CHCCSL007
Support clients in decision-making processes
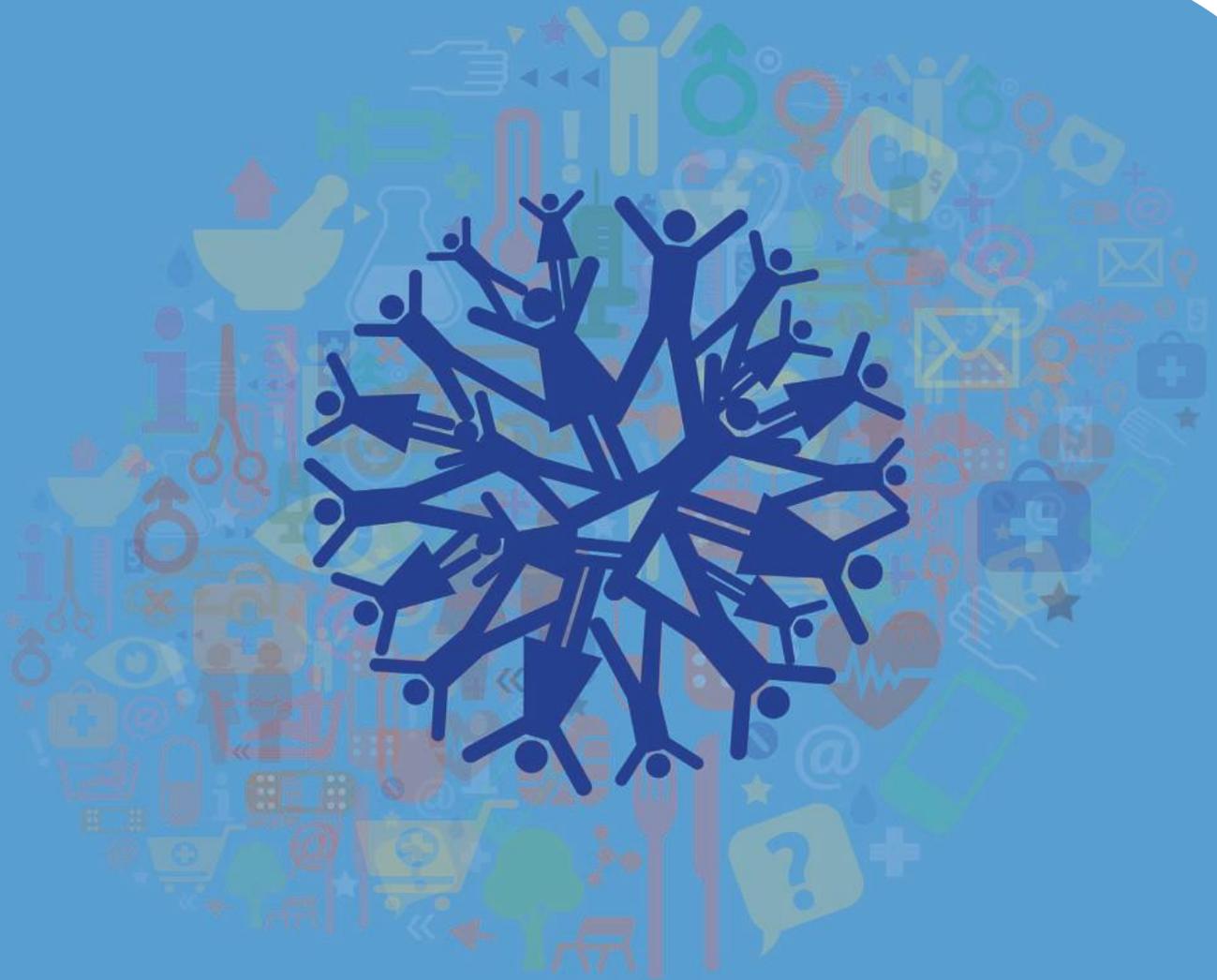
Release 1

Learner guide

aspire
learning resources

CHCCSL007

Support counselling clients in decision-making processes

Release 1

Learner guide

Aspire Version 1.2

Aspire
learning resources

Version control and modification history

Version	Release date	Modification
Release 1, version 1.1	April 2017	First release
Release 1, version 1.2	February 2019	Minor corrections as part of our continuous improvement program. Updated broken URL links.

Contact details

Participant

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Start date: ....

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Email: ....

Work location

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Postal address: ....

Workplace supervisor name: ....

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Contents

Before you begin

This learner guide is based on the unit of competency *CHCCSL007 Support counselling clients in decision-making processes*, Release 1. Your trainer or training organisation must give you information about this unit of competency as part of your training program. You can access the unit of competency and assessment requirements at: www.training.gov.au.

How to work through this learner guide

This learner guide contains a number of features that will assist you in your learning. Your trainer will advise which parts of the learner guide you need to read, and which practice tasks and learning checkpoints you need to complete. The features of this learner guide are detailed in the following table.

Feature of the learner guide	How you can use each feature
Learning content	▶ Read each topic in this learner guide. If you come across content that is confusing, make a note and discuss it with your trainer. Your trainer is in the best position to offer assistance. It is very important that you take on some of the responsibility for the learning you will undertake.
Examples and case studies	▶ Examples of completed documents that may be used in a workplace are included in this learner guide. You can use these examples as models to help you complete practice tasks and learning checkpoints. ▶ Case studies highlight learning points and provide realistic examples of workplace situations.
Practice tasks	▶ Practice tasks give you the opportunity to put your skills and knowledge into action. Your trainer will tell you which practice tasks to complete.
Video clips	▶ Where QR codes appear, learners can use smartphones and other devices to access video clips relating to the content. For information about how to download a QR reader app or accessing video on your device, please visit our website: www.aspirelr.com.au/help
Summary	▶ Key learning points are provided at the end of each topic.
Learning checkpoints	▶ There is a learning checkpoint at the end of each topic. Your trainer will tell you which learning checkpoints to complete. These checkpoints give you an opportunity to check your progress and apply the skills and knowledge you have learnt.

Foundation skills

As you complete learning using this guide, you will be developing the foundation skills relevant for this unit. Foundation skills are the language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills and the employability skills required for participation in modern workplaces and contemporary life.

The following table outlines specific foundation skills noted for your learning in this learner guide.

Foundation skill area	Foundation skill description
Learning	▶ Understanding your job role, organisational procedures and legal responsibilities ▶ Managing your work and seeing how well you are going and making goals for yourself at work ▶ Seeking professional development opportunities for continuous improvement
Reading	▶ Understanding how documents are presented and being able to navigate through documents ▶ Understanding industry- and job-specific terminology ▶ Interpreting key information in relevant documents ▶ Understanding routine workplace checklists and documentation
Writing	▶ Planning, drafting and writing reports and documents ▶ Communicating through written letters, email and online ▶ Recording progress; reporting incidents
Oral communication	▶ Clarifying instructions ▶ Providing information ▶ Supporting others through encouragement, negotiation and conflict resolution ▶ Using body language to model desired behaviour and responding to others' body language
Numeracy	▶ Calculating costs, weights, measurements of height and distance ▶ Interpreting measurements
Teamwork	▶ Working well with other people by cooperating, collaborating, encouraging and building rapport
Planning and organising	▶ Planning your workload and commitments ▶ Implementing tasks ▶ Completing work on time ▶ Knowing how to deal with hazards and risks
Making decisions	▶ Understanding and applying decision-making processes ▶ Reviewing the impact of your decisions
Problem-solving	▶ Identifying problems ▶ Working out how to fix a problem using problem-solving processes and reviewing the outcome
Innovation and creation	▶ Recognising opportunities to develop and apply new ideas ▶ Generating ideas by thinking of new ways to do something ▶ Making suggestions to improve work

Foundation skill area	Foundation skill description
Technology and digital literacy	▶ Efficiently using digitally based technologies and systems correctly and safely ▶ Accessing, organising and presenting information ▶ Using equipment correctly and safely

What do you already know?

Use the following table to identify what you may already know. This may assist you to work out what to focus on in your learning.

Topic	Key outcomes	Rate your confidence in each section
Topic 1 Assist clients to clarify goals and requirements	1A Explain clearly to clients the policy on record-keeping and confidentiality	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	1B Encourage clients to identify and explore their aims, requirements and ideas	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	1C Assist clients to identify practical goals and requirements and discuss how goals might be modified based on strengths	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	1D Identify situations where aims and requirements cannot be met, and make referrals for guidance and support	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
Topic 2 Explore options with clients	2A Identify collaboratively potential courses of action for meeting individual aims and requirements	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	2B Identify and explore factors which could influence the preference for, and ability to achieve, a course of action	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	2C Determine and explore features and likely consequences of possible courses of action	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	2D Check the client's understanding of what is likely to be involved in each possible course of action	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident

Topic	Key outcomes	Rate your confidence in each section
Topic 3 Support the client to reach decisions	3A Assist clients to assess advantages and disadvantages of each course of action, and their appropriateness for meeting requirements	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	3B Encourage clients to decide on a course of action and to consider alternatives that could be used, if necessary	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	3C Document decisions and agreed ongoing support within organisational guidelines	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident

Topic	Key outcomes	Rate your confidence in each section
Topic 3 Support the client to reach decisions	3A Assist clients to assess	

Topic 1

In this topic you will learn how to:

1A Explain clearly to clients the policy on record-keeping and confidentiality

1B Encourage clients to identify and explore their aims, requirements and ideas

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

1D Identify situations where aims and requirements cannot be met, and make referrals for guidance and support

Assist clients to clarify goals and requirements

Your role as a counsellor is to assist the client (or person receiving support) by establishing rapport and a relationship that will encourage the person to open up and discuss their issues. Often a person will present at counselling with a problem that requires a decision to be made. The person may need support and assistance because they cannot decide what to do. Having an independent person who guides them through the decision-making process can be helpful.

With encouragement the person can explore their aims, ideas and identify the requirements needed to achieve their goals. If the person can imagine how things might be in the future, this can form the groundwork for making decisions and making an action plan that will influence and potentially change their future in a positive way.

1A Explain clearly to clients the policy on record-keeping and confidentiality

People receiving support need to be reminded that anything that is discussed in the counselling session will be kept confidential. All case history notes, referrals, plans and agreements used as a part of the counselling process will be stored and accessed by only those people who have permission to do so.

In order for the person to share personal information, feelings and ideas with the counsellor, the person needs to feel secure in the knowledge that what is discussed is bound by policies and procedures that ensure privacy and confidentiality.

Explain in clear language

As a counsellor, you should be able to apply specialist interpersonal and interviewing skills to establish rapport and encourage the person to share their story. An important skill of the counsellor is their ability to use different communication techniques to explain concepts in clear and concise language. The person receiving counselling should be encouraged to ask questions and the counsellor should be checking for understanding to ensure they both share the same meaning.

Counsellors should reassure the person about the organisational and legislative policies regarding privacy and disclosure to encourage them to discuss personal concerns and place them at ease. It is likely that the organisational and legislative policies and regulations regarding confidentiality and privacy of personal health records have already been clarified in previous sessions and as a part of the initial counselling interview. However, this information is important to the person and can be reinforced at various stages in the counselling process.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is critical to work in counselling. A counsellor has access to privileged and sensitive information about the person they are working with. Reassuring the person about the way confidential information is handled can have a significant impact on the counselling process: the person must be able to trust that what is said in the session will remain confidential.

There will be policies and procedures about where reports and documents should be filed or stored, so they can be easily located and referred to. Many organisations use

electronic systems that record a person's details, referrals, assessments and case notes in a client database. To protect the person's privacy and confidentiality, files are password-protected, so only authorised people can access the information.

Confidentiality, disclosure and privacy

Confidentiality is about data or information and refers to managing access to private information. The *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth) is the legislation that underpins a person's control of information about themselves.

Confidentiality provisions restrict an individual or organisation from using, storing and disclosing information about a person that is outside of the scope for which the information was collected. Confidentiality refers to both written and verbal information. Maintaining confidentiality is part of respecting a person's privacy and individual rights. In practice, confidentiality means not discussing an individual's personal information unless they have given their consent for this to happen.

You can read more about privacy, confidentiality and disclosure at the following websites:

▶ http://aspirelr.link/aacqa-privacy-policy
▶ http://aspirelr.link/law-handbook-privacy-confidentiality

Handle personal information

An organisation should have a set of policies and guidelines that outline the way employees must manage and deal with records that contain personal and private information collected and stored as a part of the delivery of counselling services. These should reflect the Australian Privacy Principles (APPs), which came into effect in 2014. These apply to all organisations and Australian Government (and Norfolk Island Government) agencies.

There are 13 privacy principles that apply to the collection, use and storage of people's information, which are outlined below.

Collection, use and storage of personal information

1 **Open and transparent management of personal information**
Ensures that organisations manage personal information in an open and transparent way.

2 **Anonymity and pseudonymity**
Requires organisations to give individuals the option of not identifying themselves, or of using a pseudonym. Some exceptions apply.

3 **Collection of solicited personal information**
Outlines when an organisation can collect personal information that is solicited. It applies higher standards to the collection of 'sensitive' information.

4 **Dealing with unsolicited personal information**
Outlines how organisations must deal with unsolicited personal information.

5 **Notification of the collection of personal information**
Outlines when and in what circumstances an organisation that collects personal information must notify an individual of certain matters.

6 **Use or disclosure of personal information**
Outlines the circumstances in which an organisation may use or disclose personal information that it holds.

7 **Direct marketing**
An organisation may only use or disclose personal information for direct marketing purposes if certain conditions are met.

8 **Cross-border disclosure of personal information**
Outlines the steps an organisation must take to protect personal information before it is disclosed overseas.

9 **Adoption, use or disclosure of government-related identifiers**
Outlines the limited circumstances when an organisation may adopt a government-related identifier of an individual as its own identifier, or use or disclose a government-related identifier of an individual.

10 **Quality of personal information**
An organisation must take reasonable steps to ensure the personal information it collects is accurate, up to date and complete.

11 **Security of personal information**
An organisation must take reasonable steps to protect personal information it holds from misuse, interference and loss, and from unauthorised access, modification or disclosure. An entity has obligations to destroy or de-identify personal information in certain circumstances.

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

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

Records management

A counsellor has a responsibility to document information gathered during the counselling process. All records must be collated and adhere to organisational procedures and guidelines. Policies and procedures for maintaining accurate and up-to-date case history notes are based on legislative requirements that direct community organisations to be accountable for the services they provide.

A person's case notes and records can be used as evidence for the provision of services. Courts can request documentation to resolve legal matters related to service provision. Consider the following information related to writing and recording.

Accuracy and clarity

Records must be accurate and written in a way that can be clearly understood by others. Always check what has been written to make sure it is clear and that the report includes the name, signature, and date and time it was written.

Objectivity

Write only facts about what is seen, heard or done. Avoid personal opinions and feelings, and illustrate points with factual descriptions of behaviour. If all the facts about a situation are not clear, then make sure this is stated and do not infer that more is known than it is. If reporting what someone else has said, use direct quotes as much as possible.

Language

Use bias-free language and a neutral tone as often as possible. Avoid using clichéd or emotive language and slang. Remember that the person may read the report.

Completeness

Reports should contain relevant information. This may include both positive and negative information and include notes about behavioural changes or observed indicators of risk.

Timeliness

You should write your reports as soon as possible after contact with the person to ensure accuracy and to make sure the person's records are kept as up to date as possible.

Alterations

Any alterations made to your records should be done neatly and initialled. Never change what someone else has written.

Keep information private and secure

The organisational procedures for storing a person's personal information should always be followed to ensure it is not lost and can be readily retrieved by authorised personnel. Information should always be kept in safe and secure areas. It is common to store hard-copy files in a lockable cabinet with files stored alphabetically by surname. Personal information should not be kept in an area accessible to individuals and other members of the public.

Electronic filing systems are common. In most cases, software allows information to be retrieved using one or many fields such as an individual's last name or file number. Many agencies use electronic systems that allow users to input all personal details, referrals, assessments and case notes directly to a personal database. Electronic filing systems use a password instead of a key and a lock to protect the information. Avoid logging on for other staff and always log off when leaving a computer.

Example

Policy on record-keeping and confidentiality

A sample of a confidentiality statement used in a counselling contract is provided below. Confidentiality statements like this could also be included on brochures and on the organisation's webpage.

Confidentiality

All information shared with counsellors in the course of their work will be treated as highly confidential. However, there are a few exceptional circumstances that do enable disclosure of private information. These include:

▶ if you are at risk of seriously harming themselves or another person

▶ if your counselling records have been requested by a court of law

▶ if another party or agency has requested information, and you agree for this to happen by providing written consent.

Practice task 1

1. Why is it important to explain the policy on record-keeping and confidentiality clearly to people receiving support?

2. Give two examples of how confidentiality is applied in counselling practice.

3. Provide two examples of record management practices that ensure the privacy of a person's personal information.

Click to complete Practice task 1

1B Encourage clients to identify and explore their aims, requirements and ideas

One of the aims of counselling is for the person receiving support to come to an understanding about themselves and the concerns they may have. The person must clarify and explore what they want to achieve from counselling and part of this might require them to picture what they would like their life to look like. This is a useful tool in the lead-up to the person identifying personal goals and developing an action plan to deal with identified problems or concerns. The counsellor's role is to assist and support the person to explore ideas about what they would like to change and involves considering the requirements that they would need to enable their aims to be achieved.

Each organisation will have a preferred model of counselling used by counsellors for the specific services they provide. A counsellor will need to adhere to their organisation's approaches to allow continuity across the service.

No matter what type of counselling method is employed, the counsellor always needs to be mindful of the organisational legal and ethical policies and procedures when conducting counselling. Codes of conduct and other values of the counselling and community services sector underpin the relationship and communication that occurs between the person and the counsellor. These conditions set the ground rules for the counsellor–person relationship and should be reinforced with the person at various points in the counselling process.

Models of counselling and intervention
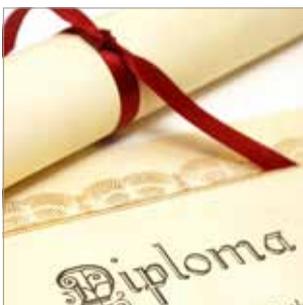
An agency will most likely have a preferred model that they expect counsellors to follow. A counsellor may draw on techniques used by different approaches and these approaches are likely to contain elements of one or more counselling methods. However, it is important to adhere to the organisation's preferred approach to enable continuity across the service. Always speak to the supervisor or manager for clarification.

You may be expected to use active listening skills, build rapport and demonstrate empathy and acceptance as advocated in person-centred counselling, but you may also be required to use other methods such as Gerard Egan's skilled helper approach or solution-focused brief therapy when helping people to make changes in their lives and solve problems.

People have a right to know what qualifications the counsellor has and the training they have undertaken. This should be described in the initial stages of counselling as a part of the explanation of the service the person can expect to receive and before they agree to counselling as a part of the counselling plan and contract. This

includes within the job role; counselling skills are used to help people resolve some of their concerns. If a person requires more in-depth counselling, a referral may be required to access a professional counsellor who specialises in another technique or in a particular issue such as problem gambling. As with other professional services, a professional always works within their scope of practice and would not employ any technique unless they have appropriate training in the method.

Different models

It may be likely that an organisation adopts an integrated approach to counselling that draws on elements from a number of different methods.

Gerard Egan, author of *The Skilled Helper* (2010), has developed a widely used model of counselling aimed at counsellors and anyone in the helping professions who may need to use counselling skills to help people solve problems. The model is straightforward and flexible and enables the counsellor and the person to work within a clear framework. Egan's model is based on three stages that can be incorporated into other models of counselling or used to enhance the structural aspect of other methods. Within each stage there are a number of tasks that can be used to help the person achieve greater awareness of the issues affecting them and encourage them to identify a range of possible solutions to these issues.

Another example might be that the organisation requires that a working relationship with the person be based on respect and empathy and use active listening skills as first identified by Rogers's person-centred therapy. However, there may be occasions when solution-focused brief therapy or applying some elements from cognitive behaviour therapy is the best method for the person and their particular problems.

The following is a brief outline of different counselling theories and methods. As mentioned, many counsellors are likely to use elements from a number of different methods, such as the following.

Person-centred counselling

▶ Counsellors using this approach believe the person is the best authority on their own life and what they want for themselves. This approach emphasises that the person has the ability to reach their full potential if they are supported and provided with the right environment.

▶ Characteristics of this type of counselling include active listening, reflection and acceptance of the person and their experiences.

▶ How counselling helps:

– The counsellor gives the person receiving support the understanding and acceptance they need to work through their problems and to identify and express their feelings instead of trying to repress or deny them.

– The counsellor acts as facilitator, but it is the person who resolves their own problems by gaining a deeper understanding of themselves.

– The counsellor develops a relationship based on trust and respect and demonstrates the core conditions or qualities of genuineness or congruence, unconditional positive regard and empathetic understanding.

▶ A drawback to this approach is that it can be time-consuming.

Solution-focused counselling

▶ This method is suitable for workers who do not have extensive training in counselling.

▶ It uses a strength-based, problem-solving approach that helps empower the person and assists them to learn strategies for resolving their problems or issues.

▶ It is usually conducted over one or two sessions and tends to focus on the person's present situation and their future rather than their past.

▶ How counselling helps:

–   Counsellors assist the person to focus on solutions and their own competencies and resources rather than the problems or perceived limitations that prompted them seek help.

–   The person may be asked to envision what they want their life to be like and then to identify strategies that will help them achieve the outcomes they want.

Cognitive counselling

▶ Cognitive therapies focus on a person's thinking and behaviour. They believe a person's thoughts are directly connected to the problems they experience.

▶ How counselling helps:

–   Counsellors help the person identify the irrational beliefs or patterns of thinking that underlie their problems.

–   Counsellors focus on assisting the person to develop different ways of thinking about and dealing with issues in their lives, rather than delving into the historical cause of a person's problem.

–   Cognitive counsellors often provide homework for their clients between sessions, and counselling may be of shorter duration than other methods.

Narrative therapy

▶ Narrative therapy encourages the person to review their life and tell the story of how events in their life have impacted them.

▶ How counselling helps:

–   The counsellor helps the person to construct an alternative story that restructures the past into a more positive and integrated experience.

–   This allows the person to interpret their experience more broadly rather than being defined by problems or issues that are only part of their experience.

Aims and ideas – what could be possible

During solution-focused therapy counselling, the person is encouraged to identify what they would like their future to look like. This leads to the person eventually clarifying their goals and identifying the requirements needed to meet those goals. By brainstorming all possible ideas, the counsellor can use this list in future sessions when working with the person to make decisions and develop action plans to resolve or improve the circumstances that have led to their current personal problems or concerns.

The counsellor uses questioning skills to encourage discussion about the things they would like to achieve in their life. An aim is a desired outcome: something a person would like to achieve. The person may need encouragement to put aside current issues and obstacles to imagine what could be possible.

Counsellors assist people to identify their own aims and explore their own ideas but do not make decisions on behalf of their clients or provide advice about personal aims, ideas or goals.

Changes may occur in:

▶ personal moods and feelings; for example, satisfaction, secure or safe in a relationship, happiness

▶ behaviours; for example, diet, drug taking, eating, exercise, grooming, sexuality

▶ life skills; for example, shopping/spending, study skills, employability skills, time management, organising, stress management, problem solving, conflict resolution

▶ communication and relationships with others; for example, family, partner, peers, workplace colleagues

▶ lifestyle changes; for example, socialising, holidays, work–life balance

▶ place of living; for example, secure housing, standard of housing.

Identify and explore aims

PATHS stands for 'planning alternative tomorrows with hope'. PATHS is a process during which a person identifies their goals and the specific actions that are required to achieve those goals. It sets out the path of action the person needs to take.

Here is a short outline of the PATHS process.

The PATHS process

1. Self-reflecting
Ask the person to reflect on their current problem: ▶ What do they do? ▶ Who do they do it with? ▶ How does it make them feel?

2. Brainstorming

Ask the person to brainstorm what their perfect world is like:

▶ What are they doing?

▶ Who are they with?

▶ Where are they?

▶ How are they feeling?

3. Considering actions

Ask the person to consider what they need to do to achieve their goals:

▶ Do they need to increase their skills?

▶ Do they need to change their behaviour?

▶ Do they need to improve their knowledge?

4. Considering resources

Ask the person to consider what they need to achieve their goals:

▶ What physical resources do they need?

▶ What human resources do they need?

5. Short-term goal-setting

What will they do in the short-term to achieve their goal?

6. Medium-term goal-setting

What will they do in the medium-term to achieve their goal?

7. Long-term goal-setting

What will they do in the long-term to achieve their goal?

Codes of conduct/practice

A code of conduct may vary between workplaces providing counselling services; however, most community services will have a code of conduct that promotes ethical behaviour, accountability, transparent sharing of information, bestowing dignity and respect and practising confidentiality.

A code of conduct is a set of principles, standards or rules of behaviour that guide the decisions, procedures and systems of work for a workplace. A code of conduct should promote the welfare of people by protecting their rights and ensuring ethical practices are followed.

Codes of practice provide guidance on effective ways to work based on the code of conduct guidelines. They generally outline the way to do something; for example, working in a safe manner with a person who is demonstrating hostile behaviour or promoting and respecting the rights of people free from discrimination.

It is important to comply with your workplace code of conduct whenever you participate in workplace communication.

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: http://aspirelr.link/austlii.

For additional information on equity and discrimination in Australia, visit the Australian Human Rights Commission website at: http://aspirelr.link/human-rights-commission.

Duty of care

Duty of care describes the legal obligation that every worker and organisation has to anticipate and act on possible causes of injury and illness that may exist in their work environment or as a result of their actions. A person or organisation must do everything they can to remove or minimise the possible cause of harm. Injury, illness or harm encompasses physical aspects of the person but also psychological harm or injury.

Duty of care is particularly important in counselling where people may have caused harm to themselves or others. The person receiving counselling needs to have explained to them the role of the counsellor to minimise harm to them. However, they should be prepared to explore some sensitive aspects of their personal life as a part of the counselling process in a safe and supported environment.

Aspects of WHS legislation varies between states and territories, but the common legislative requirements and obligations for the duty-of-care principle are the same. Everyone in the community services environment has the responsibility of duty of care for themselves, the people they care for, visitors and each other. They must ensure they carry out their work in a manner that provides for the safety of themselves and the people they support. Counsellors have an obligation to keep themselves and others safe at work and must plan their work with these obligations in mind.

Here is more information about duty of care.

Duty of care

▶ Duty of care is the obligation a person has to act in a way that would not cause harm.

Negligence

▶ Negligence occurs when duty of care has been breached and harm to either person or property ensues. It is the legal and ethical obligation of any community worker, supervisor or organisation to ensure that people using services are not exposed to unnecessary or unreasonable risk.

Dignity of risk

▶ The rights of people to dignity and choice, upheld in legislation and service standards, also require that duty of care or safety is not used as a reason to limit a person's freedom or personal choice. A support worker's adherence to duty of care and safety must be coupled with the concept of dignity of risk, which means that a person has the right to make their own choices and to take risks.

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.

Counsellor–person boundaries

Sometimes, when working closely with people, lines can be blurred. A counsellor may find themselves sharing personal information with the person they are counselling. However, when communicating with people in this role, professional boundaries need to be maintained. Professional boundaries are the limits set between professionals and the people being supported.

Professional boundaries are intended to keep the counsellor, and the people they support, safe. Boundaries also help maintain respect, and ensure that the person understands the role of a counsellor as a provider of support services. Ways to maintain professional boundaries are shared below.

Ways to maintain professional boundaries

▶ Don't share personal information, or information about other service users.

▶ Use friendly yet polite language when setting boundaries.

▶ Maintain appropriate physical contact; don't touch people inappropriately.

▶ Don't share home phone numbers or addresses.

Human rights

Another principle underlying the work of a counsellor is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights the rights that should be attributed to all humans. The Australian Human Rights Commission was established in 1986 to deal with breaches of anti-discrimination laws and to promote human rights education.

It promotes human rights for all people, and covers most forms of discrimination not already covered in the other Commonwealth Acts, including discrimination on the basis of medical history and criminal records.

Here are some relevant rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which you should think about when providing support to others and when working with colleagues.

Relevant rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

▶ All people are equal.

▶ No one should have their privacy, family, home or mail interfered with.

▶ No one should experience attacks on their honour or reputation.

▶ Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

▶ Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

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 access services

People requiring support should have access to the services they need and receive equal treatment for equal need in a non-discriminatory manner, regardless of their gender, social circumstances, ethnic and cultural backgrounds or disability.

An example is that according to the *Home and Community Care Act 1985* (Cth), special services to improve access and equity must be provided to:

▶ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

▶ people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities

▶ people who live in rural and remote communities

▶ people who are financially disadvantaged

▶ war veterans.

The right to have social needs met

People in need of support also have social needs. For example, in aged care, workers should:

▶ support the rights of married couples to live a married life

▶ provide ease of access for families and other visitors with due regard for the wishes of service users

▶ recognise the needs of residents for social contact and provide opportunities for social interaction, including opportunities for developing new friendships within the residential care environment and the community.

The right to freedom of association

Freedom of association is a principle contained in human rights conventions. The objective is to ensure people are able to meet and interact freely, without the interference of the state or of others. A worker must not threaten, organise or take any action that applies undue pressure on another person. It is illegal to discriminate, threaten or otherwise victimise another person. People have the right to associate with whomever they wish and should be provided with the opportunity to do so.

The right to freedom of expression

All service users, their carer, friends and family have the right to participate in decisions about the service they receive. For example, a person should be encouraged to collaborate in developing their counselling plan; they must be provided the opportunity to express their ideas, opinions, queries and concerns. Listen carefully to the needs and preferences of people to ensure their rights are upheld, and make sure they are allowed to express themselves without judgment.

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?'

Practice task 2

1. Why would a counsellor encourage the person to identify and explore their aims, requirements and ideas?

2. How does the concept of duty of care relate to the provision of a counselling service?

3. Explain what professional boundaries are.

Click to complete Practice task 2

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

because they are bored and they want the teacher's attention. The goal might be to use other methods to get the teacher's attention. Work will need to be done on the requirements or resources to meet that goal. This is a solution-focused aim – to get the teacher's attention by using methods that are not disruptive. Details are still needed on how this will be done and the resources required that enable this to happen.

Practical goals

The setting of practical goals is important in achieving specific change. Goals need to be specific, realistic and achievable and the role of the counsellor is to help the person understand the resources and actions required to meet those goals. If the person's goals are too vague, or perhaps relate to others instead of themselves, the counsellor can assist the person to modify their aims to make them more achievable. It may be clear from discussions what the person's aims are but they may require assistance in the clarification and prioritisation of their goals.

Some people find it hard, particularly at first, to visualise their goals or they do not identify any goal that is very concrete or definite. This may be because they are problem-focused and need encouragement to look beyond the problem to a solution. They may require some assistance and encouragement to put the problem aside and try to focus on a 'better' or 'ideal' future. The aim is to obtain a clear picture of a goal and gather momentum towards that goal.

For others, some goals may seem too challenging. The level of risk required to achieve their goals may appear too high. In this case they will need help and encouragement to identify more-realistic goals and have the importance of goal-setting reinforced through discussion. For example, the resistance to identifying a goal may be that it protects the behaviour that is in need of change or modification. A person who abuses alcohol may not want to set the goal of not going to the pub because that is where their socialising with friends occurs. It is the counsellor's role to help them understand why goal-setting is important, as well as what is and is not realistic to them.

SMART goals

Most people have a general idea about what goals they would like to achieve. These can include achieving good physical or mental health, having better relationships or many other examples. These goals are all reasonable, but they are quite vague. It is the counsellor's task to help the person define the parameters for these goals. Goals that are vague or ambiguous provide little direction.

One way to make goals clear is to draw on the SMART principle of goal-setting that focuses on the objectives and the action plan to get there. Here are the characteristics of SMART goals.

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.

SMART principle	Poor goal-setting according to the SMART framework	Good goal-setting according to the SMART framework
Realistic	Goal: Lose 10 kg in two weeks. Reason: This is not a realistic weight loss goal. Health experts recommend losing 0.5–1 kg per week.	Goal: Lose 10 kg in three months. Reason: This is much more realistic as it is more closely aligned with the recommendations of health experts.
Time frame	Goal: Develop independent living skills. Reason: This is not specific enough.	Goal: Develop independent living skills within the next 12 months. Reason: This is more specific. You should discuss what skills the person will develop, and how they will do so.

Modify goals

Once a set of practical, achievable, realistic goals have been identified, the counsellor needs to consider whether these need modifying based on the person's strengths. A counsellor can help the person identify their strengths by searching for patterns and key themes in the person's past experiences and behaviours. This may include ways they coped in the past under difficult circumstances, how they worked towards new perspectives, deeper self-awareness or understanding, or perhaps learnt different ways of thinking, feeling and/or behaving.

Particular strengths, skills and knowledge can be identified and used to assist the person to identify and modify goal choices as required. For example, a person who wants to improve their parenting skills may describe their strengths as being the love they hold for their children, that they are kind, patient, like learning new things and believe they learnt some good parenting skills from their parents. Each of these personal strengths can be considered when prioritising and modifying goals to ensure they are achievable and realistic to the person.

Due to a lack or limitation of human and/or non-human resources, some goals might not be achievable or realistic for the person at this time. The requirements needed to meet certain goals may make some goals unobtainable and are best put aside in favour of more-realistic goals. The counsellor needs to explore these options with the person and some goal modification may be required. The availability of resources to meet individual goals will vary greatly.

Requirements to meet goals

While any chosen goal must reflect the person's personal preferences, it is the counsellor's role to work with the person to help them clarify their goals and identify the resources that will help them to achieve these goals. The resources required to meet goals will differ greatly but might include the support of others, use of time, money or transport. It is the task of the counsellor working with the person to identify what is needed and how they might go about acquiring these resources.

Here is more information about some of the resources that people may need in order to meet these goals.

The support of others

Other people who can help with goal achievement include the person's friends and family members, workers, allied health workers and other professionals.

Time

A person may need support managing their time and use their time effectively.

Transport

Some goals may require travel. The lack of a car, money for petrol, a driver's licence or reliable public transport can make it hard for some people to achieve their goals.

Money/physical resources

There are many support services available at no cost but other services may require a small or full contribution, which the person may not be able to afford. Similarly, if a person needs physical resources, perhaps they can be donated, hired or bought at a discount.

Education/training

While some goals may require formal training to achieve, such as undertaking formal education at a school or university, other goals may require informal skills development such as developing better self-esteem and developing financial skills management and so on.

Goals for different circumstances

Different goals will be set for different circumstances. Every person's circumstances are different and to make sure goals are achievable it may be necessary to work with the person to modify the goals until they are specific to the issue or problem being discussed. Initial goals may require some modification to align with personal strengths and the resources available to the person to enable them to meet that goal.

Here are some examples.

Scenario 1

Tanya is a mother of two young children. She lives with Ben, who is the father of one of the children. Tanya is unhappy about how her life is not turning out how she wants it to be. She blames much of this on Ben. She says that, although he does have some good points (for example, he is kind and a good father), he is also lazy, drinks too much and doesn't have a job. They are always short of money.

Initial goal: To sort out her life

Modified goal: Implement a budget for bills and food

Identified strengths: Good at budgeting and using discounts and purchasing sale items

Resources required: Referral to a financial counsellor

Scenario 2

Eleni, a 55-year-old Greek woman with poor English whose husband died 18 months ago and has five children. Two of her children, a son in his late 20s and a son in his early 30s, still live at home. The referral notes suggest that Eleni feels guilty because she wants her sons to move out of the family home so she can prepare the property for sale because it is too much for her to maintain. She does not know how to tell them as they will be upset with her. She also thinks that her Greek friends will think she is selfish.

Initial goal: Wait for the sons to move out

Modified goal: Arrange a meeting and tell her sons why she wants them to move out

Identified strengths: Independent, interests and friends in the community

Resources required: Time, money, family support

Scenario 3

Tom is a man in his 60s who retired six months ago and is having difficulty adjusting to life without work. This is causing problems between him and his wife. Tom tells the counsellor Samir that his whole life seems to have come to a standstill and he feels useless.

Initial goal: Find a job and return to work

Modified goal: Find a volunteering job

Identified strengths: Skilled in planning and organising, punctual, good with people, friendly

Resources required: Time, energy, transport, money

Scenario 4

Jackie is a middle-aged woman with physical disabilities. She spends most of her time in a wheelchair and has a number of workers who support her with activities of daily living. Most carers working with Jackie do not last long, as she often verbally abuses and insults them. She has been referred to a counsellor to address this issue.

Initial goal: Wants to be left alone

Modified goal: Wants to be more independent and given more choices and options for her care

Identified strengths: Independent, assertive, was a team leader in a hospital

Resources required: Case meetings, workers and staff, Jackie's family, disability facilities at the residence

Scenario 5

Connor is 16 years old and has come to counselling because he has heard that the counsellor, Danielle, is pretty smart and good to talk to. Connor says he is unsure where he is supposed to fit in. His father wants him to be a professional rugby player, but Connor doesn't want to. He feels that he has to pretend to like sport to please his father. He goes on to say that he isn't studious or arty and doesn't know what he can do to find where he belongs. He doesn't have a close group of friends like everyone else seems to and feels like an outsider. Connor tells you he isn't really good at anything.

Initial goal: Leave school and get a job

Modified goal: Stay at school till the end of the year. Continue as a leader at the youth community centre.

Identified strengths: Leadership skills, role model for younger boys

Resources required: Community centre, leadership program, time, energy

Example

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

Vikram has been working with Toni to identify some goals that he can work towards to improve the relationship he has with his two adolescent children. Together, he and the counsellor have listed some practical goals and brainstormed the particular requirements he will need to meet those goals. One goal is that Vikram will no longer work on weekends and will employ a person to manage the weekend staff. This means he can spend more time with his children. Vikram and Toni have identified that one of his strengths is that he loves soccer and each of his children play games on the weekends. He wants to spend time with his children by driving them to their games and being more involved like the other parents.

The resources Vikram has identified to help him achieve his goal are listed below.

Personal goal

▶ Spend more time with his children

Modifications of goal

▶ Spend more time with children on the weekends

▶ Go to soccer games

Requirements to meet goal/s

▶ Transport, time, money for petrol, wages for new employee, handover and training for new employee, soccer game, fundraising ideas

Practice task 3

1. Why is it important to set practical goals?

2. Explain the SMART framework for setting goals.

3. What factors may require that goals be modified to make them more achievable for a person?

Click to complete Practice task 3

1D Identify situations where aims and requirements cannot be met, and make referrals for guidance and support

It is not unusual for a person to face difficulties in identifying goals and so some goals may need to be modified due to changes in circumstances and resources. Sometimes the counsellor identifies that the person has several complex issues that they would not be able to meet because they are beyond their scope of practice and a referral is necessary. Co-existing issues add complexity to the counselling process and the support that can be provided. Ignoring complex issues that arise during the counselling process may limit the potential benefits of counselling. A multidisciplinary approach including the expertise of others can ensure a range of supports are put in place for the person with complex problems or concerns.

Any referral requires that the person being referred understands their rights and be involved in the decision-making process. The person should be fully informed about the referral service being recommended and the reasons and process required for a referral to occur.

When aims and requirements cannot be met

There may be times when the person's aims and/or requirements cannot be met by counselling. These situations might involve a change of circumstances for the person such as a loss of a job or illness in their family. This could make attending the counselling sessions difficult due to shortfalls in money or time available.

In certain circumstances the counsellor may find that the aims set by the person require more specialised help. A different set of skills might be needed to assist them to access the resources needed to meet their goals. This could be that the person wants to stop their problem gambling and to assist the person to change this behaviour may require the skills of a specialist in this area. Another example may be that a person has the goal to better control their anger. A particular organisation that specialises in providing this service may be a better option because of the behavioural change required. These skills may be outside the scope of the counsellor.

A person may present with a number of complex needs that only reveal themselves during the counselling process. It may become clear to the counsellor that the range and complexity of issues is beyond their skills as a counsellor. It is important that a counsellor identifies when to refer people and how to make the arrangements for this.

When to refer a person receiving support

The decision to refer a person is based on recognising that the person requires specialist help. Awareness of the person's rights and duty-of-care responsibilities means that they are entitled to receive the best care possible. The organisation offering counselling should provide clear guidelines about when a referral is required and keep a list or database of appropriate referral sources. A supervisor or manager is often consulted to confirm or discuss the need for a referral. In some cases, a referral is to assist the person with a particular issue, while continuing to work with them on other concerns they may have.

Referral to other service providers or agencies may be required when:

▶ the agency does not have the resources or expertise to address the person's problems

▶ the agency can only address some of the person's needs

▶ the person no longer requires the service and is ready to move on to address other issues at other services

▶ the service is only funded to provide time-limited services; for example, for six weeks

▶ the person has requested that they be referred elsewhere

▶ the agency is currently unable to meet the person's needs because of resource limitations or a lack of vacancies in the program

Work role boundaries

The scope of a job role refers to the responsibilities that the person is permitted to perform, within the limits of their training, qualifications and job description. Sources of information about the scope of a role are available in various formats, including job descriptions and the organisation's policy and procedure documents. Work role boundaries outline what a person is trained and authorised to do. For example, a counsellor does not diagnose health conditions or provide relaxation massage treatments. These roles belong to other professions.

It is important to understand the legal and ethical responsibilities of work role boundaries because it can become a breach of a counsellor's duty of care for not responding to situations in a responsible or reasonable manner. Supervisors can provide clarity on the limitations that are placed on a work role or position.

Tasks that might be outside the scope of the counselling role:

▶ Administering or providing advice on medications

▶ Counselling a person who has depression or has admitted self-harm or suicidal intentions if this is not your area of speciality

▶ Giving legal or financial advice to people, regardless of how much experience you have in these areas outside of your current work role

▶ Performing certain health and mental health screens that require specific training or qualifications, or attempting to diagnose medical or mental health conditions

▶ Lecturing or preaching to people about your own religious or moral beliefs in an attempt to solve their problems

▶ Helping people with cultural needs that are better addressed by culturally-specific services, such as Indigenous Australian drug and alcohol services

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.

> ▶ Give the person the contact and address details of the organisation.

> ▶ Follow up with the person and the referral agency after the first few appointments to check that all is going well for the person and for the service provider.

Right to informed consent

It is usually necessary to obtain the advice of a supervisor before putting referral information in place. The person being referred should always be informed of their options and reasons for referral. This places the person at the centre of the decision-making. The counsellor should explain in clear language that they are either not qualified or authorised to offer the service or expertise needed by the person and that the support of another professional organisation would be helpful to the person. Involve the person in decision-making about the suitability of the service and provide information on waiting periods, costs etc. Personal information is private and confidential, and the person's consent should be sought for that information to be shared with others. Always obtain written consent from the person and add this consent document to their file.

Inform individuals

Informing people about their referral involves:

- ▶ details about the organisation and why you are referring them
- ▶ what the other organisation will expect from them (for example, if any fees and charges are associated with the referral)
- ▶ what personal information will need to be provided to the other organisation and a signed consent form for the sharing of information.

Referrals

Methods for arranging a referral include:

- ▶ a telephone call, with you logging details of the referral directly into your organisation's database or onto a paper form – in some cases, the person will be present when this occurs to answer or confirm questions
- ▶ email or an online form
- ▶ the person attending the new agency or service with a letter or other written document from the referring organisation.

Gain the person's consent and arrange the referral

- ▶ Confidentiality is especially important when you are sharing a person's information with external services.
- ▶ Gaining consent might include asking the person to sign referral requests.
- ▶ Consent can only be obtained after you have explained the types of information that you will need to provide to the external organisation and the reasons why this is important.

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 the counsellor

In every organisation, everyone has rights and responsibilities they must adhere to as a part of their job. Here are some rights and responsibilities of the person providing the counselling service.

Counsellor rights

- A safe workplace
- A workplace free from harassment and discrimination
- Access to a grievance (complaint) process
- Wages in accordance with the award rates
- Clear direction of their duties
- Receive advice and training
- Not be unfairly dismissed

Counsellor responsibilities

- Maintain the rights of service users and report any breaches if the rights of the service users are not being upheld
- Follow organisational policies and procedures
- Understand and work within the boundaries of the job description and level of authority
- Not behave or act in any way that may negatively affect a service user, other workers, or visitors to the organisation
- Comply with a duty of care
- Be competent and work within level of training
- Maintain confidentiality of business information and privacy of personal information
- Follow safety procedures and practices and work in a safe manner at all times
- Be willing to learn and train in new skills
- Respect cultural and social diversity

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?'

Practice task 4

1. Give an example of a situation where the aims and requirements of a person cannot be met in counselling.

2. Give two examples of when a referral to another service may be required.

3. Give two examples of the rights of a person receiving counselling services.

Click to complete Practice task 4

Summary

1. People receiving support need to be reminded that what is discussed in the counselling session will be kept confidential, and what is discussed is bound by policies and procedures that ensure privacy and confidentiality.

2. The person must clarify and explore what they want to achieve from counselling and part of this might require them to picture what they would like their life to look like.

3. A counsellor may draw on techniques used by different approaches and these approaches are likely to contain elements of one or more counselling methods.

4. Counsellors assist people to identify their own aims and explore their own ideas but do not make decisions on behalf of a person or provide advice about personal aims, ideas or goals.

5. A code of conduct should promote the welfare of people by protecting their rights and ensuring ethical practices are followed.

6. Duty of care is particularly important in counselling where people may present with the effects of being caused harm to themselves or they have caused harm to others.

7. Professional boundaries are intended to keep the counsellor and the people they support safe.

8. The goal-setting process requires that the counsellor use open communication and effective listening skills to assist the person to identify goals that are meaningful and achievable.

9. Goals need to be specific, realistic and achievable and the role of the counsellor is to help the person understand the resources and actions required to meet those goals.

10. A counsellor can help the person identify their strengths by searching for patterns and key themes in the person's past experiences and behaviours.

11. There may be times when the person's aims and/or requirements cannot be met by counselling.

12. The counsellor identifies that the person has several complex issues that they would not be able to meet because they are beyond their scope of practice and a referral is necessary.

13. A decision to refer a person is based on recognising that the person requires specialist help.

Learning checkpoint 1
Assist clients to clarify goals and requirements

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in assisting clients to clarify goals and requirements.

Part A

1. Provide two examples of the different organisational models used in counselling.

2. Why does an organisation have and use a code of conduct and/or a code of practice?

3. Explain the following concepts and how they are applied in individual practice.
   ▶ Discrimination
   ▶ Duty of care
   ▶ Human rights
   ▶ Practitioner/client boundaries

Part B

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

> **Case study**
>
> Ben's first client for the day is a young woman in her early 20s who is clearly nervous and ill at ease when waiting for her appointment to begin. Mahalia explains she has come to counselling for help with her fear of public places. She says she is finding it more and more difficult to go out and leave her home. She explains that sometimes when she is at a shopping centre she is overcome with anxiety and fear. She starts to sweat and hyperventilate and feels so overwhelmed she can't do anything to help herself. Mahalia says these feelings are making her very depressed and sad because she cannot make herself go out and get on with life. She is also very ashamed of her reactions and doesn't want any of her family or friends to know.

1. Why would Ben use the initial interview to explain to Mahalia the organisation's policies on confidentiality and security on the management of records?

2. Give two examples for each of the rights and responsibilities that Ben, Mahalia and Ben's employer have in regard to the delivery of counselling services.

3. Why would Ben encourage Mahalia to identify and explore her aims, requirements and ideas?

4. Why should Ben work with Mahalia to identify practical goals with achievable resources to meet those aims?

5. Give two examples of types of goals that Mahalia might set that could be modified based on her strengths.

6. Explain what factors would need to be considered to determine whether a counsellor had the skills to meet Mahalia's needs?

Topic 2

In this topic you will learn how to:

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

2B Identify and explore factors that could influence the preference for, and ability to achieve, a course of action

2C Determine and explore features and likely consequences of possible courses of action

2D Check the client's understanding of what is likely to be involved in each possible course of action

Explore options with clients

A person may seek counselling because they need help making a decision. They may feel that they are unable to do this on their own and could benefit from discussing issues with a person who is independent from them and can see things objectively. For other people it is not until they are involved in counselling that it becomes obvious that they need to make some important decisions. An action plan is usually developed at this point to discuss the decision. The counsellor's role is to support and explore options with the person at each step of decision-making.

The stages of developing an action plan may differ slightly but they are about identifying courses of action that meets the person's aims and the requirements they need to meet those aims. This includes evaluating each potential course of action before reaching a decision. The counsellor should confirm and check the person's understanding of their problem at various points in the decision-making process to make sure the process remains on track and is relevant and appropriate for the person.

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,

taking into account factors such as requirements and resources the person has access to and their personal strengths. At the end of the process a final choice will have been made that considers all relevant factors.

The counsellor's aim is to support the person in making decisions that encourage the person to explore their problem; identify their goals; generate ideas for how goals can be achieved; evaluate the alternatives; and then select an appropriate course of action by which to implement them.

Decision-making models

There are a number of decision-making models used by various industries and areas of study such as leadership, business, economics and training. Each model varies in the different steps or number of steps in the process. Many models are based on the rational decision-making model. Some decision-making models have filters that determine the ways in which factors should be considered, such as ethical considerations.

The making of decisions can appear to be very similar to problem solving. The problem-solving process requires decisions to be made and incorporates a decision-making model. However, not all decisions are problem-oriented. Whenever decisions need to be made for a problem, the first step is to clarify the problem and then work through the decision-making process until a final choice is made.

There are several decision-making models that can be used in counselling to assist the person to look to the future and resolve a problem. Some decision-making models are combinations of various models. Some models work better than others for different contexts; for example, the group decision-making model may work better for family counselling and an ethical model may be best used with a person who has a decision to be made that is value-based.

In practice, it is important to refer to the organisation's preferred model of the agency or service. A supervisor can confirm and explain the decision-making model used in an organisation and how it can be applied to solve problems with a person in counselling.

Rational decision-making

A commonly used model is the rational decision-making. This model incorporates a series of sequential steps that require consideration and exploration at each stage. In the rational model, the person weighs up the pros and cons for each alternative they have chosen to determine the most logical option. The positive and negative consequences of each option are explored and the option of choice is the one that scores better. Rational decision-making models are based on thinking through, analysing and weighing up the alternatives to come up with a judgment on the best potential result.

Steps in a rational decision-making model might look like the following.

Step 1	**Define the situation/decision to be made**
	This step includes recognising the problem. This can take some time and be the result of exploration of the issues with the person until a clear problem is clarified and a decision identified. Framing of the decision should be done in a positive way to move the direction forward rather than focus on things that need to stop.
Step 2	**Identify important criteria for the process and the result**
	Important criteria can include personal goals, resources the person has access to, personal strengths and any other variables should be considered. Factors such as experience, knowledge, skills and support people all need to be considered in determining the final decision/outcome.
Step 3	**Gather information on each alternative**
	This involves developing alternatives for each of the possible alternatives for that problem. Information needs to be discussed about the likely effects of each, incorporating the variables discussed in Step 2.
Step 4	**Evaluate options – pros, cons and risks of each alternative**
	Weighing up the pros and cons of the various alternatives allows for shortlisting the most suitable and arriving at the best decision. This step involves evaluating all available information and possible options and anticipating the consequences of each alternative. This stage often takes the most time.
Step 5	**Select the best option**
	A selection is the choosing of one of the alternatives based on the analysis completed in Step 4.
Step 6	**Develop a plan of action – and implement it**
	Decisions are only completed when they are carried into action and the action achieves the desired result. This stage may require some evaluation and monitoring to determine the success or whether modifications are required. If after evaluation, a contingency plan can be used; where another alternative is chosen, the process begins again from Step 3 or 4.

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?

Other decision-making models

There are a number of decision-making models used for different contexts and purposes. Here is a brief explanation of some of these.

Intuitive models

▶ These models do not depend on reason and logic. The selection of an option is reached by an intuitive 'knowing' of what the best answer is. People say they 'feel it in their gut' or 'are listening to their heart'.

▶ Some people are very aware of their feelings or instincts and use this as a guide to life decisions. These types of feelings are instinctive and do not rely on facts. The person grasps a situation or information without the need for reasoning. This suits a person with confidence and experience in making decisions this way. It may suit a situation where not all of the information about alternative actions is available or if it is difficult to decide between two options.

SWOT

▶ A SWOT analysis is commonly used in organisations when they want to gather information about a particular action/project or about how the organisation is working. In counselling it can be a useful tool to assess and explore the pros and cons of particular alternative actions in more detail.

▶ Strengths and Weaknesses are referred to as internal factors. They identify positives and negatives from within the person.

▶ The Opportunities and Threats are referred to as external factors. They are influenced by circumstances or events external to the person. These generally cannot be controlled.

Evidence-based decision-making

▶ Evidence-based decision-making is used in making clinical diagnosis. It means decisions are made using the best available data based on rational and objective information. It is similar to the scientific method, which uses experiments and data collection to advance knowledge. This method may be useful in counselling for choosing the best alternative when information about each alternative can be provided by research. An example could be investigating the most suitable support for a person with dementia.

Group/collaborative or consensus decision-making

▶ Group decision-making is when a group of individuals tackle a problem together to achieve a solution. This style means that every member of the group has to 'buy into' the decision. This may suit group situations such as family counselling or alcohol and other drugs (AOD) counselling when a number of different support people are brought together to help the person. The obvious advantages are group commitment and group support for the person at the centre of the decision. A large amount of information and ideas can be generated which can lead to a higher probability of success. In contrast, some mediation may be necessary as a large amount of information can be provided.

Example

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

Julia has developed a counselling relationship with Anh who has been attending sessions over several weeks. Julia has experience in AOD and is providing support to Anh who has a difficult relationship with his son, who has been a regular drug user for nearly ten years. Anh has spent years worrying and being stressed by his son's drug-taking behaviours and only ever hears from his son when he is desperate for money. This usually ends up in a confrontation.

Julia has a good understanding of Anh's issues and Anh confirms that he needs to change his situation and feels he is ready to make decisions that will help in reducing the stress he lives with. Anh describes various health issues that he has and that are made worse by stress. Anh can see a relationship between his ill health and the stressful circumstances he deals with as a result of his son's drug issues.

Julia uses rational decision-making to guide Anh through the steps of the process where he can select a suitable option from a range of alternatives. Julia explains to Anh that now he has identified his goals they can work together to make decisions to help him achieve them.

Julia finalises the session by stating what it is that Anh wants to accomplish and confirms that they both share the same understanding of the problem and potential ways to move forward.

Anh leaves the session feeling more motivated than he has in years. He likes the idea that he has an action plan and is ready to work towards making some big decisions that will enable him to improve his health.

Practice task 5

1. Give two reasons why a counsellor would identify particular courses of action for meeting a person's aims and requirements.

2. Identify two factors that should be considered before using a decision-making model.

3. Outline the main principle in the rational decision-making model.

4. What are the six steps in the rational decision-making model?

Click to complete Practice task 5

2B Identify and explore factors that could influence the preference for, and ability to achieve, a course of action

Decision-making in counselling requires the person and the counsellor to work together to select a course of action that meets the person's personal preferences. Before any decision can be made and a suitable alternative selected, the person will need to look closely at their preferences and examine the variables that may influence their ability to make those decisions.

Throughout the counselling process, goals and priorities may change or require modification to accommodate changing circumstances and resources. The counsellor will reinforce personal strengths from previous goal-setting sessions and help the person identify suitable resources that they can access.

The counsellor can assist the person to assess the overall appropriateness of each possible course of action based on their particular circumstances. However, options should mostly come from the person as they are in the best position to identify what suits them.

Factors influencing a course of action

External factors can impact the person's ability to carry out particular actions and bring about change. When making decisions the counsellor needs to examine the potential obstacles that could inhibit their ability to reach their goals. In the same way that the counsellor will encourage and reinforce personal strengths, some factors may inhibit the likely possibility of achieving a goal. Some factors might influence the person's preference towards a particular option in the decision-making process.

The person's life experience, their knowledge and skills will all influence the choice of a final course of action. There are factors that may influence an individual's preference for and ability to achieve a course of action.

External factors influencing decisions:

▶ Financial

▶ Family and other support networks

▶ Parenting responsibilities

▶ Level of education

▶ Employment history

▶ Issues such as AOD, homelessness, disability, physical health status

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?

Example:

Identify the specific barriers to seeking and accepting help, for example:

▶ 'I feel embarrassed that I can't cope and manage this situation myself.'

▶ 'I think that I should solve my problems myself. I don't want to talk about them with strangers.'

▶ 'I am bringing shame onto my family. I find it difficult to trust other people.'

How do you feel?

Is this problem causing you to feel negative emotions? Are you feeling overwhelmed, stressed, distressed, anxious?

Identifying and addressing these emotions can help a person think clearly and therefore be effective at solving problems.

Example:

▶ 'I feel scared that if I don't get help I can't cope anymore.'

Get some extra help

Who else can assist me to work through this problem? Friends? Family?

Example:

▶ 'I can't get help from my family as I haven't told them what is happening to me.'

▶ 'I have a friend who could provide emotional support. At work I can access the employee assistance program. My GP has recommended a community mental health service.'

Consider alternatives

Explore possible solutions. The more possible solutions, the more likely it is that an effective solution will be found.

Brainstorm creative ideas to collect a list of possible solutions without assessing the value.

Example:

▶ 'I can speak with this counsellor and they can help me.'

Make a plan

Assess the list of possible solutions and decide which ones are practicable and manageable. Are the resources available to implement the solutions within a suitable time frame?

Example:

▶ 'I will speak with the counsellor and tell them how I am feeling during my lunch hour on Monday.'

Action

Implement your plan.

Example:

▶ 'I made the call.'

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.

2. List two barriers a person may have to decision-making.

3. Give an example of when the personal risk to someone is considered too high and this becomes an obstacle to them making decisions.

2C Determine and explore features and likely consequences of possible courses of action

An important step in making a decision is the brainstorming of ideas and gathering of relevant information so that the features of alternative course of action can be examined. Information needs to be gathered for each alternative and explored in terms of its merits and likely consequences. Once the alternatives have been identified then work can begin on discussing the particular features of each alternative.

The number of alternatives the person identifies is not important as long as they are realistic. This is where the counsellor works with the person to remind them again of their strengths and the resources they have access to to reach their goals. The counsellor will be able to direct the person to additional support that may assist the person in areas that they do not have the skills or knowledge required. The role of the counsellor is also to guide the person to ongoing support and access to community resources to help them reach their goals.

Determine and explore features and consequences

Decisions can be avoided but the consequences of any decision cannot. Exploring the likely consequences means that options can be investigated and the person will be informed and better prepared for the outcomes. If the particular features and consequences of courses of actions are explored, the information gathered can be used to determine what might be the best course of action for them.

Here are some examples of identified problems with the alternative course of action and the consequences explored using a decision-making process.

Problem	Possible alternative courses of action	Consequences of actions
38-year-old Mal is unhappy in his job because the company is disorganised and unprofessional in their dealings with staff	1. Tell the manager	▶ Manager may give a positive response and change systems ▶ Manager may give a negative response and do nothing
	2. Leave for another job	▶ Research required to find a new job ▶ May not find a new job ▶ Stressful looking for new job ▶ Financial stress of unemployment

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

Problem	Possible alternative courses of action	Consequences of actions
Martha wants to return to full-time work and the daily household tasks still need to be done	1. Everybody in the house shares and divides up the tasks	▶ Everyone shares in the role ▶ Division of labour is more equal ▶ Adolescent children will have to do more
	2. Martha continues to do it all	▶ Will spend weekends doing housework ▶ Will increase stress and decrease family harmony
	3. Agency employed to do the tasks	▶ Expensive ▶ Adolescents no longer expected to contribute
	4. Martha does not return to full-time work	▶ Not financially viable ▶ Martha not happy being at home ▶ Martha will do all of the housework

Example

Determine and explore features and likely consequences of possible courses of action

Emile and Franco have made a list of the possible consequences and features for several courses of action they have been discussing as a part of their counselling work together. Franco has identified the following information for his decision to make contact with his daughter, who he has not seen for 25 years.

1. Alternative: Call her and leave the decision about further contact to her.

   Consequences:

   – She may decide not to have further contact. This is her right and nothing further can be done for now.

   – She may want to meet up. This means that Franco would have to plan for the meeting and decide what to say to her. He wants some help to know how to move into the next phase.

2. Alternative: Write an apology letter explaining why he wants to see her.

   Consequences:

   – She may not reply.

   – She might reply and not want to speak with him or meet him.

   – She may call him and be pleased to have had contact.

   – She may want to meet and he will need some support to encourage the meeting.

Practice task 7

1. Provide an example of a problem that a person may bring to a counselling session. Identify the alternative courses of action and the consequences of each.

2. Provide an example of a problem that a person may bring to a counselling session. Identify the alternative courses of action and the consequences of each.

Click to complete Practice task 7

2D Check the client's understanding of what is likely to be involved in each possible course of action

Listening and affirming what the person says during a counselling session is essential for the development of a therapeutic relationship and displaying empathy. When the counsellor listens attentively they show respect for the person's competence in being able to find a solution and make a decision to solve their own problems. By listening attentively they can identify the information that can be used to present back to the person when clarifying their understanding of what is likely to be involved in each possible course of action.

Most people find it difficult to make hard decisions. As a counsellor, you must remember that the problem the person wants to address is important and personal to them. Some people identify problems that don't appear to be complicated or difficult to an outsider. Remember that you, the counsellor, are very important to the person because counselling involves confronting a concern they may have had for a while.

Communication skills to help clarify

Effective communication is a dynamic exchange of thoughts and ideas. Each person brings different knowledge, experience and feelings to the exchange that can alter the information being expressed and interpreted. The only way to know if a message has been fully understood by another person is if they confirm the message back. Likewise, a message sent needs clarification to confirm it was understood in the way it was intended. Active listening requires that the person requests and clarifies meanings. This means that, during the communication exchange, each party will gain the most out of the exchange and be able to respond appropriately.

A counsellor must be proficient in the appropriate use of communication micro-skills. These skills are used to consistently check and confirm whether the person in counselling has received the message and that both parties have understood each other.

Communication micro-skills used in counselling:

▶ Attending behaviours – active listening, reflection of content feeling, summarising
▶ Questioning skills – open, closed simple and compound questions
▶ Client observation skills
▶ Noting and reflecting skills
▶ Providing client feedback

Clarify understanding

Before moving onto evaluating the pros and cons of each option in decision-making, the counsellor should check that the person is satisfied with the choices they have made along the way. One way of checking a person's understanding and satisfaction is to have them read out a list of the options and ideas that have been generated so they can examine them for themselves. The benefits are that while reading, the person can begin to imagine taking action towards one or more of these alternative actions. At the same time the counsellor can confirm the person's understanding of the process and assess when to move forward.
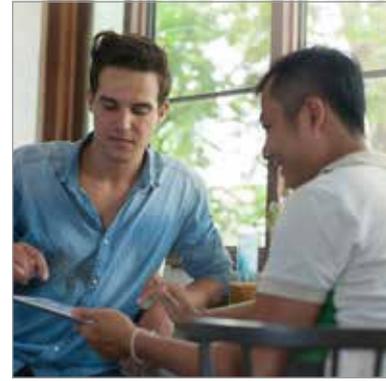
This summarising statement can be useful for recording the alternatives as they have been discussed and explored during the counselling sessions. It also allows the person an opportunity to think of other alternatives or additional comments while reading and considering the list. The person can be given the opportunity to voice any concerns they have about any of the alternatives they have identified. It reaffirms what they have been saying by hearing it back from another person.

By clarifying the person's understanding and perhaps encouraging them to read them out loud, the person may feel ownership to the list of options they have come up with and it may encourage them to remain active in the decision-making. It can also indicate that the person might be ready to move onto the next phase of decision-making that involves the evaluation of alternatives.

Example

Check the client's understanding of what is involved in each possible course of action

Jasvinder has had trouble with mild but ongoing anxiety. She has had several appointments with Murray to see if he can help her with managing the stress caused by this issue. Murray and Jasvinder have spent time exploring the causes of her anxiety and the triggers she has identified. Jasvinder has identified several alternative courses of action and Murray wants to make sure she has considered each option in detail and what is likely to be involved in each course of action. He asks Jasvinder questions throughout each session as a way of clarifying and checking her comprehension of the alternative courses of action they have been discussing.

Sample questions Murray asks of Jasvinder:

▶ 'Let's go over the alternatives we've come up with.'

▶ 'I noticed that you decided not to go with that alternative. Tell me some more about how you made that decision.'

▶ 'What might be the outcomes of this alternative?'

▶ 'How do you feel about this alternative.'

▶ 'In what way are you concerned about this option?'

▶ 'Are there any other advantages of disadvantages you can think of?'

Practice task 8

1. What communication micro-skills should be used to listen to the person carefully?

2. How can a summarising statement be used to check that the person understands?

3. What are the benefits of recording a person's list of alternatives?

Click to complete Practice task 8

Summary

1. The stages of developing an action plan may differ slightly but they are about identifying courses of action that meet the person's aims and the requirements they need to meet those aims.

2. The role of the counsellor is to assist the person to reach their goals and make decisions but also to guide the person to ongoing support as required.

3. When clear priorities are laid out, it can be more straightforward to work through decision-making and find suitable solutions to solve problems.

4. Making a decision involves choosing between alternative courses of action.

5. There are a number of decision-making models used in various industries such as leadership, business, economics and training.

6. A common model used in counselling is called rational decision-making and involves a series of sequential steps that require consideration and exploration at each stage.

7. The counsellor can assist the person to assess the overall appropriateness of each possible course of action based on their particular circumstances.

8. External factors can impact the person's ability to carry out particular actions and bring about change.

9. When making decisions, the person needs to examine the potential obstacles that could inhibit their ability to reach their goals.

10. Before moving onto evaluating the pros and cons of each option in detail, the counsellor should check that the person is satisfied with their choices so far.

Learning checkpoint 2
Explore options with clients

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in exploring options with clients.

Part A

1. Explain the concept, principle and practice of three decision-making models.

2. List two obstacles that a person may come across in decision-making and planning in the counselling context.

3. Why is it important for you, the counsellor, to determine and explore the features and likely consequences of possible courses of action with the person they are counselling?

Part B

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Ruby is 68 years old and retired two years ago. She was always active and enjoyed working full-time. Since retiring, Ruby is finding it difficult to find any real enjoyment out of the things she used to like doing. Her family had been telling her for years to retire and that she would love not working and deserved to do nothing after all of those years.

Since leaving her job, Ruby has gradually stopped socialising with friends and makes excuses for not going out. Ruby's daughter moved interstate about 10 months ago and Ruby misses her and the grandchildren a great deal. Ruby finds the days long and she doesn't have the motivation to get up in the mornings so she often stays in bed till lunchtime reading a book.

Ruby's daughter has been encouraging her over the phone but her worry for her mother led her to arrange for Ruby to see a counsellor. Ruby's daughter accompanied her on her first visit but has since gone back interstate to her new home. Ruby has been to three sessions and has found the counselling sessions beneficial. She is starting to feel more in control of her life and feels ready to make some choices about her future. Ruby tells her daughter during a phone call that the counsellor has asked her to answer lots of questions and think of ideas and options for her future. The counsellor has asked her to make choices about the way she would like her future to be.

1. Why would the counsellor encourage Ruby to identify potential courses of action for her future that meet her aims and requirements?

2. What factors might influence Ruby's preference for, and ability to achieve, her course of action?

3. The counsellor is likely to check Ruby's understanding of what is likely to be involved in each possible course of action before one option is selected. Why is this important?

Topic 3

In this topic you will learn how to:

3A Assist clients to assess advantages and disadvantages of each course of action, and their appropriateness for meeting requirements

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

3C Document decisions and agreed ongoing support within organisational guidelines

Support the client to reach decisions

Working through the decision-making process means that, by the end of the process, the client or person receiving support will be able to make a decision and select a particular course of action. Once this is done they can determine a plan that will allow the course of action to be implemented. It is important that the counsellor supports the person to reach a decision that is achievable.

Your counselling role continues beyond the choice of a final course of action because the person may require access to ongoing support. This ongoing support may be identified as being available within the organisation or outside of it via a referral. A contingency plan can be confirmed as a back-up in case the main plan comes across any unforeseen difficulties. Having an alternative plan means that there is a fall back option that would encourage the person to continue with an alternative course of action.

The final phase is to document the person's decision. In cases where the selected course of action involves additional services or referral for additional support, the counsellor must ensure that they complete case planning and referral documentation in line with their organisational requirements.

3A Assist clients to assess advantages and disadvantages of each course of action, and their appropriateness for meeting requirements

The popular rational decision-making model presupposes that there is one best outcome and that it is possible to consider every option and predict the future consequences of each. Rational models have a series of sequential steps that involve a thinking process where various options are rated according to potential advantages and disadvantages. The highest scoring option is considered to be the optimum one.

There are several adaptations of this idea and some use different methods of presenting the advantages and disadvantages of each course of action. The presentation method can vary and might include using a matrix or table to show the alternatives and findings, while some methods are more complex.

In counselling, the advantages and disadvantages need to be presented in a simple way so they can be compared. The main purpose is for the person to easily identify that one option has more positive points than another at the end of the exercise. At the end of the process a final choice will have been made that takes into account all relevant factors.

Assess course of actions

A simple T Chart can be used to record the advantages and disadvantages of each option. The chart involves listing the pros (advantages) and cons (disadvantages) of a particular decision on either side of the stem of a T.

Another variation is to give each consequence a number depending on its importance. The numbers in both columns are added and the highest number should be the preferred option.

In a SWOT analysis the information gathered is presented in a 2x2 matrix so that it reads like a list of advantages and disadvantages.

Here is an example of a SWOT analysis matrix completed on the decision that involves when to tell family members about an important issue.

SWOT Analysis	
Strengths ▶ Need to be honest ▶ Some will already have an idea ▶ They will be supportive no matter what	**Weaknesses** ▶ The youngest child will not understand ▶ They may hear the news from others
Opportunities ▶ We will be together on Saturday ▶ Need to share the information before they find out for themselves	**Threats** ▶ New partner may want to attend family meeting ▶ Father-in-law won't take it well

Appropriateness for meeting requirements

The appropriateness of any selected course of action must be considered and take into account the requirements of the individual. These factors should have been considered in every step of the decision-making to make sure the alternatives being identified were realistic and achievable. This includes the identification of goals and availability and access to resources to meet a particular course of action. Along the way, the counsellor will have reinforced that the person should consider their resources and their personal strengths. These variables will have influenced the selection of a final course of action.

Here are examples of particular requirements needed for certain courses of actions.

Course of action: move away from home

Requirements:

▶ Time off work

▶ Money for bond, internet, phone calls, transport/petrol

▶ Research skills to find a new place to live

▶ Skills of real estate agent

▶ Support from friends

▶ Friends to share a house

▶ Energy to look

▶ Transport to go and look at houses

▶ Truck/trailer to move furniture

Personal strengths: Resilience to adapt to change, determination to improve living circumstances, independence to want to move away from parents

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.

Example

Assist clients to assess advantages and disadvantages of each course of action, and their appropriateness for meeting requirements

Sean has recently become a counsellor in an agency that provides support for people with alcohol and other drugs (AOD) issues. His role is to help the people who receive a range of treatments at the agency. He was successful in obtaining the position because of his previous experience and training in person-centred counselling and solution-focused brief therapy.

On his first day, his supervisor suggests that she would like to have a meeting to go over the documents and forms used at the agency and discuss the decision-making and counselling models they use. Sean is looking forward to learning the organisation's guidelines and procedures he will need to apply when he works with people during counselling. Sean knows that decision-making and action planning techniques are useful in helping people stay motivated and look to their future and work towards goals.

During the discussions, Sean is shown a simple record sheet for recording the advantages and disadvantages of the options selected by the person as a part of the decision-making process. It includes room to record the specific requirements and personal strengths of the person as a reminder to consider these important factors when evaluating a range of options.

Practice task 9

1. What is the main purpose of assessing possible advantages and disadvantages of each course of action?

2. Provide two examples of different ways to present information gathered on the advantages and disadvantages of each option.

3. Is it ever appropriate for a counsellor to influence the option chosen as a course of action by a person?

Click to complete Practice task 9

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.

Problem-solving approach

During the counselling session it is important to inform the person as to why a problem-solving approach is being used and how it can be useful in assisting the person to reach their goals. The person needs to have the problem-solving process explained and at various stages you must clarify the person's understanding of a choice they have made. The benefits to the person may be that they feel in control of the decision-making once they understand how the problem-solving works. The person may also be encouraged because previously they may have considered there was no solution to their problem or tried other solutions that proved unsuccessful.

Problem-solving can be used when the person:

▶ requests help to solve a problem

▶ requests help in choosing solutions

▶ wants help in taking actions on a particular action plan

▶ needs to reduce the impact of an issue affecting them

▶ may gain some insights on how to deal with future problems

▶ may benefit from feeling in control

▶ may have considered there was no solution to their problem.

Techniques for problem-solving

There are various phases in the method of solving a problem. Each phase requires that the person make decisions and be satisfied with their choices. If a person has more than one problem requiring action, then the problem-solving method should be followed one problem at a time.

A structured problem-solving process used in counselling might include the following phases.

Phases of a structured problem-solving process

1 **Clarifying the problem statement and define the problem**
Repeat the problem back to the person and allow them to clarify that it is described accurately. They may clarify something or add to what has been stated and provide further important background information.

2 **Identify alternative solutions**
Allow the person to brainstorm as many alternatives as possible – none should be excluded. This requires the counsellor to use open-ended questions to encourage the person to think of as many solutions as possible: the counsellor should remain neutral and not offer any opinions. The person may feel encouraged because there are many possible solutions identified.

3 **Summarise the alternatives identified and consider ability to achieve this course of action**
By summarising all of the alternatives, the person can then add any missed ideas and indicate readiness to move onto the next phase. The counsellor should reinforce personal strengths and consider access to resources to solve their problem or source a solution.

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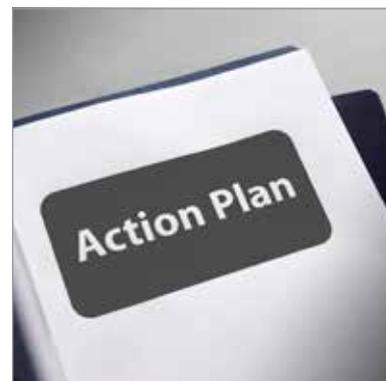
Action planning can be formalised by documenting it so the person has a record of what needs to occur during implementation. An action plan may outline the steps the person needs to take in the short-term (before the next counselling session) and/or over the long-term (next months).

Make action plans

MAPS stands for 'making action plans'. The following outlines the process that can be followed when a counsellor is working with the person to develop strategies to achieve their goals and implement actions based on a decision to solve a problem. This model encourages communication and support from other people in the person's support network and would suit a person who has a strong support network willing to assist them to meet their goals; for example, group decision-making in AOD case management.

The MAPS process

Facilitate stakeholder meeting

Identify and arrange a meeting of the stakeholders. The person is always at the centre of the group; that is, the key stakeholder. Other stakeholders might include family members, friends, carers or anyone else who can support the person or offer professional advice.

Facilitate the person's communication

Give the person time to outline their problem and the solution they have chosen to solve their identified problem and meet their goals. This helps the other people involved begin to understand the person's views and values, as well as their concept of themselves and their feelings of self-worth.

Share hopes and dreams

Ask the other people to describe their hopes and dreams for the person.

Share fears and concerns

Ask the other people to share their fears and concerns about the person's future.

Identify strengths

Ask the other people to share their views about the person's strengths and positive qualities.

Identify barriers

Ask the other people to share their views about barriers that the person may face in achieving their dreams.

Brainstorm needs and solutions

Brainstorm the requirements the person needs in order to achieve their goals and enlist the support and help of the others to meet those requirements.

Action planning techniques

Many counsellors employ some type of action-orientated outcome to assist the person to implement their course of action. It can be helpful to get the person to complete specific homework tasks or ask the person to consider what they plan to do with the insights that have been generated through the counselling process.

Depending on the type of counselling technique used, the homework or actions required of the person will be different. Some counsellors give the person receiving support homework to do; for example, keeping notes of how they apply what they have learnt, such as changing how they respond or relate to someone in their lives.

Here are some examples of the type of action plans that a person may be asked to undertake as a part of a particular model of counselling.

Classical conditioning techniques

▶ Social skills training – Uses the techniques of modelling, behavioural rehearsal and shaping
▶ Modelling – Watching others perform the social skill
▶ Behavioural rehearsal – Practising the social skill in therapy
▶ Shaping – Gradually applying the new skill to more difficult social situations

Cognitive therapy techniques

▶ Homework can include:
  – journalling – the person keeps a diary and records their thoughts, emotions and behaviours
  – note-taking through the session to review afterwards
  – employing a new behavioural technique and reporting back at the next session.

Solution-focused therapy

▶ The counsellor and the person identify what is likely to be an effective action plan. They examine what has worked previously for the person or they explore other ways the person has identified. The counsellor encourages the person to put a plan into action.

Reach a decision

Coming to a conclusion and reaching a decision can be the final phase after a lengthy and detailed exploration of issues and concerns. The counsellor's role throughout the process has been to encourage and support the person to identify their problem(s), identify their aims and requirements, and assist them in their preparedness to action out their decision.

Ideally, a counsellor wants to support a person until a point is reached where their services are no longer needed because the person's goals have been met or a solution has been successfully trialled. Counselling services should be offered for as long as is possible at the discretion of the counsellor, their supervisor and in accordance with their agency's funding agreement. However, important considerations are the development and encouragement of the person's independence, autonomy and empowerment. 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.

Consider a contingency

A contingency or alternative course of action is a good thing to have as a back-up and being prepared for circumstances that can't be planned for or predicted with any certainty. In many cases it is important to develop a contingency plan while going through the problem-solving options and discuss this with the person. 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.

The aim of a contingency plan is to enable the person to continue on with some action for changing or improving their situation or circumstances regardless of external or internal factors that may derail the initial course of action. A carefully planned back-up plan means that the person is more likely to be encouraged to move towards problem-solving and not be discouraged with a setback.

Example

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

Here is a sample of a problem-solving worksheet that could be used as a document to record possible alternatives to a problem.

Person's name: Sally Ranger

Date: April 2017

Counsellor's name: Bill Figura

Identified problem: Now that Sally lives alone, she gets sad and lonely when on her own.

Alternatives:	Excellent	Fair	Poor
Call a family member or friend	X		
Join a local community club		X	
Start a hobby and join an interest group			X
Stay back after church		X	
Initiate plans to meet friends socially	X		
Volunteer at a local organisation	X		

Practice task 10

1. Define and explain what problem-solving is.

2. When is it appropriate to use the problem-solving method in counselling?

3. Give an example of the type of action planning that may be used in cognitive therapy techniques.

Click to complete Practice task 10

3C Document decisions and agreed ongoing support within organisational guidelines

Once a decision has been made and the person has agreed to a particular course of action, the final decision can be recorded in the case management notes.

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. Ongoing support may mean providing assistance with additional resources such as community or other Government services that can assist the person to carry out their chosen course of action. This might include legal advice or advice on Commonwealth financial assistance, a list of community resource contacts or perhaps support group information. The person may agree to some ongoing professional support that needs a referral. This could be for a physical or mental health issue and, depending on the size and type of services offered, this might be a referral to an external organisation or additional services offered from within the organisation.

Regardless of what the identified ongoing support will be, the person will always need to have agreed to these services and this agreement should be documented in the person's case management notes as per the organisation's guidelines.

Document information

Throughout the counselling process, there has been a professional responsibility for the counsellor to accurately document information and ensure all personal records adhere to organisational procedures and guidelines. All case notes need to be recorded in such a way as to provide a clear and accurate account of the counselling process based on facts.

The documenting process requires that there is a record of the person's progress through each counselling session and it should contain information that can be referred to again if there is any future contact with the person. If there are other team members with authority who need to access the documentation, they would be able to clearly comprehend what they read and be able to find all relevant documents and forms stored securely together. If there was ever a dispute over a course of action taken by a person and discussed within the counselling sessions, then there is a documented record of the decisions made and evidence of the agreed actions if required.

Organisational procedures

Policies and procedures for maintaining accurate and up-to-date records are based on legislative requirements that are directed at community organisations to be accountable for the services they provide.

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. These policies are designed to help organisations meet their requirements under different legislation, regulations or industry standards, including privacy laws, freedom of information legislation, regulations and codes of practice.

Always refer to a supervisor for copies of or questions about the individual organisational requirements for the documentation and storage of personal information.
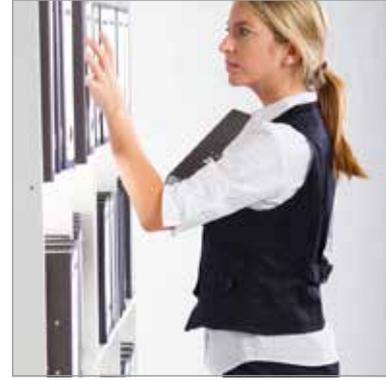
Email and written communication rules

Most organisations have policies or guidelines regarding the type of language to be used when sending correspondence on behalf of the organisation. The same rules that apply to printed correspondence also apply to email correspondence. Counsellors need to know what is expected in the workplace for referral or for communications to people within an organisation.

As with other forms of professional correspondence, emails should be written in clear, plain English, using professional language. If the person is not known to you, then use the conventional 'Dear Mr …' If there is a good relationship with someone, it is acceptable to use 'Hello'. Be careful of being too informal and friendly as the email communication may be forwarded onto others.

Here are some tips for use of email. Remember that text messaging should not be a form of email – only a short reminder for appointments or similar.

Rules for email and written communication
▶ Emails should be brief and to the point.
▶ Use uncomplicated words, short sentences and simple language.
▶ Do not overuse capital letters or bold font to emphasise points in your message.
▶ Never send aggressive messages or criticise other people in emails.
▶ Think about it overnight before you send it, if the message is difficult or stern.
▶ Respect people's privacy.
▶ Only give out someone's email address with their permission.
▶ Use proper spelling, grammar and punctuation.
▶ Don't leave out the message thread.
▶ Do not overuse Reply to All.

Document decisions and agreed ongoing support within organisational guidelines

Timothy is an older man who is the carer of his adult son, who has a mental illness. Tim says he doesn't really need counselling, but he worries about who will care for his son when he dies. He says he would just like to be able to talk to someone who understands his situation and to get some information about options for his son in the future.
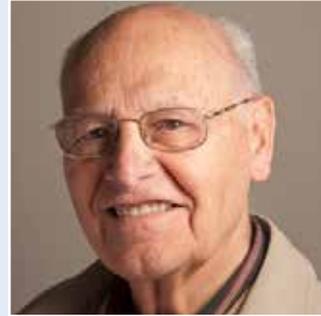
Dinesh is the counsellor talking to Timothy. Over a number of sessions, Dinesh offers support to Timothy and together they address his problem and make some decisions regarding the future care options for his son. At the end of the final session, Dinesh writes up his notes and documents the decisions Timothy has identified. Timothy would like to make contact with the carers support organisation that Dinesh has talked about. Dinesh arranges a referral letter and gives Timothy the contact details. Dinesh phones his contact at the carers support organisation and tells them that a client of his will make contact shortly.

Practice task 11

1. Provide an example of the type of ongoing support that may be recommended for a person once they have agreed to their course of action.

2. Why is it necessary to document decisions made as a part of the counselling process?

3. Provide two examples of rules for email and written correspondence within an organisation.

Click to complete Practice task 11

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.

Learning checkpoint 3
Support the client to reach decisions

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in supporting the client to reach decisions.

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Victor says he is seeking help because he is having some problems getting over the break-up of his relationship. As Prisha, the counsellor, is exploring Victor's concerns with him, he mentions that his girlfriend left him because she thinks his drinking is out of control and because he hit her accidentally once when he was drunk. Prisha believes that Victor did not deliberately hit his girlfriend. He admits that he does have a problem with alcohol and would like help to address this, but he also wants help improving his social skills so he can feel more comfortable in social situations and make some new friends.

After several counselling sessions together, Victor summarises his list of alternative courses of action he has available to him. Together Prisha and Victor examine each one in turn and list the advantages and disadvantages of each possible alternative. Victor disregards quite a few of the options on the basis that he cannot afford to spend too much money because of his rent commitments. Victor ends up with a few alternatives that could work well.

Victor likes the option of using his sound-mixing skills and turntables and speaker equipment to get a gig in a club. He tells Prisha that he was often asked to work in a club. He loved the excitement of being in a club and all types of people coming up and talking to him about the music he played.

Victor agrees on one course of action and Prisha signs off on it to formalise Victor's decision. After Victor's session finishes, Prisha takes some time to record and document what occurred during the counselling session. She keeps a record of the alternative options and the worksheet they used to identify the pros and cons of each option.

1. Why did Prisha work with Victor to assess the possible advantages and disadvantages of each course of action he identified?

2. Why was it important that Prisha encourage Victor to consider his requirements for each course of action and consider his strengths?

3. How can problem-solving be used in a counselling context?

4. How can action planning techniques be used in a counselling context?

5. Why does Prisha encourage Victor to decide on a course of action and consider alternatives that could be used as a back-up if necessary?

6. Explain why it is important for Prisha to document Victor's decisions and agreed ongoing support within organisational guidelines.