

## **Counseling Skills of Counselor who deal with COVID-positive patients**

**Dr. Samyak Makwana**

Assistant Professor, Psychology  
R R Lalan College, Bhuj (Gujarat)

When a mental health professional try to manage the COVID patient, perticularly its mental health. Such counseling skills require for that. Following essential skills would be needed in counselor.

Counselling is a helping approach that highlights a client's emotional and intellectual experience, such as how a client feels and what they think about the problem they have sought help for. Effective counselling would need the following skills:

- 1. Attending:** It is beneficial for a family when they are attended to patiently. Their concerns are heard and spoken to gently and with respect. Statements like "I am here to listen to you", "I would like to know more about what your concerns are"
- 2. Active and carefully listening,** "what person is saying" listen first to understand their challenges holistically.
- 3.. Using open-ended questions** like "What is going on in your mind?", "What about this situation brings worries to you?", "What are some things that you find helpful in dealing with this situation" help elicit client's information in a more detailed manner and helps them express themselves well. Additional close-ended questions with yes or no responses can be asked to seek clarity on specific issues.
- 4. Demonstrating empathy:** Helping clients feel supported in these difficult and isolating times is essential in counselling. A counsellor can demonstrate empathy through statements like "I notice that this is an extremely challenging time for you and your family", "I notice your care and concern for your family through these steps you have taken". Through this, the counsellor can connect with the clients and provide emotional support.
- 5. Assuring confidentiality:** Providing clear idea to the client about confidentiality and their conversations will stay confidential. It helps clients to open up about their worries. It must be explained to the client that their conversations will not be shared, recorded or used for any purpose with anyone by the counsellor. Only in times of risk to their life or the life of another person will the counsellor, with the client's consent, share only the required details to an emergency contact person or required authorities.
- 6. Using simple language:** Counselling is more effective when the counsellor can communicate in a simple language with the client, use examples relevant to their life, provide strategies possible in exercise by the client and explain concepts in the language suited to the client.

**7. Psycho-educating:** This involves providing basic facts, information and reliable resources to the clients regarding their concerns. For COVID related information, they can be directed to resources like WHO, CDC, United Nations and Government of India. Ensure that you share information clearly, without any conflicting messages and politely check if the client has understood the information.

**8. Assessing risks to safety and crisis management if required (through referral):** Assessing if the client is experiencing any thoughts about harming themselves, wishing that things were over, or has any suicidal ideations or plans, also checking if there are risks due to violence or abuse, any use of substances that might put the client in the way of risk in any way. Based on the risk assessment, ensuring that the safety of the client is prioritised.

**9. Addressing issues of stigma and discrimination, if any**

- a. Identify what kind of response do the neighbours have towards the person and their family members
- b. Provide them with correct information about COVID spread and resources that they can take home and show to relatives and friends
- c. Provide them with emergency contact numbers in case of incidence of attack or violence from the neighbourhood

**10. Making suitable referrals and connecting with other support services:** Counsellors can keep contacts of the following authorities in case of emergency and provide them to clients if needed: A Police /Medical / Women / De-addiction Support Centre/ Child /Geriatric Helpline Number /Mental Health Helpline Numbers

Counsellors can also identify specific needs of the clients and support them in identifying local support services for the same. These could include medical and grocery delivery numbers.

**11. Problem-solving:** Clients reach out to counsellors with many different problems. Counsellors can take them through a process of problem-solving through the following steps:

- a. Identification and creating a problem statement.
- b. Explore when the problem has existed and how severe it is
- c. Identify who all are a part of the problem
- d. The different steps that the client took to solve the problem before coming for therapy
- e. Identify which steps were most effective
- f. Assess the pros and cons of those steps and provide additional steps from your side if needed
- g. Explore how the client wants to try the steps again by focusing on the pros and reducing the cons
- h. Identify what the expected and realistic outcomes of these steps are
- i. Help the client visualise the expected and realistic outcomes

**12. Generating realistic hope and bolstering strengths:** Every individual has an inherent ability to deal with life's challenges and cope with them. Providing false hopes can do more damage to a person than a difficult

reality. Counsellors can also help clients identify their strengths, resilience and help them tap into their support systems. Statements like-

- a. "We can try our best to stay safe and take all precautions to keep ourselves healthy",
- b. "I am not sure of the answer to your question, but I can look up reliable resources and get back to you",
- c. "What are some things you do or remember when you feel very low or beaten down" are hope generating yet realistic statements.

**13. Activity scheduling:** Counsellors can help clients create a healthy routine by mapping their day. Following aspects can be ensured in the day:

- Sleep hygiene- ensuring time for an adequate routine sleep cycle of 7-8 hours.
- Avoid using electronic devices such as mobiles, laptops at least 2 hours before bedtime. The blue light from screens can interfere with melatonin (sleep producing hormone) production—making it difficult to fall asleep. If the use of the device is unavoidable, work in '*night light*' mode.
- De-stress before bed by taking a relaxing bath, reading or deep breathing.
- Physical activity in the form of exercise or yoga
- Deep breathing or progressive muscle relaxation
- Fun family time and connecting with loved ones over phone calls
- Scheduled time for work

The counsellors (or their supervisors) need to liaise with the medical officers / local authorities in charge of these hospitals to ensure the amenities mentioned earlier.