



## **Chapter 3: ATTENDING AND EMPATHY SKILLS**

### **CHAPTER GOALS AND COMPETENCY OBJECTIVES**

#### **Awareness and Knowledge**

- ▲ Develop a solid understanding of how attending behavior, attention, and selective attention form the basis for all counseling and therapy.
- ▲ Understand how basics of neuroscience explain and expand the importance of attention and empathy.
- ▲ Learn how teaching microskills of listening is a useful therapeutic strategy.

#### **Skills and Action**

- ▲ Increase your skill in listening to clients, and communicate that interest.
- ▲ Establish an empathic relationship with your clients.
- ▲ Adapt your attending patterns to the needs of varying individual and cultural styles of listening and talking.
- ▲ Develop recovery skills that you can use when you are lost or confused in the session. Even the most advanced professional doesn't always know what is happening. When you don't know what to do, attend!

### **CONTENTS OF CHAPTER 3**

- ▲ Introduction: Attending Behavior: The Foundation Skill of Listening
- ▲ Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills of Attending Behavior and Empathy Skills
- ▲ Empathy: Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills
- ▲ Neuroscience and Empathy
- ▲ Observe: Attending Behavior and Empathy in Action
- ▲ Attending and Empathy in Challenging Situations
- ▲ The Samurai Effect, Magic, and the Importance of Practice to Mastery
- ▲ Action: Key Points and Practice of Attending Behavior and Empathy Skills
- ▲ Practice and Feedback: Individual, Group, and Microsupervision
- ▲ Portfolio of Competencies and Personal Reflection

### **CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

This chapter presents the fundamentals of counseling and psychotherapy. Without attending skills, an empathic relationship cannot develop. Many beginning helpers inappropriately strive to solve the client's issues and challenges in the first 5 minutes of the session by giving premature advice and suggestions.

Please set one early goal for yourself: allow your clients to talk. Observe closely how they are behaving, verbally and nonverbally. Your clients may have spent several years developing their concerns, issues, and life challenges before consulting you. Listen first, last, and always.

We have added more explicit material on how to teach microskills, particularly attending behavior. This is a basic strategy we have used successfully for years, and we believe introducing it early may help students think more clearly about the psychoeducational role of interviewing and counseling and how specific transfer of skills to counseling and therapy can be made using this chapter. We have also included new material on advanced uses of these attending skills, which has been designed to meet the needs of some advanced graduate students who may all too easily skip over this important clinical tool.

Also in this chapter, we introduce the three types of empathic understanding: subtractive empathy, basic empathy, and additive empathy. Chapter interview transcripts are evaluated based on this scale.

The positive asset search and wellness are critical for helping students frame client issues and concerns more positively, and this needs constant emphasis. At this point, students are ready to look at the quality of their responses, and the basic ideas of empathy may be introduced. Finally, the five-stage structure of the interview provides conceptual and behavioral practice in skill integration. Students gain a great deal of satisfaction from finding that they can conduct an entire interview using only listening skills.

You may also want to assign portions of the MindTap, which includes the full chapter. Standard aspects are flashcards highlighting key points to facilitate student learning, interactive case studies, video clips, and Web links. In addition, key forms for this chapter may be found there in downloadable form.

## **MINDTAP FOR INTENTIONAL INTERVIEWING AND COUNSELING: FACILITATING CLIENT DEVELOPMENT IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY**

MindTap for *Intentional Interviewing and Counseling: Facilitating Client Development in a Multicultural Society*, 9<sup>th</sup> edition, engages and empowers students to produce their best work. By seamlessly integrating course material with videos, activities, apps, and much more, MindTap creates a unique learning path that fosters increased comprehension and efficacy. Each chapter of the MindTap includes activities to help students answer the following questions:

- Why am I here?
  - Chapter opening polling activity
- What am I learning?
  - Chapter reading
  - Quiz: Did I get it?
- How do I practice what I've learned? (various activities included for each chapter)
  - Video activities
  - Practice activities
  - Case studies

- Helper Studio
- What does this mean to me?
  - Reflection activity

## DEMONSTRATIONS, FILMS, AND VIDEO SUGGESTIONS

- ▲ Live instructor demonstration.
- ▲ Videos developed by students and ourselves over the years. Consider the possibility of saving good modeling videos developed in your classes as examples.
- ▲ *Basic Attending Skills* has a modeling video on attending behavior. It also includes a demonstration on discussion of cultural differences and a concluding section on cultural issues and attending skills.
- ▲ *Counseling Children: A Microskills Approach* by Mary Bradford Ivey shows listening skills with children. Students should especially note Mary's lively style, the importance of smiling and warmth, and the importance of repeating key words and paraphrasing constantly to younger children.
- ▲ *Barriers to Cross-Cultural Counseling* by Derald Wing Sue. This video is one of the best demonstrations of how cultures approach the helping process differently. Derald Wing Sue discusses how microskills play themselves out in different cultures.
- ▲ *Culturally-Competent Counseling and Therapy: Live Demonstrations*. This is a series of five demonstration videos presenting innovative counseling approaches with people of African descent (Thomas Parham and Adisa Ajamu), Asian American people (Fred Leong, Gayle Iwamasa, and Derald Wing Sue), Latina/o people (Luis Vasquez, Azara Santiago-Rivera, and Elsa Orjuela), Native American people (Art and Nora Martinez), and White people (Michael D'Andrea, Bryan Kim, and Judy Daniels). This series could be used at many points during the course to highlight various multicultural counseling issues. Each video in the series is challenging and generates extensive student discussion.
- ▲ *Video Activity: Empathic Response, Exercise 1*. Watch the video and answer the questions.
- ▲ *Video Activity: Empathic Response, Exercise 2*. Watch the video and answer the questions.

The video recommendations mentioned here are available from Alexander Street Press/Microtraining. The website is <http://alexanderstreet.com/products/counseling-and-therapy-video-series>. ASP/Microtraining offers a constant new stream of videos that you will want to examine. You can contact them for a free exploratory session to preview some videos.

## CLASS PROCEDURES

The basic microtraining procedures for attending behavior may be found below. This basic model has been used many times with consistent success and is supported by extensive research data.

For enrichment and additional emphasis, the following additions may be made.

1. *Lecture/discussion/demonstration of individual and cultural differences in attending styles.* The instructional reading provides several specific examples of how people differ in these dimensions, which may be reviewed in a variety of ways. Students must become aware of both

individual differences and group differences. The Microtraining videotapes *Culturally-Competent Counseling and Therapy: Live Demonstrations* may be especially helpful. We must also remember that each client is different, and we should not stereotype any individual, regardless of cultural background.

2. *Elaboration on the four basic attending dimensions.* We find it helpful to divide students into pairs and have one student talk about different topics while the other observes the speaker's eyes for changes in pupil dilation. In a similar fashion, each aspect of attending behavior may be studied in more detail. The goal of these exercises is to reiterate the importance of attending behavior and the fact that simple competence in the four dimensions can be followed by in-depth skills in client and interviewer observation.

3. *The value of nonattention and silence.* It is not always appropriate to attend to a client. Attending to depressed behavior tends to make the depressed individual more depressed. Students need to be aware that continuous attending is not always appropriate.

4. *Empathy.* Students value the concept of putting one's self "into another person's shoes" or viewing the world "through someone else's eyes and ears." Carl Rogers' (1957, 1961) contributions should be discussed because he brought the importance of empathy to our attention. He made it clear that that we need to listen carefully, enter the world of the client, and communicate that we understand the client's world as the client sees and experiences it.

5. *Social skills training and microskills.* Our research, counseling, and clinical experience have revealed that training in attending skills is useful for many client populations, even those with severe clinical depression. You may wish to encourage students to test this process in real or role-played sessions. It is helpful for clients with mild and severe clinical depression.

6. *Becoming a samurai.* Students find this concept helpful as they start practicing skills. Discussion of possible skill decrement as one emphasizes single skills can help students know what to expect, but long-term skill practice makes a real difference. A deliberate and conscious return to use of only attending behavior has helped us to sort out complex situations many times.

7. *Chapter exercises.* The exercises at the end of each chapter and in the MindTap offer additional possibilities for enriching the classroom experience. Our classes have appreciated and appear to have profited from homework exercises. A computer overview of a segment of the MindTap in class can lead to some interesting discussions. Many professors like to go over certain segments with the class by viewing the MindTap via their laptop and a projector.

8. *Small-group practice.* As this is the first small-group practice in specific skills, follow the guidelines carefully. Microtraining practice works well, but it can be confusing at first because of the many specific steps that must be followed during work with larger groups. It is important to go over the concepts of effective feedback (pages 85–86) as this seems to facilitate ease of talking and may help prevent overevaluative and destructive comments.

9. *Teaching attending behavior.* You may wish to discuss and/or demonstrate how attending behavior is important in social skills and cognitive behavioral therapy.

10. *Discussion of video activities provided in MindTap.* The videos offered in MindTap provide multiple ways to present the listening skills and empathic responding. Each of the videos can be used to promote class discussion of the chapter's key concepts.

11. *The samurai.* A useful exercise is to ask students to share their experiences of playing a musical instrument, driving, learning mechanical skills, ballet, skiing, and other sports around skill practice and feelings associated with separating out a single skill for emphasis. The idea of achieving competence through mastery of skills is a long-time part of the educational process. Time spent in careful practice eventually becomes second nature. The originally artificial becomes real.

## DISCUSSION OF COMPETENCY PRACTICE EXERCISES

### Individual Practice

**Exercise 3.1 Deliberate attending and nonattending.** This is an exercise we have often assigned as homework so that students can see the possible generalizations of the framework beyond counseling and interview practice. Specifically, students are asked to practice listening/attending to one or more individuals during the week and then alternate attending behavior with nonattending behavior. The effects of this simple exercise are powerful and instructive. At the same time, we worry a bit about the ethics of doing the exercise without informing the other person. Thus, we suggest that students ask a friend to talk with them, informing the friend ahead of time that they are conducting an experiment. Debriefing the volunteer follows this.

**Exercise 3.2 Observation of Verbal and Nonverbal Patterns.** We intend this as an exercise to help students note visual and eye contact patterns, vocal qualities, verbal tracking, attentive body language, and movement harmonics.

### Group Practice and Microsupervision

The framework presented here is the result of more than 35 years of microcounseling clinical practice and research. We have found that the format can be used successfully for individual training or in groups as large as 200. We require that the Feedback Form (see Box 3.4) be turned in as part of homework or the student's Portfolio of Competencies. This gives us a consistent week-to-week indication of students' progress as seen by others.

**Exercise 3.3 Using Attending Skills.** This is a good homework exercise or it can be used to vary classroom procedures. The focus is on the practice of counseling skills and the observation of attending skills. Use of the both the Client Feedback Form and the Attending Behavior Feedback Form is required.

### Portfolio of Competencies and Personal Reflection

The questions here are self-explanatory. The four levels of competence (awareness and knowledge, basic competence, intentional competence, and psychoeducational teaching competence) are particularly important in determining a student's ability to work with the material. In the early work in microcounseling, we stressed basic competence. Here the student is

simply expected to perform the skills. Intentional competence (active competence) is a higher level. Can the student trainee produce specific results in client verbal and nonverbal behavior as a result of counseling and therapy interventions? We have found that student performance in microtraining workshops and courses has markedly improved when intentional results and accountability are emphasized.

If you use the MindTap to monitor students' levels of performance, spend extra time during the first 3 weeks of the course to ensure that all students understand the specifics and the "how" of the assignment. When we assumed that everyone understood, there was always someone who couldn't get things together. If everyone is patient, we'll all get there!

The difficulty is providing evidence that a student has demonstrated intentional competence with a concept. When classes are small, we have used audiotape cassettes each week and listened specifically to determine whether intentional competence has been demonstrated. With larger classes, we ask for transcript examples of each competence item. In some cases, we have found it works very well to have a teaching assistant "attest" to the quality of a student's competence level. The emphasis on intentional competence is related to the student's ability to predict what will happen as the result of an open question, paraphrase, or other skill; and if the prediction is true, to move on. If the prediction doesn't work out, the student should attempt a different intervention to achieve the same outcome.

Working in Australia, under ideal conditions, we had 16 students and three graduate assistants. There, we could watch and supervise each student as he or she conducted sessions before a one-way mirror and was videotaped. We have talked with several colleagues who have used a similar approach.

With attending behavior, we especially look to see whether students can stay focused on the client's topic without changing topics. When necessary, we like to see students change the topic through inattention. These concepts have been especially helpful for advanced graduate students and extend the relevance of the book to those who have high levels of skill.

For those who use this book with practicum courses, the demonstration of various competence levels in practicum role-plays or real interviews provides a new dimension to the experience.

## **KEY POINTS**

- ▲ Central Goals of Listening
- ▲ Four Aspects of Attending
- ▲ Attending Behavior
- ▲ Listening and Individual and Multicultural Differences
- ▲ Attending Behavior Research
- ▲ Empathy
- ▲ The Neuroscience of Active Listening and Empathy
- ▲ Training as Treatment
- ▲ Practice Is of the Essence

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. How comfortable are you and others you know with varying degrees of eye contact and patterns of body language? Think about cultural or group differences you have observed and then describe a situation in which you have adapted (or thought about adapting) your typical level of eye contact or style of body language for a specific individual or group.
2. Under what circumstances would silence be appropriate as a response in a counseling session? Illustrate with an example.

## **WEB LINKS**

### [Exploring Nonverbal Communication](#)

Several interesting photos illustrating the concepts discussed in the book and MindTap are provided. Good information on cultural differences is provided as well.

<http://nonverbal.ucsc.edu/>

### [Attending Behavior: Basic to Communication](#)

An excellent summary of many of the points of this MindTap and the book.

<http://faculty-staff.ou.edu/M/Lawrence.J.Marshall-1/InterviewingNotes.html>

### [Nonverbal Dictionary](#)

Useful website devoted to nonverbal communication.

<http://center-for-nonverbal-studies.org/>