

Module 13 Lesson 2

Transcript

Okay, friends. It isn't about you. Well, this is all about you, but this one specifically, this lesson is not about you. You are helpers. You have lots of knowledge and experience. You are working to help people be a better version of themselves. But it's not about you. Today's lesson is on self-disclosure. By the end of it, you'll be able to define what self-disclosure is and the advantages and disadvantages of personal sharing and decide how to effectively use self-disclosure in your practice when counseling.

We disclose a lot about ourselves before we even open our mouths. People learn about us by our age, how we dress, the jewelry we wear, the color of our skin, the way we hold our posture, and more. How we present ourselves to the world is meaningful and people learn a good amount about us just from their first impression. Self-disclosure is the process of passing on information about yourself to someone else, and this can be verbal or nonverbal.

In psychology and most mental health professions sharing personal information is not done casually. The goal of the therapist is to guide the client to their insights. I'm not a mental health professional, but from my studies on counseling and self-disclosure, I also try to be really pointed in sharing about myself. Before I share, I ask myself: How is this going to benefit my client?

Self-disclosure can be used positively in a number of ways. Self-disclosure can help to reduce the power differential between you and the client. It can increase trust in the counseling relationship. It can help your client to feel less alone knowing you've had the same issue. And if used correctly, your client may feel more understood knowing you have had a similar experience.

It can also work against you in a number of ways. Poorly-timed or executed self-disclosure can increase distress. Not what you want to do. The client may question your motives or see you as getting too involved. Your client may feel that you are impaired, struggling, or not fully recovered. Your client may feel that you're not listening or that you're more focused on your own issues than theirs; and the client may become too comfortable with you and begin to view you as a friend instead of a professional.

Think about these points and I really encourage you to ask yourself how you're benefiting your clients by sharing whatever it is you share about yourself. I'm sure we've all had clients ask us if we were overweight or if we've managed IBS or otherwise in the field we're in because of the issues of personal interest. Does it really help your client to know that your parents also took you to

Weight Watchers when you were 10? Is it in your client's best interest to share that you overcame binge eating? You absolutely want to build trust and establish rapport and credibility, but be deliberate in your sharing. Be mindful of your sharing. You absolutely want to build trust and establish rapport and credibility, but be deliberate and mindful in your sharing.

Here are my tips for effective self-disclosure. Know your motives. Ask yourself if it will benefit your client to share and how will it benefit your client. Be brief. Don't dominate with the story behind what you're sharing, but use disclosure to help your client feel understood on a deeper level. Stay professional. Love your clients, but they are not your friends or colleagues. Having a higher level of professionalism will only benefit your authority. Give your full attention when your client is sharing with you and follow up with questions to deepen your understanding and build trust. Don't overdo it. A little sharing is meaningful, but too much is overkill. Anecdotes and supported research sharing may be better ways to relate to your clients. It doesn't always have to be personal.

Keep these things in mind also if you have a professional social media. This is a whole other big topic that I'm not going to get too into now, but I do want to just mention it here. Is it helpful for your clients to see you cooking for your children or sharing yourself on vacation in a swimsuit? Sometimes your intentions can be misunderstood or even triggering to the population you're serving. Be mindful. It might be positive, but it might be negative. Be deliberate and make sure your text supports the messaging behind your intentions and posting.

Okay, time to review. Self-disclosure is the process of passing on information about yourself to someone else, and this can be verbal or nonverbal. Positive outcomes of self-disclosure include reducing the power differential between you and your client, increasing trust, helping your client feel less alone, helping your client feel more understood. And on the other hand, negative outcomes can include increasing distrust, your client feeling you're struggling, your client feeling like you aren't listening, and your client's seeing you as more of a friend, not a professional. If you want to self-disclose, decide how this will benefit the client. Be brief, stay professional, give your client your full attention, and don't overdo it. Also, consider your presence in social media, if you have a professional social media. I will see you in the next lesson.