

7. List several reasons for concluding a counseling case. For each, describe how you would go about ending the counseling.

I. Overview

- A. Introduction
- B. Graduation
- C. Admonishment
- D. Termination

II. Introduction

A. **Galatians 6:1-2** *Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*

1. This verse in Galatians lays out a basic concept in biblically counseling. We who are knowledgeable, equipped, and skilled in wielding the Word of Truth can restore our brothers and sisters in Christ when they encounter issues. We do this by bearing one another's burdens for a time while gently restoring them.
 - a. **James 1:2-4** *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*
2. Our goal is to walk our counselees to a place where they are not only able to bear their own burdens but are knowledgeable, equipped, and skilled in wielding the Word of Truth in such a way that they can restore another brother or sister in Christ.

III. Graduation

- A. "Graduating a counselee is a time to celebrate the changes that God has made and an opportunity to integrate your counselee into the regular discipleship of the church."¹
1. As soon as we can, we should begin integrating them into the regular ministries of the church as part of the counseling process. This allows the counselee to build bonds with other believers and provides an opportunity for them to see how believers behave in everyday life.
 - a. Developing relationships with others in the church might be one of the best tools for continued discipleship after the counseling case ends.
 2. When considering graduating your counselee, it's wise to provide a bit of warning. Let him know a few sessions before you plan on ending the case so that it's not a surprise, as they may feel overwhelmed and not ready. This process might work for birds leaving the nest, but just consider the stakes for the baby bird.

¹ Cubby Westerberg, *How to End a Counseling Case*, from an outline at the 2018 Biblical Counseling Conference at Cross Pointe Church.

ACBC Counseling - Question 7

3. Consider meeting them a few times monthly for some time for a check-up to ensure they are continuing the right path.

B. 8 indicators that your counselee is ready to graduate.²

1. Your counselee understands his problem and the biblical way of handling it.
2. Your counselee becomes comfortable with the new response pattern(s).
3. Your counselee begins to practice the new pattern(s) automatically.
4. Your counselee has failed and can diagnose the reason for the failure and make plans for correcting the problem.
5. Your counselee can state specifically how he has changed.
6. Your counselee has been tested and has been victorious in the test.
7. Others can verify the changes in your counselee.
8. Your counselee starts to share with others what he is learning in counseling, effectively becoming an informal and spontaneous counselor to others.

IV. Admonishment

- A. Should you simply end a case if your counselee is no longer showing signs of biblical change in their life? What should I do if my counselee is not completing their homework, or only doing it half-heartedly? Before you terminate a case, consider admonishment.

1. The definition of admonish is “to express warning or disapproval to especially in a gentle, earnest, or solicitous manner.”³

B. **1 Thessalonians 5:14** *And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.*

1. There are times when your counselee may begin to stagnate, no longer showing any signs of growth. What should you do about this situation?
 - a. Try to determine whether or not your counselee is saved. Have they been presented with the gospel?
 - b. Are there circumstances that are causing a significant amount of difficulty with your counselee?
 - c. Has the problem and solution been made explicitly clear?
 - d. Would your counselee have better success by meeting with another counselor? Is there a personality conflict or another counselee that has more expertise in this specific area of difficulty?
 - e. Are you failing to hold your counselee accountable?

² The following list of eight signs is derived from “When to Stop Counseling,” <https://ibcd.org/when-to-stop-counseling/>.

³ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/admonish>

ACBC Counseling - Question 7

- 1) **2 Corinthians 7:10** *For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.*

V. Termination

A. It can be difficult to know when it's time to terminate a counseling case when it's not going well. We have often devoted a significant amount of time and effort to the case and care a great deal for our counselee.

1. **1 Thessalonians 2:7-9** *But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.*

B. Understanding what to look for will greatly assist a beginning counselor in knowing when it's time to suspend or terminate the counseling case. Here are a few specific behaviors that point toward termination.

1. Lack of seriousness concerning counseling.
 - a. "**Absenteeism.** A person who frequently cancels appointments, particularly for questionable reasons, may be avoiding confrontation. If this is a repeated pattern, the counselee may be unwilling to change. Chronic tardiness can also be a sign that the counselee is avoiding pertinent issues."⁴
 - b. "**Failure to do homework.** A second symptom of covert resistance is failure to complete homework assignments. A pattern of incomplete or sloppy homework may indicate that the counselee prefers talking to working."⁵
 - c. "**Distancing.** In instances of distancing, the counselee keeps the counselor at arm's length. When asked about his or her life, the counselee is unwilling to reveal detailed information. This reticence may indicate that a lack of desire to change. Unfortunately, counselors cannot help people who shut them out of their lives."⁶

⁴ Wayne Mack, "Biblical Counseling and Inducement," in John MacArthur, ed., Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically, 184.

⁵ Wayne Mack, "Biblical Counseling and Inducement," in John MacArthur, ed., Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically, 184.

⁶ Wayne Mack, "Biblical Counseling and Inducement," in John MacArthur, ed., Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically, 184.

ACBC Counseling - Question 7

2. Lack of growth and change.
 - a. During the counseling process, you may notice that your counselee has begun to stagnate and is no longer progressing. If your counselee has not progressed in the past 2-3 counseling sessions, admonish them. Let them know that if there is no progress in the next session, you may have to terminate their case due to a lack of growth and change. If they fail to progress after that, terminate the case.
 - b. An unregenerate heart.
 - 1) Our counsees must have a regenerate heart for biblical counseling to have any lasting effect. It's noteworthy that an unrepentant sinner could receive a significant amount of relief from their troubles by applying biblical principles to their life. However, it wouldn't take long for that individual to fall into another sinful snare as his own sinful flesh drags him away and entices him (James 1:14).
 - i. **Ezekiel 36:26-27** *And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*

C. What should you do when you terminate a counseling case?

1. Provide a clear explanation for why you are terminating the counseling case. Do this in a spirit of love and with an open door for the person to come back.
 - a. One way that you might want to phrase this, is that you don't think they are ready for counseling at the moment. That if something changes in the future, they should reapply for counseling through the proper process.
2. Continue to pray for that counselee.
3. Emphasize the seriousness of refusing to repent for sin.
 - a. **Proverbs 28:13** *Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.*
 - b. **1 John 3:8-10** *Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.*

ACBC Counseling - Question 7

4. What do you do if you terminate a case and your counselee is a **member** of your church?
 - a. If the case is being terminated because of a refusal to change or a lack of repentance, the steps of church discipline need to be followed according to Matthew 18:15-20 and your church's policy on church discipline.
5. What do you do if you terminate a case and your counselee is a **member of another church**?
 - a. Inform the counselee that you will be contacting his or her pastor to update them on the situation and that you will recommend church discipline for their lack of repentance.

VI. Suggested Reading

- A. **John MacArthur, Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically, 176-202.**
- B. **Jay Adams, A Theology of Christian Counseling, 123.**
- C. **Jay Adams, The Christian Counselor's Manual, 232-341.**