Effective Counselling with Indigenous Clients:
7 Aspects of Practice Needing Special Attention

1 CLIENT HISTORY
- Be aware of the history your client carries with them
- Own the responsibility of learning about Indigenous culture
- Understand the effects of colonization and the legacy of residential schools
- Learn about the impact of intergenerational and historical trauma
- Consider connection and disconnection from family/community
- Help clients ‘look behind’ their current crisis

2 CULTURE & COMMUNITY
- Recognize that culture is what heals
- Recognize Indigenous connection to the land; help the client (re)establish that
- Know the community and its resources
- Connect and engage with the community – spend time there
- Engage with elders in particular
- Know the community protocols
- Build circles of support for clients and families within community

3 SYSTEMS AND BARRIERS
- Pay attention to systemic racism
- Challenge systems and silos
- Heed the role of systems in child protection
- Recognize there may be political aspects of the local community (e.g., lateral violence)
- Be an advocate for your client in the system
- Meet your client where they are at (emotionally) and when they need you
- Go to your client (physically) when you can
- Reach and connect with clients through others if you have to

4 COUNSELLOR-CLIENT RELATIONSHIP
- Relationships are everything
  - Form a long-term relationship
  - Let your client know who you are - take time to establish trust
  - Expect to manage challenges associated with dual relationships
  - Avoid checklists and forms as much as possible
  - Collaboratively arrive at guidelines and agreements
  - Clarify boundaries
- Understand that some clients may live in “chaos”; this will impact the therapeutic relationship

5 TAKING TIME IN PROCESS
- Avoid working to a fixed schedule
- Take time to share stories
- Listen with intent not to respond; be comfortable with silence
- Avoid being overly focused on results

Note: Our consultation process was limited to researching effectiveness in serving First Nations or Métis clients and communities in BC.
Note: Points in bold indicate elements worthy of special emphasis
6 CLIENT SELF WORTH

- Recognize that your client’s wellbeing may be intertwined with community wellbeing
- Identify strengths and resiliency
- Support client spirituality
- Find a positive message in the client’s story
- Help the client value their existence and maintain a sense of hope

7 COUNSELLOR SELF-AWARENESS

- **Know your own culture and history**
- Understand your own position of privilege
- Show your humanness
- Expect to make mistakes
- Do not consider yourself a ‘fixer’ or a ‘healer’
- Display genuine cultural humility
- Be open to learning from your client (don’t play the expert)
- Be a team player; work inter-professionally
- Avoid using language that pathologizes
- Be consistent and keep your promises
- Ask for help from others; get supervision
- Engage in self-care
- Have a solid knowledge of ethical practice