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Foundations of Mental Health Counseling

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There were many components that lead me to consider the helping fields, one of which was the leading of the Holy Spirit. My relationship with God and the many facets of my life that was instrumentally used in opening up my heart to a world of hurting people. During my time in ministry, joining the outreach ministry thought me so much about what trauma, despair, love, and what hope looked like. I was taken back by the mere responsibility that God had entrusted me with alongside, my church in experiencing the ministry of helps. My heart posture for God and people has introduced me into purpose without my knowing. The perspectives of God's heart that I experienced by serving people was humbling and has been a continuum of my service for the Kingdom of God. My lenses of service have changed the altitude of muddling from context in conceptualizing of clarity of new heights in God. Interestingly enough, the fabrics of my being has been leading me in this moment. I am being equipped with knowledge, in formal education, in whatever facets that I need, I am learning from my educators.

There were been many incidents or experiences that I wasn't equipped to respond to due to my, inability to navigate those individuals in a healthy and professional manner. I didn't have the words, the resources at the time. I had people who trusted me with their pain, and my only response was prayer, often great, but the ability to direct people in receiving healing in those different avenues is much more of a value to me in being an effective helper to them. I am learning what a licensed mental health counselor looks like, what it entails? I am more than grateful for the opportunity to learn, in actively helping to direct anyone into whatever capacity that I can be of service. I am excited, humbled about this new journey that God is doing in this season of my life. The depths of new understanding in knowledge and wisdom in this field, and being healed along the way that I can come alongside someone in patience, in trust, is far more

important than anything else. It is a privilege in being equipped with new skills, tools, in being a professional counselor. When you have been called by the ultimate counselor, Himself, the Holy Spirit to become a counselor, I simply have absolute no words the describe the utmost respect that I feel to be a helper in that sense to others. I am so grateful and would be honored to be looked upon as a counselor, after completing my studies and training in the field, when the Holy Spirit have been an active counselor to us all.

A mark of a professional counselor is someone who is formally educated, in helping, assisting in identifying the problems in one's life. The counselor must have the ability to communicate effectively in improving the mental state of the individual, with strategies along with goal setting for their clients or patients in solving problems that have been marred internally by the wounds of life. The characteristics of a counselor must be met by the ethical professional standards that they must uphold. A counselor must be able showcase empathy, gentle, patience and being non-judgmental. The counselor must demonstrate acceptance of all walks of like, meaning the acceptance of being competent enough to navigate through cultural sensitivity, full acceptance of the individual in any capacity in helping care for any state that is within the scope of the counselor. A counselor must be actively listening in regard to their senses, having the foundations and application of theories in place.

The role of a counselor is crucial to the individual that sits across them, assessing someone's mental state, learning of their trauma, pain, behavior, thought patterns, self-worth is key in changing their perspectives. The clients history is a vehicle that gives us insight into their world, experiences and from there, it is determined how proceed with treatment. As a student counselor in training, learning and developing the facets of being a good listener is really important. It is through listening and observing the client becomes a deciding factor of good of a

counselor you are. It is putting in a practice what you have learned and assisting your client reflects the change they desire, on how counseling can be a collective effort from both parties involved.

I am profoundly in awe of my existence due to my belief in Jesus, He has kept me in every sense of the word. He has been my comforter, my provider, in whatever capacity that I needed him, he has been there. I am learning how to trust that he is my father, he loves and cares for me, my ability to read and believe his word has been transformational in my life. My imperfections as a child of God draws me closer each day to the perfect Father, he is to us all. Foundation in God, has been my saving grace, I can honestly draw from the experiences in life and remind myself of how good and gracious God has been to me and my family. The exposures to diverse cultures and trauma with much pain, makes more sense to than before. I never understood, why me? But, the answers to those questions often lingered , until it is answered in due time or season.

Often enough we ask these series of questions during various seasons of our lives really shapes who we are. It is the storms of life that teaches us strength, which gives us a wealth of understanding, strength and compassion to stand against anything. It's by God's grace, by his Holy Spirit that enables me to live in love, hope despite my circumstances. It is truly in ministry and in hardship you learn, how to love beyond your comprehension and to forgive that assaults of your enemies. Having the right heart posture towards God, must be intentional in actively seeking God and try in conjunction of his word, it is not an easy feat. It is through my past experience, even from my childhood, that I learn that people really do not listen. Therefore, I have become resilient but full of compassion in love, towards the brokenness of people and through adversities, that I was being taught on how to listen. There have been times where

people have approached me in different settings, stages of my life that they felt comfortable enough to share with me, their pain. Am I a candidate of a good listener? I recognize that I have the ability to connect with people, and to help encourage them by a kind word, or gesture.

During my studies, I have read that there are many important factors that a counselor must do in having a good session with their clients. Communication comes in many forms, and we must learned how pay close attention to the nonverbal ways people communicate. Our perception of communication can be vastly interpretated, that can offend or turn away client's even the people in our lives. Our body language communicates differently from our verbal communication. "Several nonverbal behaviors can affect our relationship with our clients. For instance, posture, eye contact, or tone that communicate "Don't open up to me" will obviously affect clients in a different way from the counselor who is nonverbally communicating "I'm open to hearing what you have to say." (Neukrug, p. 149). The Counselor "talks minimally, accurately hears the content of what the helpee is saying, and does not give advice." (Neukrug, p. 152). Three important things that can impede to the counselor's ability to listen effectively. "Some of these include (a) having a preconceived notions about the client that interfere with the counselor's ability to hear the client, (b) anticipating what the client is about to say and not actually hearing the client, (e) having a strong emotional reaction your client's content and therefore not being able to hear the client accurately." (Neukrug, p. 152). All these factors can be detrimental in being effectively listening to your client. Learning how not be distracted in that space during your session with your client, shows focus and developing how we listen as counselors.

Another form of a nonverbal communication is in our attire in our workplace, there are so many factors that must be considered in appeasing our clientele. "How one dresses and the

language one uses with clients are two additional components of the office environment." "Should you wear jeans at work? What about expensive suit? Are your clothes revealing? What does your jewelry or hairstyle say about you? Do you call your client by their first name? Should you change the way you talk for the client, such as using less complex language for a client who is less educated? Ultimately, each counselor must determine the importance of the factors." (Neukrug, p. 149). Formal wear is always appropriate of what we convey to others, in respect to ourselves and just overall dressing modestly. Attire appropriation is quintessential in the workplace and achieving trust of our client's and success. All the mentioned factors in how we are perceived from our appearance our verbal usage, is particularly important. We really have to be mindful of all those things the speaks about.

The client population that I would mostly consider of working with would be women in domestic violence situation. I have witnessed and have been around women that has been affected by a form of domestic violence almost all of my life. There are varieties of abuse, between heterosexual relationships even same sex couples. I had a friend and former classmate from elementary school that was murdered by her boyfriend. I learned of her death from her sister, when I asked about her, she replied that she was murdered. I just did comprehend, what she was saying, this was a young lady who exhibited strength, resilience to almost anything she had to face, beautiful and intelligent. I had so many emotions, I was astonished, I was in disbelief that this violent crime happened to her, her family and how it affected everyone. I did a little bit of research about abuse, didn't quite understand the severity of it, and how often this occurrence took place, especially on women, I was floored.

Abuse on women, whatever form of violence, whether through physical, verbal, any sort of control angered me. I didn't care much about men being abused, it's unheard of, but I know it

happens. Recently, I learned of a colleague that was part of the LGBTQ community that, she was the abuser. It is a lot to process, this reoccurrence of abuse on women, was not new to me. Prior to this new discovery of my colleague was not shocking, she's much younger and very angry, demeanor, her tone was not surprised. I have been in the past helped many women that were my friends escape, counseled, helped protected, fought physically with their partners for their freedom. It was all due in God intricately directing and keeping me safe that those battles we won. I have kept away from those circumstances, the best I can through prayer and just not partaking in those activities anymore. Now, I would love the opportunity to counselor, to get listen, to learn from them their mindset, and how we can possibly shift them in discovering their purpose and learning from their pain. So, I researched a bit again for this paper, and nothing changed, it has increasingly been disheartening to learn more about the help, that is offered. I wanted to share the definition of domestic violence, it is not lengthy, or in depth but a reminder.

"Domestic Violence is a pattern of physical, emotional, verbal, and sexual abuse, which includes, but is not limited to, threats, intimidation, isolation, and/or financial control. Domestic Violence can continue over a long period of time and becomes more frequent and more severe over time. Domestic violence can happen to anyone regardless of race, age, sexual orientation, religion, or gender. Domestic violence affects people of all socioeconomic backgrounds and education levels. Domestic violence occurs in both opposite-sex and same-sex relationships and can happen to intimate partners who are married, living together, or dating." Domestic violence acts are established by the relationship between the offender and the victim. A person protected by the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act is 18 years of age or older, or who is an emancipated minor, and who has been subjected to domestic violence by a spouse, former spouse, or any other person who is a present or former household member. Any person,

regardless of age, sex, or physical/psychological condition, who has been subjected to domestic violence by one of the following actors:

- A person with whom the victim has a child in common
- A person with whom the victim anticipates having a child in common, if one of the parties is pregnant.
- A person with whom the victim has had a dating relationship" (nj.gov/domestic violence).

Taking care of self, is extremely important, even as a child I learned that I had to learn how to decompress. Both parents enjoyed a good vacation, especially my dad, but my mom made sure she would send us to visit different places with my aunts, grandmother, various family members. My mom recently retired from during the height of the pandemic and she is enjoying life, spending time with family and just making little trips with her sisters, she's happy. Self-care, is actively, consciously taking time out to focus on preserve one's health in whatever capacity one can explore or venture in achieving. It is the simple pleasures of life that encompasses selfcare. Reading a good book, taking a few minutes to yourself each day and journal, going for a walk. Praying, spending time with God, checking on your mental health.

Self-care has been noted to being and doing this pandemic, it was profoundly peaceful despite the crisis, the whole world was experiencing. I learned again how to somewhat exercise, spending time with my daughter, that to me is self- care. As a student counselor in training, we were told that we must seek out professional counseling for good reasons. It gives us prospective of being the helpee, us receiving counseling or

help and just understanding what it feels like to be the client. A good massage is often a good remedy for most, but going to the gym is my ultimate therapy. Self-care is vital to one's existence, it's taking time out just for you, involving no one else. Taking yourself out in a nice restaurant, then a nice movie, or just sleeping is always fun. I sometimes Like connecting with friends or family but only for two-hours and then go home and just relax. Overall, remembering to invest the time to learn more of self and spending time alone can be difficult for some. Prioritizing self is not something we do well nor often, I know many, many individuals who does not take care of themselves. We have become a society that consistently works but never time to invest in taking a mini vacation, because of circumstances or by choice.

References

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