



COUNSELLING SKILLS

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About the Author

Traci is an experienced Counsellor, supervisor and tutor who has also worked extensively in homelessness and addiction settings. Over the years she has taught counselling at all levels and worked at CPCAB for over ten years to promote high standards in counselling training and qualification development. Traci currently works at BACP (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy) as a strategic project manager within the professional standards team.

SIX

Equality, diversity, discrimination and inclusion

Be the change that you wish to see in the world. (Mahatma Gandhi, n.d.)

The previous chapter highlighted the enormous value of the quality of empathy. It also highlighted that empathy cannot exist where there is judgement and a lack of understanding and acceptance. Empathy means to step into someone else's world and shoes, feeling through their heart and seeing through their eyes. In order to do this, we need first to be aware that other people are different from us. If we can't do that, we will simply imagine how we would feel in their situation and this is not empathy. We are all different. Even 'identical twins' are each different and unique. We also have different experiences and perceptions of life, experience, health and wellbeing. No matter how many similarities there may be, each person is unique and has a unique experience and viewpoint on life, relationships and themselves. The differences may be visible or invisible but they will be there. Table 6.1 lists just a few examples of 'differences'.

It is interesting to note that there are as many, if not more, unseen differences, which emphasises the need to use counselling skills to form a relationship that supports someone to open up about who they are and how they feel, so we can truly get to know them and not simply make guesses and assumptions. In order to use counselling skills in an effective, heartfelt way, we need to understand our own relationship with difference or diversity and become aware of all the ways we judge, discriminate, devalue, exclude and cause harm from prejudice, ignorance, fear and a whole host of other things that cause separation

Table 6.1 Visible and invisible differences

Visible differences	Invisible differences
Disabilities that can be seen	Disabilities that can't be seen
Colour / race	Taste and preference / likes and dislikes
Age	Feelings
Language	Sexuality
Dialect / accent	Religion and spirituality
Physical appearance, e.g. size	Values and beliefs
Gender	Family background / upbringing

Activity – Differences

You are invited to complete Table 6.1 by considering all the ways we are different, diverse and unique.

from others. When using counselling skills, it is all too easy to assume we know who someone is and what they need, without taking the time to find out.

The word 'diversity' can stir up some challenging feelings. For some people, the desire not to be judgemental can result in differences being ignored. There can be a fear of doing or saying the wrong thing and causing offence without meaning to, which results in not being able to make a real connection. Denying differences is like denying the person and ignoring who they are. By ignoring and not mentioning the fact that someone, for example, has a disability will not make the disability go away. Difference and diversity are about acknowledging, understanding and communication with curiosity and acceptance. It is saying to someone: 'What is it like to be you, here and now?' It is saying: 'I would like to understand what it is like to be you, here and now.' To begin the journey into being non-judgemental, understanding and accepting, there is a need to understand the terminology and language related to this issue and to take the time to reflect on our own person relationship with difference and diversity.

Discrimination

Discrimination means to exclude people because of their differences. Discrimination is often based on a person's negative attitude towards others. Various things can cause negative attitudes towards others, for example:

- Stereotyping
- Intersectionality
- Prejudice
- Assumptions.

Stereotyping

Stereotyping means to label entire groups of people with the same attributes. The definition of a stereotype is:

A fixed, over-generalised belief about a particular group or class of people. (Cardwell, 1996, p. 234)

For example, a 'Hells Angel' biker dresses in leather.

One *advantage* of a stereotype is that it enables us to respond rapidly to situations because we may have had a similar experience before. One *disadvantage* is that it makes us ignore differences between individuals; therefore, we think things about people that might not be true (i.e. we make generalisations).

As I am writing this, I have a whole host of stereotypes in my head that I have heard over the years. I am loath to write them down as they are mostly insulting and derogatory towards various groups of people. Most stereotypes follow the format:

All... are ...

An example might be:

All people who wear glasses are clever.

Stereotypes also exist in health and social care settings. Certain groups can be labelled as 'difficult' and/or demanding and this can impact on the care they receive. Once someone is labelled as 'difficult', this label can be handed on to new carers and support workers, who then meet the person with a preconceived expectation and may well act differently

Activity – Stereotypes

Take some time to reflect on the stereotypes you have heard and think about whether you believe them.

Also take the time to think about whether you would be comfortable writing them down and/or speaking them out loud.

towards them because they are expecting conflict or difficulties. This can be especially true in mental health services. Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), also known as Emotional Instability Disorder, was once thought of as something that was not treatable. It is a horrendous label which suggests that for people with this diagnosis there is no help. BPD is linked closely to emotional instability and often people with a BPD diagnosis have a history of severe trauma and abuse. There is treatment for BPD today, but the old stigma and stereotype can still persist. The stereotype itself is, in my opinion, a way of perpetuating the instability, emotionality and irrationality associated with the disorder as the professionals involved risk responding to the label of 'difficult and demanding', rather than seeing a unique individual in terrible pain and distress, and who lacks the ability to manage their feelings and environment – somewhat like a tiny child.

Activity – Recognising stereotypes and discrimination

The below account is from a young woman called Rose. Once you have read her experience, comment on the questions it raises.

My name is Rose, I am mixed race and 21 years old. I take a lot of medication to stabilise my mood and for psychosis. Basically, I've had a crap life. My mum has mental health problems and my dad sexually abused me from when I was 3, maybe younger. I came into services when I was 12 years old. I was self-harming myself pretty badly by then. Being part of child mental health services wasn't too bad – I generally got the feeling they wanted to help me. I was admitted to hospital a few times for months on end and quite a few times I was restrained and held down by several people and injected with some sort of sedative – this was because I think I was having flashbacks to the abuse and just freaked out.

When I was 18 years old, they moved me into adult services and as time has gone on things have felt really different and I feel blamed and judged nearly all the time. On my first admission to an adult ward, I felt ignored and judged, and when I tried to say this, it was suggested that I was making it up due to my illness. I wasn't making it up. I know when someone is patronising or ignoring me. I was told to take responsibility in an adult way, but had to ask to go outside for a cigarette and would sometimes have to wait over an hour for someone to unlock the door. Told to be an adult, but treated like a child. I felt they hated me and saw me as a time waster, stopping all the people who were really ill from getting help. Both in and out of hospital I know I am difficult; I was just all over the place, my moods seemed so extreme.

I felt so terrified most of the time and would reach out and ring the crisis team for help, but they couldn't wait to get me off the phone. I felt wretched all the time and nobody seemed to understand. They kept telling me to stop being attention-seeking and take some responsibility for myself. But I just felt like exploding all the time. The more they didn't like me and ignored me, the more I needed help and wanted to hurt myself, and the more they said I was attention-seeking. I didn't wash or look after myself, but I didn't know why. I just knew I was desperate and alone and trying my best but no one seemed interested. I tried to kill myself several times and was taken to A and E, but they just discharged me after a couple of hours and I was left on the street with no way of even getting home. I hadn't even been told I had been diagnosed as having a personality disorder – I don't know if they treated me the way they did because of how I behaved or because they had been told my diagnosis. I just know it was a shit time and no one seemed happy – me or them.

What stereotypes do you think might have been applied to Rose?

What sort of discrimination could result from this stereotyping?

If you were working with Rose, what sort of things could you do to ensure she is not being discriminated against within services?

Intersectionality

The Oxford Dictionary states:

Intersectionality, n.

The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and

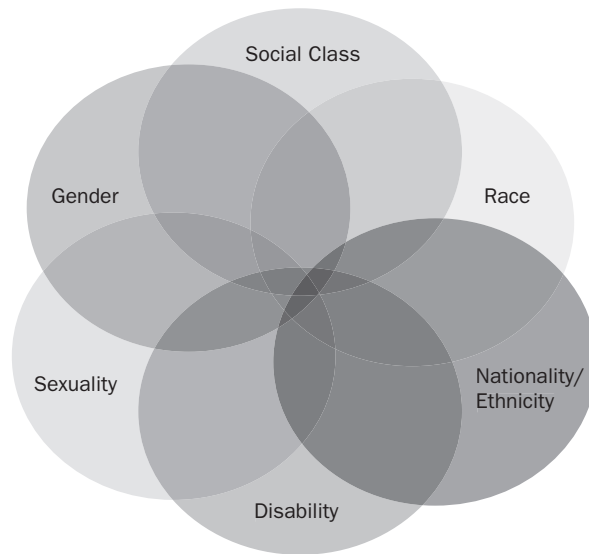


Figure 6.1 Intersectionality (created by Jakobi Oware)

Source: Reproduced under CC BY-NC-SA.

interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage; a theoretical approach based on such a premise.

Intersectionality is therefore a framework for understanding how different aspects of someone's identity combine to produce unique modes of discrimination and privilege (see Figure 6.1). It identifies advantages and disadvantages that are felt by people due to a combination of factors.

In simple terms, intersectionality refers to how some people are discriminated for more than one characteristic and that people can be disadvantaged by multiple areas of oppression, e.g. race, class, age, gender identity, religion or lack of, age, sexual orientation, etc. For example:

A woman earns less than a man.

A black woman earns less than a white woman who earns less than a man.

A trans black woman earns less than a white woman who earns less than a man.

This is quite a simplistic example but it shows that when there are multiple areas of potential discrimination, the impact on the person is greater.

Activity – Intersectionality

In the activity above, how might intersectionality be impacting on Rose's experience?

Prejudice

Prejudice is an unjustified or incorrect attitude (usually negative) towards an individual based solely on the individual's membership of a social group. For example, a person may hold prejudiced views towards a certain race or gender (e.g. a sexist attitude) (McLeod, 2008). There is a relationship and similarity between stereotypes and prejudice. Basically, as stated, stereotypes are beliefs held about certain groups of people. Prejudice is how those groups are negatively assessed. Prejudice has an emotional component and response, whereas stereotyping is more of an intellectual exercise. We are prejudiced when we make judgements about individual members of a stereotyped group and, from that judgement, decide whether someone is acceptable or not acceptable. On a simplistic level, prejudice is to pre-judge. It is to make a decision before we have any of the information we need to make a fair and accurate appraisal.

If we are homophobic, we are prejudiced against all gay people, before we have even met them.

If we are an Anti-Semite, we are prejudiced against all Jewish people, before we have even met them.

If we are a xenophobe, we are prejudiced against all people from other countries, before we have even met them.

Assumptions

An assumption is the act of supposing something or taking it for granted without proof. When using counselling skills, it is all too easy to assume we know things without evidence and information to back up our knowledge. Assumption kills curiosity and stops us from wanting to know and understand more. If we know something, why would we keep looking for it? Sometimes assumptions can be accurate and sometimes they are not, and that is too much of a gamble to take with someone's life. If we do think we know something, it is important to check it out for accuracy rather than running with the assumption. When using counselling skills, we need to keep reminding ourselves about the distinction between

facts and assumptions, to ask questions if needed and to keep the conversation open and flowing. Part of using counselling skills may also be to challenge someone else's assumptions. Someone may assume a friend doesn't like them because they haven't phoned. This may be true, but there could also be many other reasons why the friend hasn't phoned. Counselling skills can gently challenge the assumption, explore the feelings it has evoked and look for ways to find resolution.

Some everyday assumptions might be:
 Most people have a better life than I do
 I am right and anyone who disagrees is stupid
 I will wake up tomorrow
 My partner will be faithful
 Things will work out OK
 The grass is greener on the other side
 I can get a lover as long as I am attractive and pleasant and nice
 It won't happen to me
 Being rich will make me happy
 Everything happens for a reason
 Everyone is having an affair or cheating
 Good times are just around the corner
 There is life after death.

The most important thing to take from this chapter is to understand why we judge, the origins of personal and societal stereotypes and prejudice, and the willingness to challenge and move past them in order to be able to communicate and support someone without the blinkers of judgement and assumptions. In terms of offering care and support, the goal is to be inclusive and to work hard to make sure that difference is not a reason for refusing care and support.

Inclusion

Inclusion means being included within either a group or society as a whole. Inclusion doesn't simply mean an open-door policy. Inviting someone in a wheelchair to a support group that takes place on the third floor of a building that has no lift is not being inclusive. Inviting a deaf person to a motivational talk without the provision of sign language and placing them too far back from the stage to read lips is not being inclusive. A care worker telling someone what to do and doing everything for them may seem appropriate for someone with complex

needs, but actually everyone has the right to have a say and take part in their care and life, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant. When using counselling skills, it is vital to include the person being supported. When working with someone who has a hoarding disorder, who is just about to lose their child and their home due to the state of that home, it can seem very helpful and necessary to just clean up the house, but this would not be useful. The person with the disorder needs to be included in the process for it to be meaningful and helpful in the long term.

Inclusivity covers more than just premises and improving access; among many other things, it can include times and dates, language, gender, disability, ability, age and whether parents can bring their children with them. The list is long and careful consideration is needed to ensure that no one seeking help and support is excluded. It is important to understand someone's differences so that they can be included and treated equally and fairly. Those using counselling skills must take care to ensure the work is inclusive and that everyone has the opportunity to take part when they want to.

Noah's Ark

When I think of inclusivity, I think of the story of Noah's Ark. All animals, beasts, insects and birds of the earth and sky were welcome and able to board Noah's Ark. The entrance was big enough and wide enough for all and there was somewhere for all to live and sleep. No creature was left out. No creature was the wrong colour, shape, size or demeanour to be excluded. They were all different but all were of equal value. They must have had to find a way to exist together ... and certainly not to eat each other!

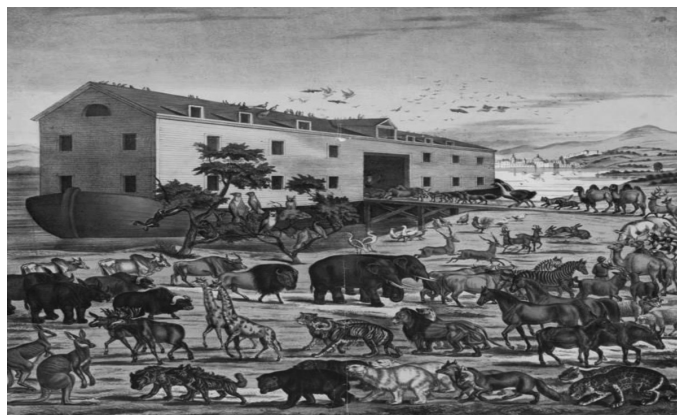


Figure 6.2 The animals go in two by two – hoorah, hoorah!

Source: George F. Cram, 1882

Activity – Create your own Noah’s Ark

Design a modern-day Noah’s Ark for people – all types of people, all sizes, colours, abilities, personalities, shapes and genders.

Design the inside and also the entrance way.

Where would people sleep, cook, eat, socialise, play, work, etc.?

How would you assign the jobs that need doing and to whom?

Unlike real life, you have unlimited space and an unlimited budget.

Please draw your **Ark of Life**.

Many of us understand the pain of being excluded, of not being picked for a school sports team or not being invited to a party, of being left out and not belonging.

Learning journal

The topic ‘difference and diversity’ was covered today. I feel a lot of fear around this subject. I feel scared of getting things wrong and saying the wrong thing. I don’t want people to think I’m racist or homophobic because I use the wrong term or word.

I don’t think I’m racist but growing up, there were a lot of stereotypes applied to different races and cultures. Whole races were considered mean or stupid or greedy or cruel or violent, and although I know that such labels cannot possibly apply to whole groups of people, the old messages are still there at times. What I do find difficult is responding to other people who are being racist. I still don’t feel brave enough to challenge someone, but then I feel guilty that I have in some way colluded with them. I’ve written about this in a previous journal entry and it remains a real problem for me. Last week I was in the supermarket and someone made a very derogatory comment to me about certain people who should take their ways back to their own country as they weren’t welcomed here. I felt uncomfortable and also angry, but all I did was half nod and half smile and made my escape. I still feel as guilty as if it had been me who had made the horrible comment.

In the skills practice sessions, I know we are meant to acknowledge and work with the differences and similarities between us, but my default position is to pretend I haven't noticed any differences, even when they are glaringly obvious. In last week's skills practice session, I was working with a peer who is a black woman and quite a lot older than I am. I mentioned the age difference between us but just could not bring up the difference in race. Even writing this, I don't know whether to write – race or colour or culture. So, the most obvious difference between us – I am white and she is black – was ignored.

Another thing I do which really annoys me is that I am overly nice and jolly to people I see who have a physical disability. Because I feel uncomfortable, I act stupidly and then I feel guilty about that.

Tutor feedback

Thank you for your honesty. You have a lot of guilt.

You give a good overview of your fears and discomfort around difference and diversity. I appreciate all that you wrote and agree that words can wound and hurt, but the attitude and intention behind the words is the power that has the strength to harm or heal. The skills session with your peer, as you acknowledge, would have been so much richer by not only acknowledging the differences between you but also acknowledging your difficulty in talking about it.

I agree, it is difficult to challenge other people's prejudice and hatred towards certain groups, and in some cases it risks the bad feeling turning onto you, but, as you say, you felt as guilty as if you had made the horrible comment. If you had been able, what would you have wanted to say and do in that situation? As stated, you have given a good overview and identified some challenges. I would now invite you to reflect on your personal prejudices and discomfort around the topic of diversity. What feelings are there? What prejudices persist even after challenge? What role does fear play?

Working and living to ensure equality of opportunity and a fair society is not just a nice thing to do. Being judgemental is not confined to the worlds of counselling, care, support and helping others. It is the law.

The Equalities Act 2010

The Equalities Act was introduced in the United Kingdom in 2010. It provides a legal framework of anti-discrimination and promotes equality of opportunity for all. It is an umbrella of protection from unfair treatment and promotes a just and equal society. The Equalities Act works by offering legal protection against discrimination or unfair treatment for certain personal characteristics which are vulnerable to discrimination. These personal characteristics are called 'protected characteristics' and it is against the law to discriminate against anyone because of:

- Age
- Disability
- Race, including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin
- Being pregnant or on maternity leave
- Gender reassignment
- Being married or in a civil partnership
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation.

The law protects those with these protected characteristics:

- At work
- In education
- As a consumer
- When using public services
- When buying or renting a property
- As a member or guest of a private club or association.

The Equalities Act is not inclusive to those within the 'protected characteristics'. The law also offers protection from discrimination for those associated with someone who has a 'protected characteristic', for example friends, family members, partners. The law also protects anyone who complains about discrimination or supports someone else's complaint.

Perception

There is something else that can get in the way of being non-judgemental and that is our own feelings and perceptions. Some days I am an incredibly loving and understanding person – on other days, I don't like

A tale of perception

Version 1

I woke up this morning, feeling warm and cosy. I laid in bed for a few minutes listening to the birds singing outside the window, enjoying the different sounds and how they just sing their hearts out into the world. I could hear the world waking up and stretched and yawned and got up ready to meet the day. I have a duvet cover and pillows with butterflies on and it always makes me smile when I make the bed. I went into the bathroom and noticed how sleepy I looked in the mirror. I splashed my face with water to wake up. Having a shower brought me completely to life and I felt refreshed and clean afterwards. I bought a new dress last week and decided to wear it for the first time. It fits like a glove. I walked into the kitchen and made myself tea and toast, which I really enjoyed. I put a big dollop of peanut butter on my toast, yummy. I stacked the dishwasher and wiped the sides quickly, and had a few minutes to play with my dog Benjy before I went to work. He's a beautiful golden labrador and I just adore him; he's like an actual person and I'm sure he talks to me.

As I left the house, I noticed my neighbour and waved a hello. He was trimming the honeysuckle that grows along the fence between us. He trims my side too and I must remember to buy him a little present as a thank you. The farmer from across the way was trying to reverse his tractor up the track opposite my house. I know how difficult that can be and stopped to help guide him. He told me his daughter has given birth to twins and he now has 11 grandchildren. 11!! He invited me to a little get-together in the village later in the week. I'm grateful to be part of a close-knit community. There was quite a lot of traffic on the way to work, but the time passed listening to a really funny programme on Radio 2. The nursery kids were on their way in and its lovely to see them making a long caterpillar, all holding hands with a teacher at the front and back to make sure no one gets lost. I was a few minutes late for work but I can easily make that up at lunchtime, and I work for a decent company so it's not a problem. I had a chat with colleagues while my computer warmed up and then noticed an email from my boss asking to meet later. I felt excited. I've applied for a promotion and wonder if it's about that. Well, I'll soon find out! John from finance was laughing in the kitchen. He's got a big booming laugh which is infectious and made me smile even though I didn't know what was funny.

I've only been awake an hour and a half and such a lot has already happened. Hopefully the rest of the day will be as good.

anything or anybody, myself included. The story here illustrates this. The story hopefully portrays how personal thoughts and feelings can affect how we see and feel about a situation and how in turn that perception can impact on how we care for and support others when using counselling skills.

A tale of perception

Version 2

I woke up this morning, feeling sweaty and suffocated by the duvet. I laid in bed for a few minutes, and my head was already going a million miles an hour, full of all the things I should do and reminding me of what a mess my life is. The birds were squawking as if they were being tortured outside the window and the noise felt like sandpaper on my brain. I could hear the dustman and the traffic, and some idiot was bellowing on the building site which made me get up as there was no peace to be found in my bedroom. The sheet had come off the bed and I got even sweatier and became more bad-tempered as I tried to manhandle it back on. I went into the bathroom. I looked in the mirror and couldn't believe what I saw. I looked like an old crone and wondered how I even dared go outside with a face like mine. Having a shower nearly gave me a heart attack. The shower ran cold and I nearly drowned myself trying to sort the temperature out. Nasty thing. I got in and out as quick as possible. I put on a new dress I bought last week and was horrified. I looked like a space-hopper squashed into a condom. Disgusting! I make myself feel sick. I took it off and put on leggings and a baggy top, angry with myself for being a fat, ugly, greedy monster.

I walked into the kitchen and made myself tea and toast, which stuck in my throat as I'm far too fat already and should eat fruit rather than toast and a big dollop of peanut butter. It serves me right for being a greedy pig. My dog Benjy heard me and ran in. He wanted a walk but he'll have to wait, which makes me feel guilty for not getting up in time. He jumped up at me and covered me in hairs and I'm too late to change. I shouted at him and pushed him away. I don't even know why I got a dog, I don't like them and they're too much responsibility.

As I left the house, I noticed my neighbour trimming the honeysuckle that grows along the fence we share. He trims my side too, but why doesn't he just mind his own business? He makes me feel guilty and annoyed. Do-gooder! He should stay on his side. So what if the honeysuckle is untidy. I really don't like him and having to pretend to be nice. I waved but couldn't summon up a smile and now am annoyed I even waved as I didn't want to.

Great! The farmer from across the way was trying to reverse his tractor up the track opposite my house. Who made him King of the Road – idiot, entitled buffoon. His stupid daughter has produced yet more offspring and there's a get-together in the village later in the week. I'd rather eat my own head than have anything to do with someone like that. I hope the tractor gets stuck in the mud for a week. There was a ton of traffic on the way to work and I wanted to scream with frustration at the people driving like snails. I was very tempted to just drive into one of them. Some people should stick to walking – morons. Then the nursery kids caused another hold-up crossing the road in a huge great procession – come on, come on, come on, hurry up! Of course I was late for work, and not one person asked if I was OK. Horrible job anyway. My colleagues were chatting together – don't mind me – ignorant people. The first email on my computer was from my boss asking to meet later. What the heck does she want? How does she even know I'm late? What have I done wrong? She can stick the job up her bum if she thinks she can intimidate me. Stuck up bitch. Big John from finance was laughing in the kitchen. What's so funny? He better not be laughing at me.

I've only been awake an hour and a half and already I've lost the will to live.

Both of the above examples are by the same person about the same day. Nothing changed or is different apart from the person's perception. Perception plays a huge part in how we view the world and also how we perceive and judge others.

If I feel bad about myself, I tend to struggle to see anything good in people and the world.

If I feel good about myself, I tend to see goodness in people and in the world.

How judgemental I am about others is often dependent on how I feel about myself. This suggests that when I point the finger at someone else, three fingers point back at me. Some of us have a kind of radio in our head that gets stuck on a certain channel called 'Crap FM'. When we wake up in the morning, Crap FM switches on and we are deafened by the same old song.

You're crap and you know you are. You're crap and you know you are...

If you are the kind of person who has Crap FM in your head, it is important to remember to turn it off every morning.