



Focusing Cube Presentation

Slide 1: In this particular PowerPoint we are going to talk about the assessment process.

The rubric that we are going to use for purposes of assessment is the focusing cube. The focusing cube is an excellent tool that I think you will find useful in several ways. We are going to use the focusing cube as a filtration system and for how you can separate and filter background information that you are gathering on the client as he sat with him or her. The focusing cube will also lead us and help us effectively goal set the treatment plan. Lastly, I believe the focusing cube will be helpful to you down the road in your development as a counselor in training, because I believe it will help you be more intentional when you are sitting with a client. What we are going to talk about, the focusing cube has three primary dimensions: the subject focus, verb focus and time focus. Again, these three dimensions will be the filtration system of how you take in assessment information when you are sitting with a client.

Slide 2: As stated before, the focusing cube has three dimensions: the subject focus, verb focus and time focus. Now I want you to sit back in your chair wherever you are sitting and picture a giant filtration system. Picture a giant cube that is going to serve as a filter. That's pretty abstract I guess, but hopefully it will become more concrete as we practice this focusing cube. Remember, this is going to be your filtration system as you are gathering assessment information about the client. Okay, maybe it is an abstract image but I want you to picture in your mind's eye this cube and this cube is going to be a filtration system that is going to separate three dimensions for you. It is going to separate or filter your subject focus, your verb focus and your time focus.



Now a quick overview on what each of these dimensions is all about. The subject focus helps you filter information whether you are talking about the counselor being the focus of the conversation, which is typically rare. We will talk more about that. The client might be the focus. That means the client talking about himself or herself. The client might be talking about others or other's perspectives, or the client might be talking about culture or systems in the client's life. The client might be talking about himself or herself in relation to the family system or the culture that he or she is a part of, religion or spiritual beliefs that are a part of his or her life. In terms of the verb focus, that tends to be divided into three sub factors: thoughts or cognitions, feelings or what we call affect, and behavior or action. We will be filtering or listening for assessment information on the client in terms of listening for thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Last, we have our time focus. Again, we will be listening or gathering assessment information on the client about his or her past, present and future.

Slide 3: Now we are going to talk about the subject focus aspect of the cube. During the assessment process, the subject focus as counselor will be minimal. The primary skill when the counselor is the focus of the session is self-disclosure or immediacy skills, and these don't really have as much of a place during the assessment process so I'm going to skip onto the next subject focus, which is the client. Again, that is when the client is disclosing about himself or herself, and we will see some examples of that going forward. Others as the subject focus is when the client is sharing more about other's perspectives. The client might be sharing about other's impact on his or her life, friendships are relationships, and then when you get to the cultural-systemic the client is talking about the role of family, his or her place in the family. The client might be talking about community, religious beliefs, faith community—these are all part



of the cultural systemic subject focus. What is particularly helpful about the subject focus aspect is you as the counselor can listen and notice wow, I'm hearing a lot about others in the client's life but I'm not hearing much about the client; or, I've heard a lot about the client but I would love to hear more about his or her relationships with others. Or, let me hear more about the client's culture or family system—these help you when you use that focusing cube metaphor as a filtration system and allows you to think about where you are getting your information. Are you getting enough information about the client? Are you getting enough information about the client's relationships with others? Are you getting enough information about the client's culture or the systems in which the client is a part of? Now we are going to get into some specific examples on the next slide of subject focus.

Slide 4: Now let's look at some examples, some subject focus examples. The first when you can see is an example of the counselor as subject focus. Again, this will be a minimal aspect of what we will cover but I wanted to put an example of the counselor as subject focus. Here you see a self-disclosure skill used by the counselor. We are going to move on to the client as the subject focus. If you notice the counselor's question he or she says "what was it like for you when you were first placed on academic probation?" The counselor's question is focused on the client, so he or she is the counselor is wanting to elicit client information or wants to get the client talking about himself or herself. You notice the client's response, "I hated it at first, but I think it helped motivate me to do better." So there is some clear indication that the client is talking about himself or herself. There is a lot of I's: I hated it at first but I think it helped me to do better, so the client is clearly talking about self. Then you have the others example. The counselor says, "if your roommate was in the session now, what might he say about the



positive efforts you have made towards your academics?" Here the counselor is clearly trying to find out more about other's perspectives in the client's life, and of the client response, "he would say he's noticed I've made more time for school work." You see some indicators that the client is clearly talking about others or relationship. "He would say he has noticed I've made more time for school work." The client is talking, channeling his friend's perspective.

Slide 5: Now let's examine to systemic examples of subject focus, and I offer to hear because sometimes cultural systemic subject focus can be abstract so I wanted to offer two examples here. In the first one the counselor is clearly focusing the subject on family systems. The counselor asks, "how did your family react when they found out you were placed on academic probation?" Then the client responded, "they were disappointed. Success in school is very important in my family." The client's response is clearly reflective of a cultural systemic focus. They were disappointed. Success in school is important in my family, so you see the word family. You hear the client talking about they referring to my family were disappointed. The subject focus there is clearly on cultural systemic, more specifically, family. In the second example the counselor asks, "what is it like to be a student in this university system?" You can see there that systems can range from family to other aspects like community or even university systems.

Slide 6: Now we are going to talk about the verb focus aspect of the focusing cube. Simply, the verb focus is broken down into three domains: cognitive, affective and behavioral, cognitive referring to thoughts, affective referring to feelings and behavioral referring to behaviors or actions. On page 212 of the mark young text, you will see that asking questions and learning about thoughts, feelings and behaviors related to the client is a critical aspect of



the assessment process, so you may use some intention asking or listening for the client's thoughts on the presenting concern, thought patterns that the client experienced that might trigger depressed or sad mood or anxiety or other experiences. You will listen for an effective so you will listen for the client's feelings related to the presenting concern. You will listen to patterns of feelings or feelings that the client feels most challenged with or most troublesome or intrusive to the client, and then you will listen for behavioral aspects of the client's presenting concern. A lot of times there may be the clear behavioral component. Are there anger behaviors, avoidance behaviors, substance use behaviors, positive behaviors that represent coping or strengths of the client? These are all part of the verb focus, things for you to listen for during the assessment process and things for you to ask about if you have not gotten information on the cognitive, affective and behavioral.

Slide 7: Now we are going to discuss some verb focus examples. In all of the focusing cube examples throughout this PowerPoint presentation, you will notice that the counselor is intentional about using certain aspects of the focusing cube. In theory, what I'm trying to show is that during the assessment process the counselor can be intentional about trying to gather cognitive information, and effective for behavioral information, systemic information, information on others or relationships so I try to continue that in these verb focus examples. Here the counselor intentionally focuses and is trying to get information on the cognitive. We know that because part of the counselor question is "what thoughts are going through your mind?" The counselor is being intentional to find out about the cognitive aspect of the client. You can tell the client is talking about cognitive because the client response "I'm saying to myself." That is our keyword that we know the client is talking about cognitive verb focus.



Similarly, without effective the counselor is intentional to ask “how were you feeling when your significant others said he felt you were growing apart?” That how were you feeling is the key or the tipoff that the counselor is being intentional to find out about feelings and affect, that focus, that verb focus. The tipoff about the client, the client response “I felt hurt and devastated.” It is pretty obvious when you see the word felt that the client is talking about feelings there or the effective. Last, behavioral—when the counselor is trying to focus on behavioral aspects during the assessment process, the counselor (he or she) is asking “what did you do?” The client response “I ended the relationship because things just weren’t working out.” The behavior there is ended the relationship. That was a behavior, and action, that the client took.

Slide 8: During the assessment process, we also want to be oriented to time. The time focus is broken down into three domains: past, present and future. This is important because the client may be speaking about his or her past, present or future and as the counselor we may intentionally want to find out more information about the client’s past, present or future. For example, if we don’t have a sense of aspects of the client’s presenting concern in the past we don’t have a sense of how the problem is changed, improved, decompensated; on the other hand, the client me exclusively talk about his or her past and we don’t have a sense of presenting concern in the present time or what is concerning the client in the here and now. Also, we need to get an idea about a future time focus for the client. For example, how does the client view his or her future? Is he or she pessimistic or optimistic? Moreover, it is important to get a sense of, especially during the goal-setting process, what does the client want? What does the client want for his or her future?



Slide 9: Again, here in the time focus examples you see the counselor being intentional to ask about the past, present or future and that you see some keywords that tip you off letting you know that, okay, the client is talking about his or her past, present or future. The first example “tell me about how you handled arguments in your past romantic relationships?” The counselor is asking about the past. The client response, you see the first thing we client says “in the past.” That is your keyword right there that the client is talking about the past. The present example you can see similar. “When arguments arise, how do you respond?” The counselor is using present tense language in the question. The client responds, and the key word there that tips you off right away is now “I step away from the situation,” so you see the word now let’s you know that the client is probably talking about here in the now, present. In the future, the counselor ask “what would you like to do differently?” This is clearly a future-oriented question. Then the client responds, with the key word there, “I would like to recognize.” You know the client is projecting a future goal. “I would like to recognize my anger earlier.”

Slide 10: In the previous slides, I showed the three aspects of the focusing cube separately. I showed examples of subject focus separately or subject focus only, verb focus only and time focus only, but it is important to know that any client statement or most client statements contain all three of those aspects of the focusing cube in one single phrase or in the span of a couple of client sentences. Here on this slide is an example of how you can find the subject, verb and time focus within one client statement; in other words, the three aspects of the focusing cube don’t have to be viewed separately. In fact, they often all occur in a single client statement or two, so on this slide there are some examples of that.



Slide 11: What does it all mean? Let's put the focusing cube in context. If you turn to page 212 of your Mark Young text, you will see that primary domains in assessment are affect, behavior, cognition, development, family, culture and religious/spiritual aspects and physical. Now you notice that the focusing cube allows you to filter information and be intentional about getting information about most of these aspects of a good assessment. In the focusing cube, we can listen for affect, behavior, cognition, family, culture—so putting the focusing cube in context really gives us a filter to listen for information that is important to in assessing. It allows us to be intentional about filling in some gaps or asking about information we want to hear more about. Now you will notice what is missing from the focusing cube that is very important in the assessment that you can see on page 212 of the Young text is asking about development and also asking questions about the client's physical self. These are elaborated for, as I said, in the Young text and are very important aspects of the assessment process that are not specific to the focusing cube. Also missing that can be added to the focusing cube but apart I really want to stress is asking about and listening for client strengths and positive coping. This is absolutely critical, so we really want to—whether we are using the focusing cube in our listening or we are using any other assessment model—we always want to listen for client strengths. I think the primary implication of the focusing cube and of using a solid assessment model like that presented on page 212 of the Young text is that it allows us to conceptualize the client's presenting concerns. It allows us to create a picture of what the client's life is like and what their challenges and what their strengths are. When we can accurately and effectively conceptualize the client, we can help Coke construct an effective treatment plan with the client.



Slide 12: In this final slide, I discuss the implications of using the focusing cube. One thing I want to underscore the most as we conclude this PowerPoint presentation is the importance of assessing for strengths during the assessment process. The focusing cube can be used to assess for strengths. When you're asking about or listening for subject, verb and time focus remember listen for client strengths. Listen for client resources and listen for client positive coping.