

WELCOME TO  
HGW317/517  
DIRECT PRACTICE 1  
INTRODUCTION TO THE  
STRENGTHS PERSPECTIVE  
AND INTERVIEWING  
WEEK 7



Unit Coordinator: Dr Torna Pitman

## This week's lecture

- Introducing the strengths perspective
- Comparing Counselling Models and the Social Work Interview
- Preparing for an interview
- Structure of a Social Work Interview

## The Strengths Perspective is ...

- ...a philosophical, moral and pragmatic approach used predominantly by social workers.
- ... able to be applied in a variety of social work interventions.
- ... an empowering alternative to the problem based therapy which has traditionally described people in terms of pathology, deficits, dysfunction, disease and diagnoses.
- ... characterised by a “lexicon of strengths” which highlights people’s resources, coping mechanisms and resilience, thereby departing from the “lexicon of pathology” which serves to stigmatise, stereotype, devalue and oppress people.

## Promoting Optimism and Hope

Dennis Saleebey, a key exponent of the strength perspective, states:



*“Practising from a strengths orientation means this – everything you do as a social worker will be predicated, in some way, on helping to discover and embellish, explore and exploit clients’ strengths and resources in the service of assisting them to achieve their goals, realise their dreams and shed the irons of their own inhibitions and misgivings and society’s domination” (Saleebey,2001, p.1)*

## The Strengths Perspective

*... obligates workers to understand that however downtrodden or sick, individuals have survived (and in some cases) thrived. They have taken steps, summoned up resources and coped. We need to know what they have done, how they have learned from doing it, what resources (inner and outer) were available in their struggle to surmount their troubles. People are always working on their situations, even if just deciding to be resigned to them; as helpers we must tap into that work, elucidate it, find and build on its possibilities.*

(Saleebey, 1992, pp. 171-172).

## The Strengths Perspective

Basic assumptions that influence the approach of the worker using this perspective include:

- All people possess ideas and capacities that can be used to improve the quality of their lives.
- Clients are the experts in their own lives.
- There are a variety of resources even in the most challenged environments.
- Individuals almost always know what is right for them.
- Helping that is useful occurs “within the confines of a personal, friendly, supportive relationship”,
- The better it is for the worker and client if the relationship is egalitarian.
- Motivation is increased by emphasizing strengths as defined by the client.
- Discovering strengths is a process of collaboration between client and helper.
- Focusing on strengths directs the helper away from blaming/pathologising.
- All environments contain resources.
- The future is untapped the past is full.

## A social worker with a strengths perspective

... approaches a client with hope, optimism, curiosity and respect because the person is considered competent, resourceful and capable of addressing and solving their own issues.



## Comparing Counselling and the Strength Focussed Social Work Model

### Problem focused models

- Pathology/diagnosis/what is wrong
- Passive client role
- The professional is the expert and the client takes the position of not knowing
- Professional power is exclusive

### Strengths Focused/Social Work Model

- Potential of People
- Active client role
- The Client is the expert  
Social worker takes the position of not knowing
- Power is shared in collaboration/inclusive

## Preparing for an Interview

### □ Give consideration to the interview environment

- The interview context e.g. office, home, prison, hospital, community centre...
- Privacy (door closed, blinds closed, etc)
- Safety (waiting room, etc)
- Comfort (access for wheelchairs, seating arrangements, temperature, toys for children, etc)
- Tidy and clean (remove used cups and rubbish, etc)
- Time (diary or appointment book with record of (1) name, (2) contact number and (3) referral source; clock for time management)
- Equipment (telephone, tissue box, whiteboard, notebook & pen)
- Aim for no interruptions (noise, phone calls, door message to say room occupied, etc)
- Posters conveying a positive / inclusive message
- The way seating arrangements are set up

## Preparing for an Interview

### □ Give consideration to the ...

- agency's safety protocols and policies relating to such issues as home visits, duress alarms, transport, etc
  - Don't put yourself or others at risk
    - What are the agency's protocols and policies?
    - Are you or anyone else feeling threatened?
    - What do you need to happen so that you and others feel safe?
    - Do you need to talk to your supervisor?
- appropriateness of physical contact.

## Structure of a Social Work Interview

- **A Collaborative Process using social work values such as empathy, respect etc..**
- **Client-centred and focused on client need**
- **Based on transparency, and the 'openness' of interviewer**
- **Be clear about your role and the purpose of the interview**
  
- **Beginning Phase**-focus is on engaging the person/developing a relationship
- **Exploring Phase**-focus is on exploring and clarifying the issue
- **Planning Phase**-focus is on developing a pathway or course of action
- **Ending Phase**- focus is on checking the interview had met the client's needs and the plan is clear and appropriate

## Beginning Phase

**Beginning Phase of the Interview** - Focus is on Engaging the person/developing relationship

Joining/engagement/contracting/developing rapport/forming an alliance and co-operative working relationship (various terms used according to the model used)

- Initial introduction and welcome (What would you like to be called?)
- **Discusses** the workers approach and session format (Can I share with you how I work?) Also discuss what the person needs from you.
- Explain the clients 'rights' e.g. clients can stop the session at any time; they can read the workers notes/assist in writing them; they can ask questions to clarify information; they can request a change of process/direction of interview; they can clarify the boundaries and limitations of confidentiality.
- Explore what the person would like to get out of the session (what might be different for the person when they leave your office).

## Beginning Phase

- Establish a relationship
  - Engage with interest and warmth
  - Introductions and confirm client's identity
  - Small talk
  - Address confidentiality
  - Clarify how you work
  - Contract and facilitate co-operation - clarify what the person wants from the session ie what they hope to achieve from their work with you.
  - Briefly explore what has brought them to see you.

## Exploring Phase

### **Exploring the concern or issue – Focus is on exploring and clarifying the issue**

- Gathering information (through exploring the story/concern that brought the person to see you).
- Use social and emotional empathy- active listening skills-
- Work with persons story and treat person as the expert
- Non-directive
- Explore the persons context, thoughts and feelings
- Explore relevant aspects of the social context

# Exploring Phase-Skills for ‘Not Knowing’

## 1. Active Listening Skills

**The most important thing is to assist the person to be come clearer about what has brought them to see you and what they might have been hoping for and what they would like to see happen (i.e. planning for action)**

### □ ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS

- **Attending**
  - connecting/joining with the client
  - applying personal qualities
  - acknowledging body language
  - Creating rapport – establishing a relationship
- **Following**
  - Door openers
  - Minimal encouragers
  - Infrequent questions
  - Attentive silence
- **Reflecting**
  - Paraphrasing-relating back in your own words what you think you heard the other person say
  - Reflecting feelings
  - Reflecting meanings
  - Summative reflections-used to draw together the various issues that have been discussed
  - Reframing, normalising and validating

# Exploring phase-Skills for ‘Not Knowing’

## 2. Solution Focussed Listening Skills

### □ SOLUTIONS FOCUSED LISTENING SKILLS

- **Listening** – suspend our own frame of reference. Focus on what appears important to the client. Picking up on exceptions/strengths.
- **Formulating questions** - remove embedded values from your questions. Form questions from the clients last answer/dialogue. i.e. come from the clients frame of reference.
- **Explore Client Meaning** – pick up on words that might be ambiguous for example
- **Getting Details** – clarifying questions. Assist client to explore meaning in detail. (thoughts, feelings/behaviours)
- **Explore what the person might have tried-** in response to this issue/concern
- **Use of active listening skills**
  - Echoing Client Key Words. – Min encouragers,
  - Open questions
  - Summarising
  - Paraphrasing
  - Use of Silence
- **Workers non-verbal behaviour/Noticing clients non-verbals**
- **Noticing Process** – congruency,
- **Complimenting** – focus on strengths and past successes
- **Affirming clients perceptions**
- **Natural/Social empathy**
- **Normalising**



## Planning Phase

### **Planning a Course of action/Goal Setting – Focus is on developing a pathway or course of action**

- Identifying a process/goals or a plan characterised by a theme of future possibility and exploring alternatives
- Identify (as relevant) referral opportunities – resources- etc

## Ending the Interview

### **Ending the Interview**

- Summarise interview
- Check out if the person has got what they needed from session
- What can be done about it if they haven't

## REFERENCES

- Saleebey, Dennis, 2009. The Strengths Perspective. (Fifth Edition). Pearson Education Inc. USA.
- Harms, Louise. 2007. Working with People. Oxford University Press. Australia.
- OHara, A and Weber, Z. 2006. Skills for Human Service Practice. Oxford University Press. Australia.