

Outline Structure for Assessment at the Beginning of Counselling or Psychotherapy

Presenting problems	<p>What is the client's problem/difficulty – how do they define it? How long has the client experienced problems for?</p> <p>How severely do they experience their problems (a 0–10 scale is often helpful) and does this change? If so, what factors make things get better or worse?</p> <p>Are the problems specific or do they cause difficulties in other areas of the client's life?</p> <p>Have they tried any strategies to improve things? If so, have these been successful?</p>
Functioning and social support	<p>Is the client experiencing any problems with sleeping, appetite, sex, concentration, motivation, energy levels? If so, are these problems new or long-standing?</p> <p>What support does the client have (e.g., family, friends, colleagues)?</p> <p>Does the client feel able to access support at particular times of difficulty? If not, what inhibits them from talking to someone about things?</p> <p>How does the client feel they are coping with daily demands (e.g., job, studies, other responsibilities)?</p>
Family and relationships	<p>Who is in the client's family? (Sometimes it is helpful to draw a genogram – i.e., a pictorial representation of the client's family – to quickly highlight important relationships and dynamics)</p> <p>How much contact does the client have with family, friends and colleagues? Is the client socially isolated?</p> <p>How would the client describe the quality of their personal relationships?</p> <p>Is there a history of previous significant relationships?</p>
Medical/psychiatric history	<p>Has the client ever experienced emotional/psychological difficulties previously? If so, when and what was the nature of them?</p> <p>Does the client use alcohol or drugs to cope with their problems? If so, how does this affect the client's mood/perception of themselves?</p> <p>Is the client taking any prescribed medication for their problems? If so, how does this medication affect the client's mood/perception of their problems?</p> <p>Has the client experienced, or does the client experience currently, any medical conditions that they attribute meaning to in relation to their psychological distress?</p> <p>Has the client ever been given a diagnosis in relation to their psychological distress?</p>

Sense of self	<p>How would the client describe their degree of self-confidence?</p> <p>How would the client describe their sense of self-esteem – do they like who they are?</p> <p>Does the client feel valued by others?</p> <p>How does the client feel/think about their physical self (their body image)?</p>
Risk	<p>Does the client have any thoughts of suicide? Are these thoughts long-standing, impulsive or persistent?</p> <p>How does the client manage their thoughts of suicide? How do they not act on them?</p> <p>Does the client hurt themselves in any way as a means of coping with their problems?</p> <p>Has the client ever hurt anybody else or feel as if they might want to hurt someone else?</p> <p>Does the client appear to be looking after themselves or are they self-neglectful?</p>
Psychological mindedness	<p>What has brought the client to therapy now?</p> <p>What does the client understand about therapy?</p> <p>What does the client hope for from therapy – what do they want to change?</p> <p>How does the client relate to you in the session (e.g. eye contact, understanding your questions)?</p> <p>Does the client have an 'emotional language' to draw on?</p> <p>Might the client benefit from short-term, long-term or group therapy?</p> <p>Do you have the capacity and experience to work with this client and their presenting problems (e.g. do you need to refer to other specialist services or for another form of therapy)?</p> <p>Does the client appear willing and able to engage in the therapeutic process?</p>

FIGURE 7.1 Outline structure for assessment at the beginning of counselling (Reeves, 2008, pp. 67–8)