

Sample Chapter

Name of technique: If I Were a Car Metaphor

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Introduction: Many clients and students have difficulty looking at their issues and their person from an outsiders or objective viewpoint. Metaphors offer a visual understanding of an issue that can take a person outside of themselves to look at the issue objectively. By using metaphors in teaching and counseling we help the trainee understand how metaphors influence the way we think, define reality, draw inferences, set goals, make commitments, and execute plans.

Rationale

The versatility of this exercise is vast. It can be used as an Icebreaker in isolation of other skills or it can be combined and processed to teach the concepts of advanced empathy, the power of the unconscious, the use of metaphor, and the limitations of interpretation to name a few.

2016 CACREP Standard(s) addressed

Section II F.5.f. counselor characteristics and behaviors that influence helping processes. This activity illuminates the counselor-in-trainings understanding of self and how personal issues can affect the counseling relationship.

Description

I typically use this technique at during the first meeting of my counseling skills course. I give each student the handout (see below) and allow approximately 15 minutes to complete the assignment. I do not give them too much time because I do not want them to think too much, about what they are writing down; I want their gut reaction.

In the skills course I like to use the fishbowl to process information, this activity allows for the introduction of the fishbowl with focused content. One person is the interviewer and the other is the interviewee. They use the set of questions to get a description of the car and the interviewer is then instructed to begin using clarification skills during the interview process. At the conclusion of the interview, the interviewer is asked to give a summary of what they heard from the interviewee in terms of who they are as a person. They state things they hear such as what the person values, what is important to the person, how open or closed they appear, if they are a person with few very close friends, if they are open, if they have issues to work on, what their fears may be (see process questions below). The rest of the class is also able to give feedback as to what they heard. At any time, the interviewee is able to clarify, dispute or respond to the comments given by the rest of the class.

A variation of this exercise would be to have each student write down their description and instead of sharing it with the class have the class describe the car they see. This would give the student insight into how closely their self-perceptions are with those of others.

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Sample Process Questions

- What do we know about this person?
- What does this person value?
- How guarded or open do you see this person being?
- What is important to them?
- What are their hopes or dreams?
- What do they fear?
- How strongly do they hold onto the past?
- What do we know about how this person feels about himself or herself? How does this person feel about others?
- How well does this person take care of himself or herself?
- What do they like to do for fun?
- How do you perceive this person's ability to handle ambiguity?
- Do you perceive this person to be flexible?
- What type of personality does this person have?
- Does this person trust others easily?
- Are they casual or formal?
- What do they see as their strengths or weaknesses?

Application

I always enjoy this activity. It is fun and informative. Students also love it and are very surprised at how much they share and how much they learn about each other. We use the metaphors throughout the program to talk about growth and personal insights. I have personally seen some amazing insights turn into action because of this one exercise. One semester when using this exercise, the class gave feedback to a student regarding his desire to fulfill everyone else's needs before his own. He mentioned things like having different music on the radio when different people were in the car or that the car would go different places depending on who was along. The student shared this without really realizing it and when he heard the feedback from his classmates, he was astonished. Consequently, the next class he returned and thanked them all. He said he was able to do a lot of soul searching and realized how he was living his life and making decisions based on others wants and desires not his own. He informed the class that he broke off his current engagement and felt a tremendous amount of relief.

Resources

Metaphor Questions (see below)

If I Were a Car Metaphor Questions

- What kind of car/truck/motorcycle would you be?
- What color would you be?
- Would you have a sunroof?

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- Would your windows be tinted? (guarded or open)
- Would the windows be open or closed? (guarded or open)
- Where would your car be going? (goals)
- Does your car have a rearview mirror? (issues with the past)
- What would a bumper sticker say on your car? (even if you hate bumper stickers) (favorite saying, motto etc...indicates value)
- What kind of tires do you have? (flexibility)
- What type of terrain do you drive on? (ambiguity tolerance)
- How much horse power does your car have? (energy level, drive)
- Are there any special features on your car? (what do think is special about them)
- What music is playing and when? (preferences and independence)
- Do you have leather seats or cloth? (formal vs. Casual)
- How is the interior different than the exterior of the car? (is what you present different on the outside than on the inside)
- What's in your cup holder? (fun)
- Do you have anything hanging from the rearview mirror? (value)
- Do you have anything on the windows? (fun)
- How many people can fit in your car at once? (trust)
- Are the doors usually locked? (guarded)
- What's in the trunk? (baggage)
- What's the glove box? (what you value or what you feel you need)
- Any place your car just won't go? (fears)
- What do others say when they see your car? (others perception of you)
- Does your car get good gas mileage? (fitness)
- Is your car always clean or in need of a cleaning inside and out? (self-care)
- Does your car get regular maintenance? (self-care)
- Is everything working the way it should or are you in need of a tune up? (self-care)
- Is your car up to the latest environmental standards? (how green they are)

Evaluation

This exercise is not used as an evaluation tool. It is used to get to know students, introduce them to the use of metaphors in counseling and the fishbowl technique. It also helps them to begin using basic counseling skills such as clarification as well as more complex skills such as interpretation.

Implications for diversity issues

This is a great activity to introduce diversity issues and dialogue perceptions and reflect on one's own perceptions.

Online adaptation

This activity can be adapted to work with online students in much the same way it is used in the class. The questions can be given as an assignment and students can post remarks and questions on the discussion board. Students could also be paired up and give their partner a summary of

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what they have heard and give a first impression of who they think the person is based on their answers. This could be a fun activity for the “café” section of an online course to have the students introduce themselves in this fun way then incorporate it into the class at a later date.