

Essential Skills for E-Counsellors
and Telephone Coaches

BUILDING TRUST AND CONNECTION IN REMOTE COUNSELLING



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INTRODUCTION: WHY CONNECTION MATTERS IN REMOTE COUNSELLING

Whether you're supporting someone through a crisis call or guiding a client through long-term recovery, the quality of your connection shapes the outcome.

But in remote counselling—where we can't see body language or share space—the challenge becomes clear: How do we build real trust without being face-to-face?

This practical guide is designed for e-counsellors, telephone coaches, and support workers who work in online or phone-based settings. Whether you're new to virtual counselling or seeking to sharpen your skills, you'll learn how to:

- Build rapport with warmth and professionalism
- Use verbal and non-verbal communication effectively
- Communicate with trauma awareness
- Practise cultural sensitivity across distance
- Avoid common missteps that break trust

Remote counselling is powerful when done right—and connection is always the foundation.



VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL TECHNIQUES OVER THE PHONE

When you lose body language cues, every word matters more.

Verbal Techniques:

- Use your tone to convey empathy. Keep it warm, steady, and calm.
- Use the client's name appropriately—it helps create connection.
- Mirror key words the client uses to reflect understanding.
- Be clear and direct without sounding clinical.

Non-verbal Cues (Yes, they still matter!):

- Pausing strategically shows you're listening.
- Vocal nods ("Mm-hmm," "I see," "Tell me more") keep the flow natural.
- Avoid typing sounds or background noise—they break presence.

TIP: Smile as you speak. It naturally changes your vocal tone and helps you sound more approachable, even when the client can't see you.

TRAUMA-INFORMED & CULTURALLY SAFE COMMUNICATION

Remote clients may be sharing from unsafe environments, trauma-affected histories, or unfamiliar cultural spaces. Your words become the safety net.

Trauma-Informed Remote Practice:

- Offer choices whenever possible (e.g., “Would you prefer we talk about X or Y today?”)
- Normalize nervousness or pauses—this validates the experience
- Avoid fast-paced questioning; it can feel interrogative
- Reaffirm consent at key points (“Is it okay if we explore that further?”)

Cultural Sensitivity in Virtual Spaces:

- Avoid assumptions about silence, eye contact, or emotional expression
- Ask respectfully about cultural or spiritual needs
- Learn appropriate phrases in the client’s preferred language where possible
- Use inclusive, non-gendered language and avoid jargon

In trauma-informed and culturally safe practice, the relationship is the intervention.

TOOLS AND TEMPLATES FOR STRENGTHS MAPPING

These practice tools help build confidence in virtual counselling settings:

Script 1 – Opening a First Session

“Hi [Name], it’s great to connect with you today. I want you to know this is a safe space—we’ll go at your pace. My role is to support you, and you’re in charge of what we explore. Would you like to start by sharing how you’ve been feeling recently?”

Script 2 – Reflecting Emotion

“It sounds like that really shook your confidence. Would it be okay if we paused here and took a breath together?”

Practice Exercise – Building Comfort in Silence

Role-play or self-practise this:

- Ask an open-ended question
- Wait 10 full seconds before speaking again
- Reflect on what that silence felt like—and what it allowed

Silence, when handled gently, creates room for insight.

MISTAKES TO AVOID + WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

COMMON MISTAKE

- Talking too much to fill the silence
- Using over-technical language
- Rushing the call
- Ignoring vocal tone cues
- Skipping warm-up or rapport-building

BEST APPROACH

- Let silence create space for reflection
- Keep it human, simple, and clear
- Respect time, but always prioritise presence
- Actively listen for emotion in speech
- Always open with relational check-ins

Remote counselling is not about doing more—it's about being more present. Your voice becomes the bridge. Trust is built one small act of empathy at a time.

Ready to deepen your skills in remote mental health support?

Explore our [Diploma in E-Counselling and Telephone Counselling](#).

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