Self-Evaluation Paper

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My internship experience has been one of the most significant parts of my development as a clinical mental health counselor. Over the past 14 weeks, I have worked with clients presenting with concerns including anxiety, depression, trauma, family conflict, school difficulties, relationships, emotional regulation, and developmental issues. Through direct client work, supervision, case presentations, treatment planning, documentation, and self-reflection, I have applied what I learned in coursework to real clinical situations. This experience has increased my confidence, strengthened my counseling skills, and helped me identify areas for continued professional growth.

One of the most important lessons I learned from my clients is that counseling cannot be approached as a one-size-fits-all process. Each client has different experiences, developmental needs, communication styles, strengths, and levels of readiness for change. Working with children and adolescents especially taught me the importance of meeting clients at their developmental level. Many sessions involved school concerns, friendships, family relationships, identity development, decision-making, and difficulty communicating emotions. I learned that progress does not always involve a major behavioral change. Sometimes progress is a client becoming more comfortable expressing themselves, identifying an emotion, considering options, or making an independent decision.

I also learned the importance of maintaining client autonomy. For example, one adolescent was uncertain about whether to request a change to her school schedule. Instead of telling her what to do, I helped her consider the advantages and disadvantages of her options. This reinforced that counseling is not about solving problems for clients but helping them develop the confidence and skills to make their own decisions. My clients also taught me to

consider the larger context surrounding their concerns. Family conflict, divorce, developmental changes, school stressors, and environmental factors often influenced what clients brought into counseling. I became more intentional about considering these factors when conceptualizing clients rather than viewing concerns in isolation.

My peers contributed to my development by providing different perspectives during case discussions and presentations. Hearing alternative ways to conceptualize clients or approach interventions helped me become more comfortable with uncertainty and recognize that developing counselors do not need to have an immediate answer to every clinical situation. Supervision was especially important in helping me recognize both my strengths and areas for improvement. I was increasing my use of reflections of feeling and meaning and moving away from question-heavy sessions toward more balanced dialogue. This was meaningful because relying too heavily on questions had previously been an identified area for growth. My sessions were generally goal-directed and focused on client needs. At the same time, supervision helped me recognize the need to improve my ability to go deeper into client content, track themes, and communicate engagement through nonverbal behavior.

The course objectives focused on counseling skills, case conceptualization, self-awareness, and professional development. My internship experience increased my competency in each of these areas. My counseling skills improved through repeated practice. I became more comfortable using open-ended questions, reflections of feeling and meaning, paraphrasing, validation, minimal encouragers, and therapeutic silence. I was making progress in moving away from question-heavy sessions toward more balanced therapeutic dialogue. However, I continue to struggle with stacked questions and multiple closed questions. When I am

uncertain about how to continue a conversation, I sometimes rely on questioning instead of reflecting or allowing the client additional space. Moving forward, I want to become more comfortable using one purposeful question, reflecting what the client has said, and allowing silence when appropriate.

I also developed stronger case conceptualization skills. Working with clients with different presenting concerns taught me to consider developmental history, family relationships, environmental stressors, strengths, symptoms, and behavioral patterns. I became more comfortable connecting these factors to treatment goals and selecting interventions based on individual client needs. One of my most important growth areas is learning to go beyond surface-level content. I sometimes missed opportunities to explore the deeper meaning beneath what clients were discussing. I also need to improve my ability to track and synthesize multiple themes when clients discuss several topics. This is important because counselors must allow clients space to explore while also identifying patterns and helping sessions move forward meaningfully.

Internship also increased my competency in treatment planning and documentation. I learned to translate broad concerns into measurable goals and objectives and connect interventions directly to those objectives. I gained experience with confidentiality, professional boundaries, documentation, technology, risk assessment, safety planning, and supervision, strengthening my understanding of professional counseling responsibilities.

At the beginning of my clinical experience, my primary goals were to improve my counseling skills, strengthen case conceptualization, increase self-awareness, and develop

professional confidence. I made meaningful progress in each area. My counseling skills improved through consistent practice and feedback. I became more comfortable initiating sessions, maintaining therapeutic dialogue, using reflections, and allowing clients space to process their experiences. I was using more reflections and fewer questions demonstrating progress toward this goal.

I also developed greater self-awareness. One particularly valuable piece of feedback involved my affect and nonverbal communication. At times my affect appeared flat or somewhat distant and that I occasionally seemed distracted. Although difficult to hear, this feedback helped me recognize that I may feel engaged internally while my client may not experience me that way. This was especially important because much of my internship involved telehealth. Telehealth requires counselors to be intentional with nonverbal communication and eye contact because connection can be different from face-to-face counseling. I learned that I may need to intentionally emphasize facial expressions, eye contact, posture, and other nonverbal behaviors so clients recognize that I am listening and engaged.

My confidence also increased throughout the internship. I initially felt pressure to know exactly what to say or which intervention to use. Over time, I became more comfortable with uncertainty and learned that I do not have to immediately solve every client's concern. I have become more willing to slow down, listen, reflect, and trust the counseling process.

One of my primary strengths is my ability to build rapport and create a supportive environment. I believe my warmth, openness, appropriate humor, and genuine interest help clients feel comfortable. I also believe I have developed the ability to recognize and reinforce

client strengths when clients demonstrate improved communication, confidence, decision-making, or problem-solving. Another strength is maintaining goal-directed sessions. My sessions were generally focused on client needs and goals. I have learned to balance allowing clients to discuss what is important to them with maintaining enough structure for the session to remain productive. My increasing use of reflections of feeling and meaning is another strength. This is an area I intentionally worked on throughout my internship, and the feedback from supervision demonstrates meaningful progress.

My primary growth areas are deeper therapeutic processing and nonverbal presence. I want to become better at identifying emotions, underlying meanings, patterns, and themes rather than simply following the surface content of a conversation. I also need to continue reducing stacked questions and closed questions. Another growth area is my telehealth presence. My supervisor's feedback about flat affect and appearing distracted made me more aware of the importance of intentional nonverbal communication. In my next clinical experience, I want to be more conscious of my facial expressions, eye contact, posture, and other behaviors that communicate attentiveness.

As I move into my next clinical experience, I want to build upon the skills developed during internship. My first goal is to improve deeper therapeutic processing by identifying emotions, meanings, patterns, and themes within client content. I will monitor this progress through supervision, case conceptualizations, and session reflections. My second goal is to improve my use of reflections while reducing my reliance on stacked or closed questions. I want to practice using reflections of feeling and meaning before asking another question and become more comfortable with therapeutic silence. My third goal is to strengthen my telehealth presence

and nonverbal communication. I want to be more intentional with eye contact, facial expressions, posture, and other behaviors that communicate engagement. I will use supervisor feedback and session review to evaluate my progress. Finally, I want to continue developing my professional confidence. I want to become more comfortable making clinical decisions while recognizing when consultation or supervision is needed. I hope to approach my next clinical experience with curiosity, humility, and a commitment to continued growth.