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PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING IN CONDITIONS OF EXPERIENCING ACUTE STRESS REACTION

Анотація. У статті представлено теоретичний та практичний аналіз психологічного консультування як ефективного засобу надання допомоги особам, що переживають гострі емоційні кризи. Досліджено сутність кризового консультування, його методологічні основи, етапи та моделі втручання. Особливу увагу приділено психотехнікам, які сприяють адаптації клієнта до травматичних подій, зокрема когнітивно-поведінковим технікам, емоційному реагуванню, техніці ослаблення травматичного інциденту (ОТІ). Визначено етичні принципи діяльності консультанта та роль соціального оточення у процесі психологічної підтримки. Підкреслено важливість своєчасного психологічного втручання як профілактичного заходу розвитку посттравматичного стресового розладу (ПТСР), покращення емоційного благополуччя та відновлення особистісної рівноваги.

Ключові слова: психологічне консультування, емоційна криза, психотерапія, когнітивно-поведінкова терапія, етика, підтримка, адаптація.

Abstract. This article presents a theoretical and practical analysis of psychological counseling as an effective tool for assisting individuals experiencing acute emotional crises. It explores the essence of crisis counseling, its methodological foundations, stages, and intervention models. Special attention is given to psychotechnical approaches that facilitate client adaptation to traumatic events, including cognitive-behavioral techniques, emotional response strategies, and the Traumatic Incident Reduction (TIR) technique. The ethical principles of counselor activity and the role of social support in the counseling process are emphasized. The importance of timely psychological intervention is highlighted as a preventive measure against the development of PTSD, improvement of emotional well-being, and restoration of personal equilibrium.

Keywords: psychological counseling, emotional crisis, crisis intervention, psychotherapy, cognitive-behavioral therapy, ethics, support, adaptation

Formulation of the problem. In today's world, where the pace of life is rapidly increasing as well as social and personal challenges, including those related to Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, are becoming more and more complex, more and more people are facing emotional crises. An acute emotional crisis can arise as a result of the loss of a loved one, divorce, job loss, serious illness or other traumatic events.

In Ukraine, there is a growing demand for psychological services, especially in times of social upheaval. In such situations, psychological counseling is an important means of providing assistance, support, and guidance on the way to restoring the psycho-emotional state. The relevance of the topic of psychological counseling in the context of Russia's ongoing military aggression against Ukraine is due to the growing number of people facing psychotraumatic situations that exacerbate both provoked and unprovoked psychological crises.

Modern psychological practice is supported by two key methodological techniques: diagnosis and influence. In this article, we want to focus on the second methodological technique. For this purpose, we will first clarify the relationships between the initial concepts related to crisis counseling: “psychological influence” - “psychological counseling” - “crisis psychological counseling”

Psychological counseling is a process of interaction between a counselor and a client aimed at solving personal, emotional or behavioral problems. The main goal of counseling is to support the client in difficult life situations, develop self-awareness and build self-regulation skills.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Therefore, psychological counseling is one of the forms of interaction between a psychologist and a client within the framework of psychological influence. According to the figurative expression of J.O. Prochaska and J.C. Norcross, “is more like penicillin than aspirin... and has a tremendous potential for positive (and sometimes negative) impact on patients” [6, p.12].

The creative and dialogic process of psychological counseling action refers psychological counseling practice to an understanding, ideographic paradigm, to a practical, change-oriented psychology and reflects the model of personality change as the main vector of its evolution and development of living space [9].

Psychological counseling is a field of practice of a psychologist related to the provision of psychological assistance to a client in establishing attitudes towards oneself, other people, and life events in the experience of current or chronic difficulties.

Psychological counseling is the process of providing professional assistance to individuals experiencing emotional, behavioral or interpersonal difficulties. The main goal of counseling is to support the client in difficult life situations, develop self-awareness and build self-regulation skills.

As S. Kalischuk rightly notes, the activity of a counseling psychologist is aimed at “building bridges” between the constructs “I” and ‘World’ through “correlation of the client with the world” (and the world of other people, in particular), as well as balancing the relationship between his subjective and objective worlds through self-relation and self-determination [10].

Crisis counseling is a type of psychological counseling aimed at minimizing the client's shock from an extremely difficult traumatic event, providing emotional support, strengthening personal coping strategies, and building a positive perspective through the release of resources.

Crisis counseling is a special format of psychological counseling due to the significant vector of psychological work, which begins with the position of “supporting” the client in a situation of acute difficulty and ‘impossibility’ and ends with the “typical” for psychological counseling finding (restoring, reorganizing) meanings and releasing personality resources.

The task of crisis counseling (according to the American Counseling Association in 2022) [1] is to help a person:

- assess the degree and severity of existing problem areas;
- to cope with an acute crisis;
- regain a certain sense of control,

- restore personal skills in solving tasks and problems after a crisis event; activate human resources.

Consideration of the practice of crisis counseling involves a preliminary analysis of the concepts of “crisis,” “crisis situation,” and “crisis space.”

A crisis is the perception and experience of an event or situation by a client as an unbearable, insurmountable acute problem that hinders the realization of an important goal and exceeds current resources and survival mechanisms, and therefore requires a significant change in perceptions of the world and oneself in a short period of time

A crisis is caused by a specific situation - an event, a life stage, extreme circumstances.

A crisis situation is the conditions (factors) that cause significant (often destructive) changes in a person's life (life space), the way to overcome which seems unknown or impossible for a person. In crisis situations, a person, regardless of the experience of other people in his or her environment, experiences an unpredictable loss of his or her own ability to use previously acquired effective skills in finding ways to solve a problem, as well as a loss of the ability to rely on personal experience in overcoming difficulties.

Crisis intervention is a methodical procedure of emergency and short-term assistance provided to a person in order to interrupt the downward spiral of inappropriate behavior and return the person's ability to control his or her life by mastering emotional, physical and behavioral disorders. Crisis intervention is aimed at minimizing stress associated with the event, providing emotional support and improving individual survival strategies “here and now”.

G. Langsley and D.M. Kaplan identified three key focuses of crisis intervention: client-centered, event-centered, and social relationship-centered. Thus, the authors identified three models of crisis intervention:

1. The compensation model is aimed at controlling symptoms and stopping crisis decompensation. However, it does not seek to clarify the temporary inability to cope with the crisis or to understand the past dynamics of the person that led to the crisis.

2. The stress-oriented model is aimed at successfully solving specific problems posed by a stressful event. The tasks of the psychologist are to develop strategies for solving problems by the client and forming coping skills, as well as the future adaptation of the person to possible stressful situations.

3. The system-oriented model is aimed at the social field of the client in crisis, in particular, family members, relatives, colleagues, and friends [4].

Presentation of the main material. The purpose of the article is to study the effectiveness of counseling, its methods, ethical principles and impact on the emotional state of an individual.

An acute emotional crisis is characterized by intense feelings, impaired adaptation, anxiety, depression, and the risk of developing PTSD.

Different methods of psychological counseling are used in working with people experiencing an acute emotional crisis: empathic listening, cognitive behavioral therapy, crisis intervention, art therapy, body-oriented therapy, etc. The choice of method depends on the nature of the crisis, the client's personality, and the professional competence of the counselor.

Let's consider the main most famous psychotechniques for overcoming traumatic crisis states, described in the textbook by S. Kalischuk [10]

Cognitive-behavioral techniques for adapting to threatening events.

A person chooses the way of coping with the situation that best suits the circumstances and their individual characteristics, experience, and emotional state. A person “pulls himself or herself

together”, feeling ready to change something in his or her life, to start a difficult journey forward. Mastery also serves as a gradual solution to a problem. In both cases, both effective and purely imagined modes of responding to difficult circumstances are possible.

Emotional response. Although it is believed that in general, emotional reaction often occurs automatically, unconsciously, active and conscious intervention in this process can accelerate the transition to another, more effective level of coping. To do this, a person needs to be active - to perform appropriate exercises, directing emotions and feelings in a different direction. Acceptable in this situation are crying, even anger, active forms of expressing negative feelings - active cheering for your favorite sports team, perhaps even aggression directed at inanimate objects (if it is accepted by others), conversation (“crying into a vest”), etc.

The technique of switching attention is closely related and interrelated to the emotional response. For this purpose, you can use the following actions - various physical activities (sports, physical labor, motor activity, walks in the fresh air), drawing, etc.

Also effective is the method of relieving tension (emotional and muscular) through relaxation, meditation, massage, autogenous training, specially selected music, aromatherapy (inhaling the scents of herbs and plants, using infusions of them), hydrotherapy (taking a shower, bath), communication with pets.

Redefining the situation (reinterpretation) - the goal is to make the situation more tolerable. This technique has several components:

- Stop “blaming” yourself for what happened;
- Look for the positive in the situation and do not “dwell” on the negative;
- try to “devalue” what happened, find any flaw - “I didn't really want to,” “it's not yet known who was lucky,” etc.

“Increase self-confidence” - through reflection, realize your strengths, find the positive in yourself. It also covers several positions:

1. Make a list of your achievements, even the most insignificant ones, and re-read it if necessary.
2. Make a list of everything you are grateful for in your life. Remember that all of this is a reward, not something you received by mistake.
3. Talk about yourself with respect. Value yourself as much as others value you.
4. Set small, specific, but achievable goals for yourself.
5. Even if you don't feel particularly confident, pretend that you do.
6. Imagine a person who is authoritative for you in your place and try to model how they would behave in this situation.
7. Never compare yourself with other people. Improvement can only be seen in comparison with yourself.
8. Do not worry about criticism in your address - it is a hidden compliment. No one would scold you if you were worthless.

“Proactive estimation”. The purpose of this exercise is to prevent possible negative consequences by first assessing the expected troubles.

1. What is the worst thing that can happen to me if I don't solve this problem? (Do not put too much emphasis on the consequences.)
2. How much do the experiences that were important to you a year ago (when you were dealing with a similar problem) mean to you now?

3. It is necessary to accept the problem (danger), to accept it as an objective reality, because if we cannot change the situation or solve it, the only way to overcome it is to change our attitude towards it.

If the cause of a critical life situation is another person, the “visualization method” can be of great help.

1. Mentally imagine your abuser and tell him/her everything you think about him/her or do whatever you want to him/her.

2. You can imagine the abuser in a very small form, he is not dangerous in this state.

All of the above techniques and exercises are most effective in helping a person overcome a critical life situation only when they are used in combination, not individually, but in combination. In addition, a person must be active in this process, not to mention the fact that even the provision of professional psychological or psychotherapeutic assistance requires an active position of the client.

It should also be noted that each person has certain traits that help them choose the most effective strategies and ways to overcome critical situations. Among them are the following: mental health, optimism, constructive thinking, i.e. the ability to solve everyday problems with minimal post-stress consequences.

However, there is a significant number of people who need psychological assistance on the eve of a crisis, during its unfolding, and at the stage of choosing a strategy for resolving a difficult life conflict. Since experiencing a real life crisis temporarily maladjusts a personality, increases conflict, makes communication difficult, reduces productivity, has certain psychosomatic consequences, and not all people are capable of dealing with such situations on their own, help from a professional psychologist is essential.

Among the crisis intervention techniques, the technique of “Traumatic Incident Reduction” by Frank Jerbod is quite effective.

The Traumatic Incident Reduction Technique (TIR) consists of visualization, re-experiencing the trauma that occurred (without interruptions, interpretations and comments). This method allows for a cognitive reassessment of traumatic events. This technique assumes the neutrality of the counselor. The client is a “spectator” here, the counselor only creates the conditions for the “revision” procedure. To work, it is necessary for the client to be sufficiently cheerful at the beginning of the session, trust the counselor and want to solve the problem. The counselor should provide the client with a safe therapeutic environment and make sure that he or she wants to work on the problem. The place for “viewing” should be isolated so that nothing interferes with the work. The procedure can take a long time, but neither the counselor nor the client should be in a hurry.

Communication with the client is clearly structured and does not involve any interpretations.

The consultant is a neutral person who accepts without comment whatever the client says. The consultant should not allow himself to be judged in any way. The client may start to threaten the counselor, but in this case there should be no discussion. If the counselor has emotional reactions, they should not be shown. The client may have a strong emotional reaction, he may want to stop, then the counselor should help him to continue working in order to re-encounter what he experienced during the traumatic event. The task of the counselor is to bring the session to a successful conclusion.

During a TIR session, the counselor explains the basic rules and describes the procedure: "You need to follow the instructions and do what I say. We have to work without interruptions. Your task is to recall the episode and go through it many times. We work until we get a result, and stop when you feel better. You may want to discuss something with me, ask for advice, but we will not do that. I will not give advice, I will not evaluate you. What happened is what happened. Now we have to make sure

that these memories do not interfere with our lives. We will not discuss your case in detail, I will explain what you need to do. You should not discuss what will happen at the session with anyone.

TIR procedure:

Counselor's instructions: " Recall the traumatic incident. Imagine that you are watching a movie about it on video. Watch the event and say:

Step 1. When did this happen?

Step 2. Where did it happen?

3 step. How long did it last? If it's a chain of events, remember the first one. Once you have determined how long the event lasted.

Step 4. Go back to the beginning of the incident.

Step 5. Turn on the "video" button and start watching. (Close your eyes if necessary.) What do you imagine, see, feel? Briefly describe it.

Step 6. Review the event, go through the incident to the end. Let me know when you are finished watching.

Step 7. Tell me what happened. What do you imagine, see, hear, feel? Tell me briefly about it.

Step 8. You need to go through this episode many times. It's like re-watching a movie, when you watch it several times and notice more and more details and react less emotionally. Say "beginning" out loud when you get back to the beginning of the episode, watch the episode again. You can say whatever you want, you can only report new details that you notice when you watch it again. When you're done, go back to the beginning again. Watch it all the way through.

Step 9. After you have reviewed everything several times, I want to know if you feel better or worse. Is the incident getting easier or harder? "

If the client says it is getting easier, you need to start over; if it is getting harder or unchanged, the counselor asks: "Maybe the incident started earlier?" If the answer is yes, the client should be asked to return to the previous episode by going through steps 5-8.

If the client cannot recall the previous episode, the counselor should ask the client if there is anything in his or her experience that resembles the trauma situation. If the answer is yes, the counselor asks the client to recall the event, their feelings, thoughts. In this case, steps 1-8 should be repeated.

When the counselor has the impression that the client has reached the "end", he or she asks questions such as: "How does the incident seem to you now? Do you realize what decisions you made during the event? ", "Is there anything you would like to ask or say before the end of the session? "

Conclusions. Psychological counseling is an effective way to help people who are experiencing an acute emotional crisis. Its use helps to reduce anxiety, improve emotional state and prevent the development of PTSD. Ethical principles and support from the social environment are important factors in successful counseling. Studies show that timely psychological counseling significantly reduces stress, improves emotional well-being, facilitates adaptation to new living conditions, and improves quality of life. Counseling helps people regain control over their lives and find new meanings in their experiences.

Prospects for further research. Due to Russia's ongoing military aggression against Ukraine and the resulting increase in the number of traumatic situations, the demand for crisis counseling is growing. This stimulates the further search for new forms of counseling, including online sessions, crisis help lines and mobile applications.

It is necessary to improve the skills of specialists, implement international standards and develop interdisciplinary cooperation to ensure comprehensive assistance to clients.

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