

Access to Higher Education Unit

This unit forms part of an Access to HE Diploma. If delivering the graded version of this unit, please refer to the Provider Handbook for details on grading descriptors and the application of these across units within your programme.

Unit Title: Professional Skills for Counselling

Graded Unit Reference Number: GA36COU04

Ungraded Unit Reference Number: UA36COU04

Module: Counselling

Level: Three [3]

Credit Value: Six [6]

Minimum Guided Learning Hours: 60

Learning Outcome (The Learner will):	Assessment Criterion (The Learner can):
1. Understand the purpose and processes involved in establishing a counselling working alliance	1.1 Explain the purpose and importance of contracting within counselling practice.
	1.2 Explain how a safe and ethical therapeutic environment is established, including boundaries and confidentiality.
	1.3 Describe the roles and responsibilities of counsellor and client in forming a working alliance.
2. Be able to demonstrate and reflect on initiating, developing and ending a counselling interaction	2.1 Demonstrate the ability to initiate, maintain and appropriately end a simulated counselling interaction.
	2.2 Reflect on own performance in initiating, maintaining and ending a simulated counselling interaction, identifying strengths and areas for development.

3. Understand the legal, ethical and professional responsibilities in counselling practice	3.1 Explain the purpose of key legal requirements relevant to counselling practice, including: • UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018 • Equality Act 2010 • Mental Health legislation (e.g., Mental Health Act, Mental Capacity Act) 3.2 Explain how ethical principles inform practice in areas such as confidentiality, safeguarding, supervision, and referral.
4. Understand ethical principles and personal qualities within contemporary counselling ethical frameworks	4.1 Summarise the core ethical principles and personal moral qualities from a current, recognised UK counselling/psychotherapy ethical framework (e.g., BACP, UKCP, BPS, NCS). 4.2 Explain how these principles and qualities contribute to ethical and professional counselling practice.

Indicative Content

Learners could cover the following:

(The information below is provided for guidance only and is not mandatory)

LO1	AC1.1 Purpose of contracting: establishing boundaries; clarifying expectations; ensuring informed consent; outlining session structure, confidentiality, and its limits. Types of contracts: written vs verbal contracts; collaborative agreements; reviewing and renegotiating contracts. Professional considerations: transparency, safeguarding, power dynamics, maintaining clarity to support trust. AC1.2 Therapeutic environment: physical and emotional safety; privacy; neutrality; accessibility; managing risk. Boundaries: time boundaries (session length, endings); role boundaries; interpersonal boundaries. Confidentiality: legal and ethical limits; safeguarding duties; recording and storing information safely. Cultural sensitivity: adapting the environment to promote inclusivity and reduce barriers.
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	AC1.3 Roles and responsibilities: client autonomy and participation; counsellor professionalism, ethical conduct, and adherence to codes of practice. Working alliance: collaboration, shared goals, tasks, and development of trust. Communication foundations: active listening, empathy, respect, and appropriate use of counselling skills.
LO2	AC2.1 Initiating counselling interactions: welcoming the client; clarifying purpose; establishing rapport; contracting; attending behaviours. Developing the interaction: using core skills (e.g., paraphrasing, reflecting, summarising, open questions); managing silence; exploring client themes; maintaining focus; managing boundaries. Ending interactions: signalling time boundaries; summarising key points; supporting client stability at session end; planned versus unforeseen endings. Simulated practice expectations: demonstration within role-play scenarios using appropriate ethical awareness. AC2.2 Self-awareness: recognising own responses, assumptions, and emotional reactions. Reflective practice: strengths and limitations; impact of communication style; appropriateness of interventions. Feedback: giving and receiving constructive feedback; linking observations to counselling theory and skill competency. Development planning: identifying areas for improvement; considering supervision needs; ongoing learning.
LO3	AC3.1 Key legislation: • Data protection: UK GDPR, Data Protection Act (2018); confidentiality, secure storage, client rights. • Equality and anti-discrimination: Equality Act (2010); protected characteristics; inclusive practice. • Mental health and capacity: Mental Health Act, Mental Capacity Act; consent; safeguarding; decision-making frameworks. Purpose of legislation: promoting safety, fairness, privacy, autonomy, access to support, and ethical accountability. Professional responsibilities: adhering to organisational procedures; recognising when to seek supervision or escalate concerns. AC3.2 Ethical principles: confidentiality; non-maleficence; beneficence; justice; autonomy; fidelity.

	Application to practice: confidentiality limits; risk disclosure; handling ethical dilemmas; maintaining competence. Supervision: purpose, structure, and benefits for service quality and practitioner development. Referral: criteria for appropriate referral; signposting; multi-agency working; ensuring client continuity of care.
LO4	AC4.1 Ethical frameworks: overview of widely recognised frameworks (e.g., BACP Ethical Framework, UKCP Code of Ethics, BPS Code of Ethics, NCS Code of Ethical Practice). Ethical principles: values-based practice; integrity; respect; responsibility; competence; professional boundaries. Moral qualities: empathy, humility, sincerity, courage, resilience, fairness, and wisdom. AC4.2 Practical implications: applying ethical principles to real-world scenarios; ethical decision-making models; managing dual relationships; handling conflicts of interest. Professional identity: understanding the counsellor's role within the helping professions; accountability; reflective practice; importance of lifelong learning.