

# Skills Associated with the Interactional Model

## Part A: Definitions

- ✓ **Tuning into self:** The worker's effort to get in touch with potential feelings/concerns/beliefs that the worker him/herself may bring to the helping encounter.

Relevance to practice: Worker self-awareness is essential in order to avoid worker feelings and bias from adversely affecting the intervention and helping process.

- ✓ **Tuning into others:** The worker's effort to get in touch with potential feelings and concerns that the client may bring to the helping encounter.

Relevance to practice: In order to promote engagement and the collaborative/protective partnership, the worker needs to be able to focus on and take into account client feelings and concerns.

- ✓ **Tuning into the environmental situation:** The worker's effort to get in touch with the specific situation of the client and any feelings associated with their situation.

Relevance to practice: This skill includes seeking to understand the context in which the client is trying to work out personal and family needs. It also includes worker awareness of environmental or situational elements that effect worker, child, and client safety.

- ✓ **Clarifying purpose:** Statement of the helping professional's role/function at the agency, specifically as it relates to the stated problem or issue at hand. Also includes a simple, non-jargonized statement by the helping professional regarding the general purpose of the meeting/session. Clarification of purpose is also used when the worker shifts the focus of the interview to a new topic area (see example #2 below).

Relevance to practice: Helps the client to be clear about who you are and what you are about; tends to reduce client resistance based on lack of clarity or misunderstanding of purpose.

Examples: "Good morning Mr. and Mrs. Lindberg. I am Emily Airhart from Carson County Children and Youth Services. I will conduct the foster home study with you today. I hope by the end of our meeting we will know whether or not becoming foster parents for a troubled teen is a good match for you and CYS."

"Ms. Wilson, I am going to ask you some questions about yourself and your family that will help me to better understand if there are any additional risks to your children of which you or possibly I may not be aware. Also, another purpose of these questions is to help us identify strengths and resources that you and your family have that may help to keep the children safe and healthy."

# Skills Associated with the Interactional Model (cont'd)

## **Part A: Definitions (cont'd)**

- ✓ **Dealing with issues of authority:** Use of communications that invite and assist expressions of complaints about the helping professional or the helping process, as well as clarification about the level of authority that the worker believes is necessary to promote cooperation and change.

Relevance to practice: Child welfare work is necessarily intrusive. The worker is aware of this reality and seeks to use only that level of authority that is necessary to promote achievement of required outcomes. Best-practice cautions the worker to explore alternative strategies for dealing with client resistance before increasing authority. However, when higher levels of authority are required, the worker must be able to explain and implement the necessary level of authority.

- ✓ **Reaching for feedback:** Encourages others to respond to the helping professional's explanation of why the meeting is occurring, his or her role/function at the agency, etc.

Relevance to practice: This skill is crucial for assessing the client's level of understanding of issues, goals and tasks so that the worker and client have a common and clear understanding of expectations and roles.

Examples: "How do you feel about what I just explained to you?"  
"Do you agree with the plan as I outlined it to you?"  
"Do you believe you can carry out the tasks that we identified?"

- ✓ **Reaching for feelings:** Asking the client to share the affective portion of the message

Relevance to practice: This skill requires genuine empathy on the part of the worker and the openness of stepping into the client's shoes and experiencing the client's feelings. It is not to be used routinely in rote kind of way.

Example: "You said that caring for your three young children by yourself when your husband is away on trips is difficult. How do you feel about all that work and responsibility?"

Example: "Can you tell me what you are thinking and feeling right now?"

# Skills Associated with the Interactional Model (cont'd)

## Part A: Definitions (cont'd)

- ✓ **Putting the client's feelings into words:** Articulation of what the helping professional feels someone may be feeling but cannot put into words.

Relevance to practice: Sometimes clients may have feelings that they may not be able to put into words. By attending to non-verbal cues and the context of the interaction, the worker can put into words what the client may have difficulty expressing.

Example: "When you said that you started drinking again, you sighed and looked down. Are you feeling embarrassed by this relapse?"

Example: "You've asked me twice how old I am and if I have children. Are you really wondering if I will be able to understand you and be of help?"

- ✓ **Confrontation:** The bringing forward and articulation by the worker of discrepancies in client verbalized intentions and actual behavior; identifying client resistance to the established purpose of the session; identifying apparent denial.

Relevance to practice: This skill is important for promoting real work and addressing obstacles to progress. Confrontation helps to avoid development of hidden or conflicting agendas that may compromise real work. Confrontation need not involve anger. It is essentially the practice of honest communication about gaps or incongruities between client intentions and verbalizations and actual behavior. The client may sometimes use confrontation to challenge the worker's stated purpose and actual behaviors.

Example: "You said that the baby was hurt when he rolled off of the sofa onto the floor. That explanation of the injury does not match the medical evidence from the hospital."

Example: "You said that Amanda made up the story of her being fondled by your boyfriend. However, your son, John and one of his friends witnessed the incident. What do you think about that?"

Example: "You say that it's very important for you to get your son back home. Yet you have missed the last two visits with him and have not made an effort to find housing. I'm confused about what your real priority is."

Example: "You asked me why Bobbie has not been returned to you. You know we discussed that several times already, and I even wrote the explanation down for you. What's really behind your question?"

## **Skills Associated with the Interactional Model (cont'd)**

### **Part A: Definitions (cont'd)**

- ✓ **Providing relevant data:** Providing someone with information he or she needs to consider as decisions and plans are being made.

Relevance to practice: This skill involves answering client requests for information or offering information to the client about policies, procedures, resources, etc.

- ✓ **Identifying next steps:** Helping another to develop ideas about future actions based upon current discussion or overall outcomes accomplished.

Relevance to practice: In order for work to move forward, the worker needs to assess the relevance of any given session with the client to expected progress on goals. Based on that assessment, the worker expresses what steps are needed next to continue progress. Next steps need established in collaboration with the client to assure understanding and compliance.

### **Part B: Skill Practice**

- I. Purpose statement:** Write a purpose statement that includes the following elements: (a) your introduction of yourself to a new client; (b) why you are meeting with the client; and (c) what outcome you hope to achieve from this meeting.
  
- II. Displaying Understanding of Client Feelings/Situation:** Write a response to the statements below communicating your understanding of the client's feelings and situation. Your response should include a feeling word(s) and a brief recap of why the client feels that way.

Client: "I've got three kids, no job and I just found out I'm diabetic. I do not know what I am going to do. It's so hard."

## **Skills Associated with the Interactional Model (cont'd)**

### **Part B: Skill Practice (cont'd)**

Client: “I’ve got a decent place to live now, I’ve been clean from drugs for six months, and the judge said Tiffany can come home with me next week. Wow!”

Client: “I’m sick and tired of CYS harassing me. I hear fighting and kids screaming all the time from the family at the end of the street. Why aren’t you investigating them instead of me?”