



Contraceptive Counseling: *Training New Counselors*

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content:	Essential Counseling Techniques

Overview

This document reviews the counseling techniques that are essential during a contraceptive counseling session. It is important to discuss these skills and strategies during contraceptive counseling training, and to remind counselors to review them on an ongoing basis to maintain optimal interactions with patients. For examples of these techniques, refer to the [Essential Counseling Skills](#) video.

Qualities of a Good Counselor

- Empathetic (the ability to understand the view of another person)
- Respectful
- Warm
- Confidential or discreet
- Honest
- Attentive or listening
- Unbiased
- Understandable or clear
- Unhurried

Counseling Skills

- **Effective Questioning.** Use questions to elicit facts or feelings about the patient's health. Use closed-ended questions to quickly gather factual, nonsensitive information, while open-ended questions are critical for eliciting feelings and detailed information. Use probing questions to elicit more in-depth information.
- **Active Listening.** To get the information you need to help a patient, you must listen actively. This technique involves communicating, without words, your interest in the needs the patient expresses. You can open up communication by using silence. You can let the patient know that you are listening by maintaining eye contact, leaning forward, occasionally saying words like "yes," "uh-huh," and "please continue"—these are signs of respect and generate a feeling of well-being in the person who is being heard.
- **Paraphrase, Summarize and Clarify.** This technique involves repeating, synthesizing, or summarizing in other words what the patient has told you. This helps the counselor clarify what the patient is saying, and helps the patient feel that she's been heard.
- **Reflect and Validate Feelings.** This technique involves clarifying the feelings the patient expresses in order to help understand her emotions. It is helpful to patients to let them know that their reactions to a situation are normal, and that those feelings are common to other people in similar situations. You can communicate that the feelings are valid.
- **Give Clear Information.** Before you give any information, it is helpful to ask questions to determine how much the patient already knows. It is important to provide information using words that the patient can understand. Ask patients to repeat the information you have given them to verify that they understood.
- **Arrive at Agreement.** This technique involves clarifying and summarizing the decisions that a patient has made during the counseling session.



Making a Patient Feel Comfortable

Sharing a reproductive health history can be uncomfortable for a patient. Demonstrating effective interpersonal skills is essential to help the patient feel comfortable and respected during counseling. Body posture, eye contact, physical appearance as well as actions, gestures, behaviors and facial expressions can affect whether or not the patient answers questions honestly.

Strategies to help a patient feel comfortable:

- Greet the patient with a warm smile
- Offer the patient water, coffee, or tea
- Complete the counseling session in a private, closed space when the patient is completely clothed
- Arrange the counseling room in such a way that the counselor and patient are seated directly across from one another with a table between them
- Ensure confidentiality of both the counseling process and the handling of medical records
- Maintain good eye contact

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