the problem for so long that, while they do not like experiencing it, they are used to it, and may have a high level of anxiety about the impact of change on their life.

Overcome a barrier to decision-making

The following information illustrates the process a person can take to identify and act on their emotional distress and overcome their barrier to finding a solution through actions.

Define the problem

Break the problem down into manageable chunks:

▶ What exactly is the problem?

▶ What are the negative effects of the problem?

▶ What harm is being done?

▶ How is it affecting people around me?

▶ What do I want to accomplish?

▶ What barriers to progress am I experiencing?

Review and evaluate

What happened? Were there unintended consequences? Was the problem resolved? If the solution didn't work, why not? Does it just need refinement or a whole new plan?

Monitor your emotions. Negative feelings may arise, such as feelings of frustration or failure. These feelings must be addressed or they will hinder the person's ability to find a solution.

Example:

▶ 'It felt good to talk honestly about my issues. I have arranged another appointment. At this stage I am happy with the outcome. If I don't like the service I receive I will try somewhere else.'

Example

Identify and explore factors that could influence the preference for, and ability to achieve, a course of action

Sahar has been referred to counselling after being through the courts to get an intervention order against her husband for domestic violence. One of the social workers assisting Sahar suggested she may benefit from speaking about her experiences with a person who has the time and skills to discuss this with her in detail.

Through discussion and questioning during counselling, it has become clear that Sahar is not decisive. On exploration, the counsellor identifies that Sahar used to be able to make decisions but she has lost confidence in her ability to do so. She explains that in the 12 years with her husband he gradually took over all of the decision-making so she was never allowed to make a decision. Her husband controlled all aspects of her home life and required her to do what she was told. She was not allowed to question him.

The counsellor spends time with Sahar encouraging her to make some small decisions with the aim of building her confidence. They examine the decision-making steps and after a few attempts, Sahar feels empowered when she makes her own decision and begins to build confidence in working through the steps and arriving at a decision.

Practice task 6

1. Provide two examples of factors that might influence a person's ability to make a decision.

....

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| Problem	Possible alternative courses of action	Consequences of actions
	3. Change work processes himself	▶ Increased workload ▶ Increased pressure/stress ▶ Poor relationship with other staff ▶ Changes may be implemented
86-year-old Chris is no longer able to care for himself at home	1. Stay at home with supports in place	▶ All supports are available ▶ Supports don't cover all tasks ▶ Expensive/not eligible for support
	2. Move into daughter's home for care	▶ Son-in-law not keen for father-in-law to move in ▶ House too small ▶ Money will be needed to spend on facilities ▶ No-one home during the day
	3. Move from home to an aged care residence with nursing care	▶ Expensive ▶ Chris is reluctant ▶ Chris moves away from his neighbours and friends ▶ Further distance from family
Casey, aged 14 years, binge drinks with her friends every weekend	1. Stop drinking	▶ Will improve health ▶ Save money ▶ Free up time for other pursuits
	2. Drink in moderation	▶ Will improve health ▶ Save money ▶ Can maintain friendship group
	3. Move to a new/ different group of friends	▶ May not find a new friendship group ▶ Will see old friends at school

Course of action: return to study after a long break

Requirements:

▶ Support of other family and friends, teachers

▶ Transport to and from campus

▶ Time to study

▶ Planning and organisational skills

▶ Time management skills

▶ Money for books, bills, transport, childcare

▶ Skills to apply for commonwealth assistance for childcare and study concessions

▶ Campus facilities like library and classrooms

Personal strengths: Determination, decisiveness, analytical, caring, communicative

Appropriateness and safety

A central principle of counselling is to recognise that, ultimately, it is the person receiving support who best knows how to help themselves. If a person wants to choose an option that the counsellor does not believe is sensible or appropriate, they need to respect the person's right to make their own decisions and their reasons for doing so. The counsellor can make suggestions and offer encouragement and support, but this should be done in a sensitive and respectful way. People have the right to make their own decisions and counsellors have an ethical responsibility to encourage them to do so.
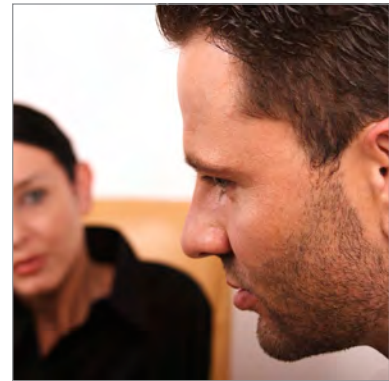
The only time a counsellor would try to persuade a person against a particular course of action is when they believe that the action will increase the risk of a person harming themselves or others. In this case, there is a duty of care to protect them and others and to break confidentiality if necessary to obtain help and prevent any harmful actions or events taking place. Counselling work relies on the belief that, given the right support, people can find solutions to their own problems and change negative patterns of behaviour. By respecting and valuing the person as a capable person, the counsellor can enhance their sense of competence and encourage them to draw on their own resources to choose the course of action that suits them best.

3B Encourage clients to decide on a course of action and to consider alternatives that could be used, if necessary

It can be encouraging if a person knows there are many possible solutions to their problems and that the counsellor is there to support them through the process. Once a course of action has been decided, the counsellor should check that the person is comfortable with the decisions made and the process that has led them to this course of action. At this point a contingency plan can be discussed and confirmed as a back-up course of action if required.

Depending on the counselling model used there will be different amounts of time spent in the exploring and understanding stages of the counselling process. Some counsellors are more action-orientated than others and their aim is to assist the person to work towards observable changes through making decisions on courses of actions.

Problem-solving

Problem-solving is a method used in various industries, such as business and leadership, as a way of making something positive out of a problem. It involves the process of finding a solution to something that needs to change and involves a multi-stage process for moving the problem from an issue or situation to a better circumstance or situation. In the counselling context, the problem-solving method begins with the identification of the problem. This approach can help the person with their current issue but can also be used to show how problems can be approached and resolved. The person might gain insights on how to deal with future problems using a problem-solving method.

When a person seeking counselling explains a problem or issue, the counsellor needs to use their communication micro-skills in active listening, reflecting feelings and open-ended questioning. In many cases a person may need help in finding a solution to a particular problem. The counsellor's role here is to help the person to understand the problem and the situation or circumstances surrounding it. Together they can explore alternative solutions, make some choices about preferences for particular courses of action and consider the likely consequences of possible courses of action. Using a problem-solving method involves cycling through choices until an appropriate one is identified.

4

Explore possible consequences of the alternative

The counsellor can offer other likely consequences that the person may not mention. The analysis of each alternative can take some time. This is an important part of problem-solving because the consequences can have a big impact on the person and the people around them.

Discussion around the feelings and emotions allows the person to explore these and may affect the possible course of action chosen by the person. The counsellor needs to pay attention to any alternatives being avoided because of the emotional issues it may cause. They can support the person to deal with these concerns.

5

Rate each alternative according to preference

For each alternative, the person can then rank them according to a numbering system or a rating scale such as excellent–poor. This assists the person to rank in preference order and examine how they rank against each other. The aim is to make it easier for the person to identify which alternatives they consider are best suited to them as a solution to their problem.

6

Make a decision and select the best alternative

The person should find it easier to identify the alternative they want. The counsellor can discuss the alternative and reinforce the process and positive points that have been raised for this alternative.

7

Assist the person to take action as required

The action planning process can then begin.

8

Evaluate action and resolution later as required

Once actions have been put in place, the counsellor can work with the person to evaluate the success or otherwise of the action plan and develop alternative actions as needed. The person needs to be reminded that there are always other options and alternatives available and that requirements needed to meet goals can sometimes change.

Action planning

No matter what problem-solving method is used, there will always be a requirement for the person to select a particular course of action. Once a firm decision has been made then the counsellor and the person can explore how they will go about implementing the course of action chosen. This involves setting out a path of action that implements the decisions made to solve their problem. It requires the counsellor to assist the person to translate the identified problem and the desired goals into steps that can be taken and put into action.

Action planning can be formalised by documenting it so the person has a record of what needs to occur during implementation. An action plan may outline the steps the person needs to take in the short-term (before the next counselling session) and/or over the long-term (next months).

Summary

1. Rational models have a series of sequential steps that involve a thinking process where various options are rated according to potential advantages and disadvantages.

2. There are several adaptations of this idea and some use different methods of presenting the advantages and disadvantages of each course of action.

3. If a person wants to choose an option that the counsellor does not believe is sensible or appropriate, they need to respect the person's right to make their own decisions and their reasons for doing so.

4. It can be encouraging if a person knows there are many possible solutions to their problems and that the counsellor is there to support them through the process.

5. Once a course of action has been decided, the counsellor should check that the person is comfortable with the decisions made and the process that has led them to this course of action.

6. In the counselling context, the problem-solving method begins with the identification of the problem.

7. Action planning can be formalised by documenting it so the person has a record of what needs to occur during implementation.

8. An end goal for the counsellor is self-efficacy, which is when the person has a belief in their ability to succeed and accomplish their chosen course of action.

9. If external factors are likely to affect the person's ability to work towards a particular course of action, then a contingency plan is helpful for those occurrences.

10. The role of the counsellor and the service provider is to support the person through counselling and review and reflect on their need for ongoing support.

11. All workplaces have policies that dictate how information is gathered, who receives information about a person's progress, how the information is stored and who may access it.