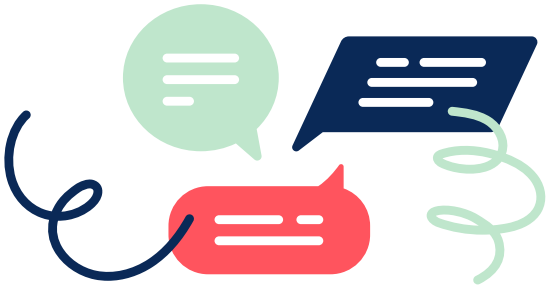




THE
LAY COUNSELOR
ACADEMY

Ways of Being **for Effective Counseling**



We extensively talk about, teach, and practice counseling *communication* techniques, strategies, and approaches in this course. What we refer to as “Home Stance” is a collection of 6 specific *communication* techniques (friendly posture/ expression/ tone; open-ended questions; empathic reflection; countering shame; affirming strengths; acknowledging feelings). Likewise, the counseling strategies we cover (Motivational Interviewing,

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Behavioral Activation, Happiness Practices) are identified primarily by *what* and *how* we communicate with clients. This comprehensive focus on communication techniques, strategies, and approaches, is very intentional; **communication** is the vehicle for how we deliver help to our clients.

“Ways of Being” are the foundational attitudes necessary for these communication techniques, strategies, and approaches to be effective. These “Ways of Being” are so critical, in fact, that when they are present in a counseling relationship, highly skilled technique is less important—“Ways of Being,” ultimately, are the **most important aspects** of effective counseling.

Ways of Being underpin our communication strategies.



Just as we could work our whole lives on increasing our skill with counseling communication techniques, Ways of Being are lifelong practices as well. The practice is:

1. Notice during sessions when we have slipped out of one of the six Ways of Being;
2. Gently bring ourselves back.



Perfectionism is not at all helpful in our relationship to Ways of Being. Our mantra could be: practice, not perfection! Ways of Being ebb and flow throughout the day, with different clients, depending on our own stress and struggles, and throughout different phases or chapters of our lives. Because the practice is in noticing and gently (non-judgmentally) bringing ourselves back (as opposed to staying perfectly in these Ways of Being), the more we practice, the easier it will become to learn about our tendencies, take care of ourselves, and grow in our skill and effectiveness as counselors.

Ways of Being:

Asymmetry: *Being completely focused on our client* without desire for reciprocation, urges to share, or need for our client to hear us, care for us, validate us, or approve of us. Asymmetry is being totally comfortable in service to, and focused on, someone else—we are firmly in the role of counselor when we are counseling.

Tips: Remember that for many of our clients, work and family responsibilities, social conditioning, social status, culture, and/or other relational dynamics often lead them to dampen, mask, deprioritize, or otherwise limit their support and care for themselves. We, as counselors, are trusted stewards of a protected space, dedicated to facilitating a sense of care and support for our clients. When we remind ourselves that we hold and protect these conditions for clients (e.g. “The absolute focus on them is a unique gift,” “My role is to provide focus on them”), we can stay “with” the clients and forget ourselves (most of us find relief and reward in this “self-forgetting” state!)



Authenticity: *Being true.* Authenticity is complex, as we do not have “one true self” we instead have many true selves; we often match ourselves to clients, in terms of the “self” that will be most helpful to clients. Further, authenticity should not be confused with speaking harshly, rudeness, “tough love,” advice, or other “I’m just being real!” missteps. We certainly don’t share everything we are thinking with clients. Because we share with clients intentionally, rather than unconsciously, it can take a lot of practice before we find a comfortable way of being as a counselor, where we are intentional *and* authentic.





Tips: Practice saying selected thoughts we have in session: (“I’m realizing I’m having some mixed reactions to what you are saying, about whether I should share them or not. I’m wondering if I could just ask you—would it be helpful to hear my reaction?”) and see how clients react. Sometimes authenticity means connecting with humor, directly answering questions clients ask us, and generally using our normal words, pauses, and patterns of speaking (not a robotic “therapist” voice or any other affect or way that isn’t true to us).

Know-nothing mind: Being without opinion. When clients share about a partner mistreating them, sometimes we feel strongly that they should leave; we might have an opinion that someone should get into recovery for their addiction; that they should find another job, go back to school, be more assertive with their parents, or join a support group. Once we have an opinion about something, it tends to stifle curiosity and exploration—we are less apt to elicit and hear what the client thinks is best and we might be less focused on helping clients access their own deep wisdom.

Tips: Once we realize we have an opinion, in order to avoid “leaking” this by pushing clients to do or think something, instead try this thought corrective: “Maybe they shouldn’t stop using now. Maybe it is keeping them alive,” or “Maybe they shouldn’t leave. Maybe it isn’t time,” or “Maybe a support group wouldn’t work for them. Maybe there is something else.” The point is not to develop another opinion, but to raise the possibility that our initial opinion isn’t right, to help us loosen our grasp on it and to get back to a “know-nothing” mind.



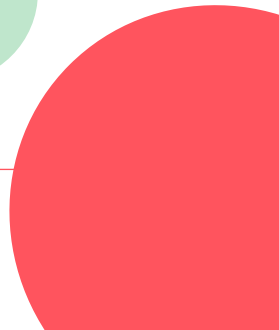
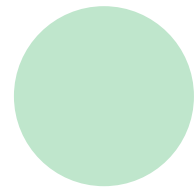
Mindful Presence: *Being in the present moment, with the client.* Much has been written about mindful presence, and its relationship to happiness, contentment, and relaxation. In counseling, it is only when we are present that our clients can be fully present (this is one of the reasons we don't write during sessions—it's not possible to be present with a client when we're writing). It is only when both of us—the counselor and client—are present, in the moment, that transformative experiences occur. It's only when we're present that we have access to our intuition, curiosity, and deepest wisdom—all of which help us help our clients. When we're present, we have access to our capacities to deeply listen to clients, beyond their words, into what they truly are communicating.

Presence Tips:

- Hide self-view when counseling via video
- Turn off device and app alerts when counseling on video or the phone
- Avoid writing during counseling sessions
- Spend some minutes before a session starts in a mindfulness practice (meditation, breathing, prayer, etc.)
- If we can't let go of something that's distracting our mind, consider pausing the session to address, then return.

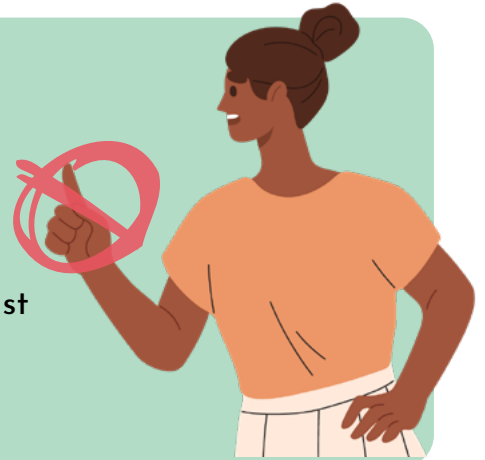


Just as with mindfulness practices, when our thoughts stray, we gently bring our “monkey mind” back to the present. We can refocus on our breathing, on what we see (client), on what we hear the client saying, on our feet on the floor, our back on our chair, etc.—returning to being right there, *with* our client.



Non-judgment: Being unconditionally empathic. This is the sphere of no right or wrong and no “shoulds” or “should nots.” While we all have our own values and ethics and beliefs about what is right or wrong, when we’re counseling, we put these aside in service to creating a space of **total** non-judgment for the client. This is the space in which clients can share anything and, no matter what, be met with empathy and understanding.

Tips: once we notice judgment, we try not to judge ourselves for judging! We can remind ourselves that our helpfulness with clients is directly proportional to the absence of judgment (be wary: sometimes our judgment tells us people “need to be judged” in order to change!). We can notice and then gently set the judgment aside, just for the session—sometimes our minds are more ready to set aside a judgment when we know it’s time-limited.

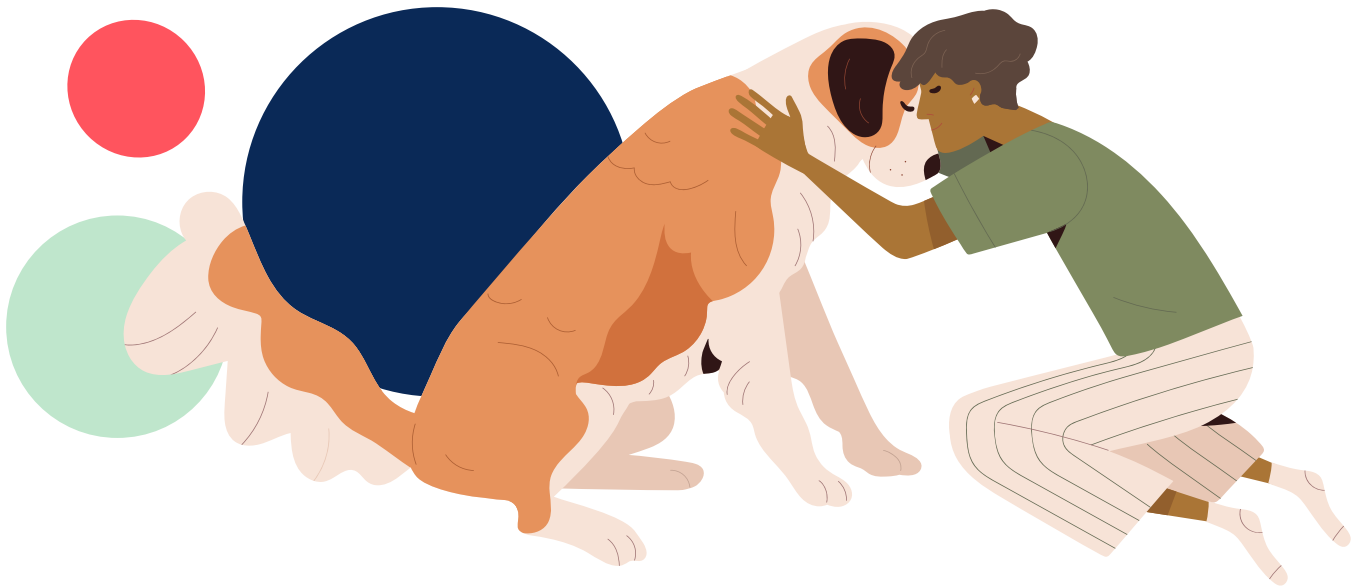


When the above tips aren't working or if the judgment returns, we can talk with a trusted colleague or clinical supervisor about it. If the judgment consistently shows up around the same content, we can explore this through writing, counseling, or other self-help, to heal this part of ourselves.

Unconditional Positive Regard: Being unconditionally accepting of clients, as humans. This is the attitude of a steady view of clients as lovable humans, doing the best they can. Consider how we are with small children, or loved animal companions: we tend to assume good motives, we assume an innocent heart, we know if they hurt us or others, it was likely out of fear or confusion. This isn't to compare clients with children or animal companions! The idea is to find effective ways of familiarizing ourselves with the attitude of unconditional positive regard and practice generating it, as a skill, for our clients.



Tip: practice unconditional positive regard in all of your relationships: with yourself, your family, your friends, animals, plants, co-workers, and in casual interactions - since we can practice unconditional positive regard in any relationship, we have ample opportunities to build this skill. The more practiced we are, generally, the better able we'll be to maintain this for clients.



For some of us, (internal) mantras can be helpful to us in *believing* and *embodying* the meaning in these phrases. We can practice saying these things to ourselves, about clients and other people in our lives:

"I accept you, completely"

"You are a whole, unique being"

"No matter what you say or do, you are worthy of love and acceptance"

"You are worth understanding"

"No matter what you say or do, you have unique gifts"



When this feels more difficult for any reason or for those of us where this Way of Being doesn't fit gracefully into our nature, starting with unchallenging relationships (and building up) is an excellent strategy! Hold these phrases in our minds with someone we have a great relationship with or for someone with a very transient relationship (a person walking past, a grocery store cashier, etc.) and then work toward more complex relationships—for some of us, cultivating unconditional positive regard for ourselves is the ultimate challenge.

Techniques from this **"Loving Kindness"** meditation are effective for many to cultivate positive regard for the self and others.

If we find ourselves struggling to have unconditional positive regard for a client, reach out to a colleague or clinical supervisor as this may be a situation where the best therapeutic care we can offer is to connect the client with a different counselor. Though uncommon, it does happen that we aren't able to achieve unconditional positive regard with some clients—it can be a clue to something within ourselves that requires deeper love and care.

