

ACBC Counseling - Question 1

1. What issues should be covered in an introductory session with a counselee regardless of the counseling issue? Explain the importance of each issue.

I. Overview

- A. The Importance of the First Session
- B. Establish A Routine
- C. Be Prepared and On-time
- D. Briefly Describe Biblical Counseling
- E. Gather Relevant Data to Identify the Problem(s)
- F. Give Hope
- G. Gain Involvement
- H. Give Homework

II. The Importance of the First Session

- A. Adams “The first session is particularly important. Basic trends are set; initial attitudes and decisions, as well as relationships, are formed by both the counselor and his counselees. The notes that a counselor takes in the first session (and perhaps the next) usually will vary from those that follow”¹
- B. Adams “He will want to establish his leadership in the counseling context and elicit commitment from the counselee... to center counseling upon Jesus Christ and His Word from the outset... to determine (if possible) whether the counselee is a Christian... to establish regular Bible reading and prayer if it does not exist already... to give hope... to solve some initial problems, or take initial steps to do so... to focus on solutions to *some* problems... to assign homework designed to bring early success and relief growing out of biblical action... to work on enlisting whatever help is possible and necessary from others and get procedures underway for encouraging other involved parties to come... (and) to determine what the main problem(s) is (are) if possible.”²

III. Be Prepared and On-time

- A. Establish A Routine
 - 1. Establishing a routine that you use for every one of your first counseling sessions is an incredibly helpful tool and will accomplish a lot of goals. First, a standardized approach allows you to address and answer important questions that might otherwise get overlooked. It can also convey that you are competent and organized, which is important for establishing trust and hope. Finally, determining whether or not they are saved may be the most important question to ask in the first session, as their answer could dramatically influence all future counseling sessions.

¹ Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual*, 228.

² Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual*, 228-229.

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B. Preparation

1. Being prepared for counseling can have many meanings. First, by being prepared, you should be equipped (2 Tim 3:16-17). Second, you should have a counseling room reserved, or other private place set aside, for counseling. Make sure the room is comfortable and that distractions have been dealt with.

C. Be On-Time

1. Being on time, or better yet, early is important for a few reasons. One, it shows the counsees that you mean business. That you are prepared, and that you take counseling seriously. Beginning a counseling case by being late for the first session and rushing to get a counseling room sends the message that you don't take counseling seriously and that you don't care or take their counseling needs seriously.
2. Being late also sends the message to the counsees that it's ok to be late. This attitude can seriously affect future counseling sessions. We only have so much time to give each counsee in the counseling room, if they show up 35 minutes late, and you have a counsee scheduled in 25 minutes, you can only give them 25 minutes. Be on time.

- D. Warmly welcome your counsees and begin, and end, each counseling session with prayer.

IV. Briefly Describe Biblical Counseling

- A. It's very common that our counsees may never have sought out or received biblical counseling before. In fact, they very likely have received some level of secular counseling in the past, which will have established certain expectations. Beginning every counseling case by taking a few minutes to explain what biblical counseling is, and what it is not, is a great strategy for addressing potential issues before they ever have a chance to occur.
- B. Within your description of biblical counseling, it's essential, and somewhat presumptuous, as they are seeking *biblical* counsel, that we plainly state that the Word of God, the Bible, will be our foundation for truth (2 Tim 3:16-17).
- C. You can also briefly explain your credentials as a biblical counselor. Some folks may appreciate hearing what process you had to go through to become a certified biblical counselor with ACBC. In fact, hearing that the process is so rigorous may begin to establish some trust in the relationship.

V. Gather Relevant Data to Identify the Problem(s).

- A. **Proverbs 18:13** *If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.*
- B. **Proverbs 18:17** *The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him.*
- C. Our counsees are coming in for counseling because they have problems that they need help with. We should begin the data gathering process before the counsees even step foot in our counseling room. If you don't have a mechanism for gathering this data, then one can be found on pages 433-435 of Jay Adams book "The Christian Counselor's Manual," entitled the Personal Data Inventory.

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D. Once your counselees are in the counseling room, have each of them, one at a time, describe to you in a few sentences what the problems are as they see them. Be careful to not let the session get out of control in this area. Emotions and tensions may have been building for some time and simply allowing one counselee to vent may cause a meltdown right there in the counseling room. However, if done in a controlled manner, there is the potential to gather a lot of valuable information.

1. If the counselees are having a difficult time defining the issues, either because there are so many or because they are not the best communicators, consider having them answer the following question, “What problem, or two or three problems if solved today, would provide you with the greatest amount of relief?”

E. Core Data vs Halo Data

1. Adams “A counselor may gather data basically in two ways: (1) overtly and (2) covertly. Data gathering depends upon communication. One communicates primarily in two ways: non-verbally and verbally, i.e., by what kindergarten teachers call the *show* and *tell* methods. Two kinds of data in counseling that correspond roughly to these two methods may be called *core* data and *halo* data.”³
2. Adams “Halo data may be derived not only from visual and auditory cues, but also from tactile (e.g., a clammy handshake indicates anxiety or fear) or olfactory (e.g., the odor of alcohol) cues.”⁴
 - a. Adams “Every counselor must learn to look (feel, taste, smell) and listen for halo data. He looks at clothing and appearance. Changes in these may provide positive or negative indices of the direction that counseling is going. He watches for signs of embarrassment, nervousness, tension, blushes, evasion, redirections of conversation, appearance, clothing, etc. Such signs also may indicate how counseling is progressing; changes in the halo data can, at times, be the most significant indicators of progress (or regression).”⁵
3. Adams “The other form of data gathering relies primarily upon questioning. The counselor must learn how to ask questions and probe into answers that he receives in order to elicit the information that he needs to understand his problems and thus help the counselee.”⁶

F. The Salvation Question.

1. “Tonight, while you are on your way home if you were to get into a car accident and die, and you find yourself face to face with God at the gates of heaven, and he asked you, ‘Why should I let you into my heaven?’ what would you say?”
 - a. This question provides a variety of useful information. First, it provides you with your counselees’ understanding of how someone is saved

³ Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual*, 257.

⁴ Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual*, 257.

⁵ Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual*, 258-259.

⁶ Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual*, 259.

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(works, faith, tipping the scale). Next, it forces them to see that they are wholly unworthy to enter the kingdom of Heaven on their own merit. Finally, it lays the groundwork for where our counseling will be moving in the upcoming weeks (see ‘VII. Gain Involvement: Provide a brief description of the next counseling session.’)

VI. Give Hope

- A. Mack “Biblical change cannot take place without hope, especially in the difficult situations we face as counselors. People who have had life-shattering experiences like divorce, a death of a loved one, or a loss of a job need hope. People who have faced the same problem for along time need hope. People who have compounded their initial problems with other unbiblical responses need hope. People whose problems have been wrongly described need hope, and people whose hopes have been dashed repeatedly need hope. If we want to help any of these people, we must make sure that inspiration and hope are operative elements in our counseling.”⁷
1. “Most counselors, both Christian and non-Christian, realize that people with problems need hope. Unfortunately, however, the hope that many counselors provide is a false hope that rests on an unbiblical foundation and will inevitably crumble (Prov. 10:28; 11:7).”⁸
 2. Mack “False hope is based on human ideas of what is pleasurable and desirable. Many people think that their problems will disappear if they can just get what they want, and sometimes counselors encourage them in that error by promising or intimating that their desires will be satisfied. This is a serious mistake, because God never promises us that we will get everything we want, nor does He even tell us that getting what we want will make us happy. Often what we want is *not* what is best for us, and a name-it-and-claim-it approach to our desires only compounds our problems.”⁹
- B. Adams “In one sense, *every* counselee needs hope. Sin has worked its defeating and disheartening effects in all of our lives. There are times when every Christian is dispirited. Often this attitude deteriorates into the sin of despair. Counselors, therefore, may be sure that they will see more than their share of sin’s blighting effects.”¹⁰
- C. Jay Adams provides a list of potential reasons that our counselees may need hope. Here they are in a bulleted list.
- Individuals who have been dealing with problems for a very long time.
 - Individuals that have a specifically difficult problem need hope.
 - People may have been misled about the causes of their problems.
 - Individuals have allowed fear to blot out all hope of change.
 - Individuals whose hopes have been dashed time and time again.
 - Individuals who have tried and failed, or maybe gave up too quickly.
 - Depressed persons need hope.
 - Suicidal persons need hope.
 - Individuals that have suffered a life-shattering experience need hope.

⁷ Wayne Mack, “Instilling Hope in the Counselee,” in John MacArthur, ed., *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically*, 114.

⁸ Wayne Mack, “Instilling Hope in the Counselee,” in John MacArthur, ed., *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically*, 115.

⁹ Wayne Mack, “Instilling Hope in the Counselee,” in John MacArthur, ed., *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically*, 115.

¹⁰ Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual*, 40.

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- D. Mack “*True hope is a biblically based expectation of good. In other words, it is biblical hope, an expectation based on the promises of God.*”¹¹
1. **Romans 15:4** *For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*
 2. **Romans 12:12** *Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.*
 3. **Romans 8:24-25** *For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*
 4. **2 Corinthians 4:16-18** *So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*
- E. Many times, our counselees will feel that the troubles and tribulation that they are experiencing is unique to them. That no one could possibly understand what they are going through. This is quite common among service members that are struggling with PTSD.
1. **1 Corinthians 10:13** *No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*
 2. **Ecclesiastes 1:9** *What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.*

VII. Gain Involvement

- A. Counselors begin gaining involvement with the PDI (Personal Data Inventory). This continues when they greet their counselees and become acquainted with them, further growing with the conversation and questions that get asked throughout the counseling session. However, all of this has not addressed the counselee’s level of involvement. They signed up for counseling, they showed up on time, and they are engaged in the conversation, but what will happen when the going gets tough?
- B. Four Questions:
1. Are you willing to give this some time?
 2. Will you commit to doing homework faithfully?
 3. Will you have a teachable spirit? (Prov 13:10)
 4. Do you give me permission to speak Biblical truth into your life? (Gal 6:1-2)

¹¹ Wayne Mack, “Instilling Hope in the Counselee,” in John MacArthur, ed., *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically*, 118.

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C. Provide a brief description of the next counseling session.

1. Adams “Sometimes the counselor will find it necessary to tell the counselee that there is much yet to be done, even explaining what he would like to have done, had there been more time. Laying out an agenda for the next session in this way often (1) encourages the counselee to return; (2) encourages the counselee to see that there is much more to be done; (3) encourages the counselee to see that the counselor (a) has a plan and program, (b) moves thoroughly, not rushing things through in order to get them done, (c) cares enough to explain what he is doing when and why.”¹²
2. Adams “At times the counselor will place items on the agenda because, as he plainly says, ‘You are not ready to deal with this issue until first you have solved these other problems.’”¹³
 - a. **2 Corinthians 5:9** *So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.*

VIII. Give Homework

- A. Attend Church together on Sunday.
- B. Pray daily, together would be preferred, that God would...
- C. Give a Bible verse for them to remember.
- D. Bring a Bible, notebook, & pen to the next session.

IX. Suggested Reading

- A. Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual*, 228-231, 257-293.
- B. John MacArthur, ed., *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically*, 101-146.
- C. Paul Trip, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*.
- D. Ed Welch, *Side By Side*.
- E. Timothy Lane and Paul Trip, *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making*.

¹² Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual*, 229-230.

¹³ Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual*, 231.