



McMaster Divinity  
College

**MS 3P1240**  
**Basic Counselling Skills and Interventions**

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Fall 2025  
Tuesday 11:00 am – 12:50 pm

*The mission of McMaster Divinity College is to develop effective evangelical Christian leaders for the Church, academy, and society through graduate-level education, spiritual development, and vocational formation.*

**COURSE SYLLABUS**

**1. COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Accurate and empathic listening coupled with effective communication is a requisite in encouraging growth or development within any of our relationships, both personal and professional. This is an intensive practical skills course and trains the student in the micro skills leading to empathic listening and effective growth-producing communication, which are essential for counselling and ministry activities. It will also enhance all our dialogues within the church, and between the church and the world. This course will require self-disclosure, at a level of comfort of the student, and will rely heavily on practicing these micro skills both inside and outside class in the roles of counsellor, counselee, and observer. All students are expected to take turns in all roles. Skills practice assignments are expected to be done *outside* of class time within your skills group (and with a final volunteer from outside class), up to two hours per assignment for five assignments. Assignments will focus on analyzing recorded transcripts of the student's own practice sessions. Grading will be based not on providing the 'perfect response', but on the ability to observe and analyze your own skills, receive and apply feedback, and be able to reflect on how to improve your communication further. Communicating compassion for ourselves and others, is the overarching goal.

**Core/Required Course for:** MACSC, MDiv Specialization in Counseling and Spiritual Care

**Elective for:** Church and Culture and Christian World View Specializations

**Advanced Research and Doctoral Students:** 5- or 6-unit students needing to enroll in the course must obtain a separate set of course requirements from the instructor

**2. COURSE FORMAT**

**This is an in-person course with a live stream option. All students who reside within 80 km of MDC are required to attend in-person unless permission is granted by MDC administration.** The class will be divided into 2-3-person groups which will remain consistent throughout the semester for practicing counselling skills. Class sessions will include didactic instruction, video presentations, or live skills demonstrations. Assigned

readings for class sessions will include interactive questions and practice responses in workbook format that must be completed before class when assigned. Since this is a skills-development course, full participation in all class exercises is required. There is no class on October 14th for Reading week. **There is assigned reading due by the first day of class. See class schedule below.**

### 3. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

*These learning objectives are coordinated with the expected competencies for CASC/ACSS certified chaplains and pastoral counsellors and the College of Registered Psychotherapists of Ontario (CRPO Competencies noted).*

#### **Knowing**

- To differentiate the roles of psychotherapist and pastoral counsellors in relation to other health professionals and recognize the limits of professional competence in understanding scope of practice (CRPO 4.1.2, 3.1.6)
- To distinguish the goals and phases of counselling, the roles of “counselor” and “counselee”, and the language terms of micro skills in therapeutic dialogue
- To be able to correctly identify the different types of responses and interventions which might occur in dyadic communication or dialogue
- To discriminate the kinds of responses and interventions that are helpful or not helpful in promoting growth and change, and in specific situations in the therapeutic relationship (CRPO 4.5.5, 4.5.7)
- To identify when and how to review therapeutic process and progress with clients periodically, make appropriate adjustments, and refer clients appropriately, and to identify the important factors in conducting an effective and appropriate closure process (4.5.3, 4.5.4, 4.6, 4.7)
- Recognize ethical issues encountered in practice, such as maintaining appropriate boundaries with clients, use of counsellor self-disclosure in therapy relationships, and how to respond to inappropriate client requests (CRPO 3.2.1)
- Integrate knowledge of human and cultural diversity in relation to psychotherapy practice, in terms of understanding how cultural factors can influence therapeutic engagement and response to interventions, recognizing multicultural implications of some basic counselling interventions, and recognizing cultural barriers that may affect engagement in the therapeutic process to enable modification of interventions according to cultural needs and preferences (CRPO 1.5, 1.5.1, 1.5.2)

#### **Being**

- To increase comfort with self-disclosure, within one’s own sense of safety and boundaries, and as appropriate to the assignments
- To increasingly practice empathic listening skills and effective responses in all our relationships
- To increase tolerance in hearing others’ pain and being open to the experience of one’s own pain
- To develop a growing self-awareness of one’s strengths and weaknesses
- To better understand one’s motivating factors, thoughts, and feelings, in pursuit of safe and effective use of self, and developing the person of the counsellor
- To develop greater comfort and appreciation for receiving feedback from peers and teachers

**Doing**

- To observe, identify, and demonstrate helpful versus non helpful responses in therapeutic dialogue (CRPO 4.5.5, 4.5.7)
- To demonstrate micro-skills in noticing, reflecting, and validating, both content and feelings, to establish relationship, encourage deeper exploration and growth, and consolidate learnings (CRPO 4.5.5, 4.5.6, 4.5.7, 4.5.8)
- To demonstrate micro-skills in clarifying, confronting, using metaphors, and using authenticity, self-disclosure and immediacy to encourage growth and change (CRPO 4.5.9, 4.5.10)
- To practice obtaining informed consent and explaining client rights to privacy and confidentiality, and the limitations imposed on them by law (CRPO 3.1.1, 3.1.5, 4.1.5, 4.1.7))

**4. COURSE TEXTS**

All required textbooks for this class are available from the MDC's book service, READ On Bookstore, Room 145, McMaster Divinity College. For advance purchase, you may contact READ On Bookstore, 5 International Blvd, Etobicoke, Ontario M9W 6H3: phone 416.620.2934; fax 416.622.2308; email [books@readon.ca](mailto:books@readon.ca). Other book services may also carry the texts.

**A. Required Textbook for all students:**

Sbanotto, E.A.N., Gingrich, H.D., and Gingrich, F.C. *Skills for Effective Counseling: A Faith-Based Integration*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016. (450pp)

McMinn, Mark R. *Sin and Grace in Christian Counselling: An Integrative Paradigm*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic Press, 2008. (176pp)

**B. Additional Required Articles for all students:** (provided on A2L, see Class Schedule)

Carlson, David E. "Jesus' Style of Relating: The Search for a Biblical View of Counseling." *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 4 (1976) 181–92.

Hambrick, Brad. *The Pastor as Counselor: Role Definition, Process Clarity, and Skill Development*. (Jan 7, 2020) No pages. Pdf available online at, <https://bradhambrick.com/pastorascounselor/>. (Also available as 8 videos at this web address).

**5. INSTRUCTOR**

**Biography:** Sarah Hyndman is an Adjunct Professor of Counselling and Spiritual Care (part-time) at McMaster Divinity College. Sarah is a Registered Psychotherapist (RP) with the College of Registered Psychotherapists of Ontario (CRPO) and meets CRPO's criteria as a Clinical Supervisor. She has spent the last decade working on the frontlines of child and youth mental health in a community mental health setting, providing walk-in therapy, crisis counselling, brief and ongoing therapy, and facilitating therapy groups for both caregivers and youth. Sarah has supervised and mentored practicum students for both Master of Social Work and Psychotherapy programs. She holds a Master of Divinity from Tyndale University, with a specialization in Clinical Counselling. Sarah has extensive experience working with a range of emotional, behavioural, and mental health challenges, along with family and couples counselling. Sarah runs a private practice based out of the Niagara region and continues to work in community mental health. She is married with four children, spanning the ages of two to eighteen. She is passionate about empowering the next generation to reach their full potential when it comes to mental and spiritual health.

**Contact and Availability:** Sarah will be available for brief consultations before class begins, and during breaks. Questions and other communications can be directed to email:  
[sarah.hyndman@mcmaster.ca](mailto:sarah.hyndman@mcmaster.ca)

## 6. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### A. Class Participation: 5% of grade.

Participation in class discussions and completion of assigned chapter questions for each assigned chapter in the course text **before** class, are crucial to the successful completion of this course. Completion of chapter question assignments will not be graded but will be recorded at the beginning of each class and contribute towards the 5% participation mark.

### B. Assignments

#### i. Small Group Role Play Exercises and Transcript Analysis - 35% of grade.

Five small group exercises, to be completed in class, are delineated on pages 389-425 of the text to correspond with Chapters four through twelve according to the class schedule below. These small group exercises must be completed as a group outside of class time and will take one to two hours of role play time per assignment. For each roleplay, students will transcribe their responses as “counselor” and analyze them. Microsoft Word has a transcribing function that will speed up this process, but the result must be proofed and corrected. A template for the roleplay analysis is given in the text, and an MS Word version will be provided on A2L. Professor will assign groups.

Assignments will grow in their point value as the semester progresses:

Chs 5, 7, 9 = 15 points each; Chs 10, 12 = 25 points each; Total converted to percentage of total grade.

#### ii. Reflection Papers – 20% of grade

The first reflection paper will be due on **Sept 16<sup>th</sup>**. Based on your understanding of Ch. 2, The Person of the Counsellor, please write a three-page reflection on your own areas of strength and identified needs for growth, being sure to cover topics such as: self as instrument, priest vs. prophet, understanding your past, awareness of values, and motivational factors. The second three-page reflection paper will be due on **Nov. 25<sup>th</sup>** and should encompass your personal learnings throughout the course in the areas identified in the first reflection paper. Be sure to show your learning in ‘safe and effective use of self’. A successful reflection paper will demonstrate the ability to challenge oneself to growth. Additional instructions will be provided through A2L.

#### iii. Final Interview Project - 40% of grade.

In this summative project, the student will conduct a 45–60-minute session with a volunteer from outside the class who serves in the role of counselee. The format will be similar, but more extensive than the roleplay assignments above. The session is recorded and transcribed and the digital recording or a link to the recording will be handed in to the instructor with the written analysis. The practice session can be conducted any time after Chapter 12 Lecture is completed. It is best to have your volunteer scheduled and your equipment prepared beforehand, so that you can do your session as soon as possible after November 6<sup>th</sup>. Full details of the project are given on pages 425-439 of the text, but you should *use the revised template provided on A2L*. The student’s analysis and critique of their counselor behaviors will review all the micro skills used as taught in the course, as well as observations of their personal responses in the

session, and reflection on their growth challenges. The project is due on Nov 28<sup>th</sup>. *Because of the length of time required for grading, late submissions are strongly discouraged.*

## 7. COURSE ADMINISTRATION

### **College Style for Submission of Written Work:**

All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses <https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/resources-forms/mdc-style-guide/>. This includes spelling, grammar, and syntax accuracy. Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions. Students are encouraged to have someone proficient in English proofread their work. Mandatory templates are provided, however, for the unique assignments of this course which differ from a typical academic paper.

### **Academic Honesty**

Academic dishonesty is not qualitatively different from other types of dishonesty. It consists of misrepresenting the ownership of written work by deception or by other fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include any number of forms such as: copying or using unauthorized aids in tests, examinations; plagiarism, i.e., submitting work that is not one's own (regardless of the means of its production, including AI) but passing it off as if it is; submitting work for credit in a course for which credit is being or has already been given, unless the previously submitted work was presented as such to the instructor of the second course and has been deemed acceptable for credit by the instructor of that course; aiding and abetting another student's dishonesty; giving false information for the purposes of gaining admission or credit; giving false information for the purposes of obtaining deferred examinations or extension of deadlines; forging or falsifying McMaster University or McMaster Divinity College documents.

**A special note about AI:** You are expected to do your own thinking and to write your own papers, etc., and not to have AI do this work for you. There may be value in using an AI tool to help you locate and collate resources or to help you "tidy up" your English grammar, usage, and mechanics, especially if English is not your native language. However, using AI to create content for you and then submitting that content as if you created it is considered plagiarism (i.e., submitting work that is not one's own as if it is one's own) and is a violation of the academic honesty policy.

### **AODA**

In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), the content of this course is intended to be accessible to all students who are enrolled in the course, including those with disabilities. If a student requires accommodation to participate fully in this course, that student is to contact SAS at McMaster University, who will then work directly with the McMaster Divinity College Registrar to negotiate reasonably appropriate accommodation for the student. The MDC Registrar will communicate with faculty regarding necessary accommodations. Please note that an accommodation is not retroactive and must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation.

### **Gender Inclusive Language**

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all its publications. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote

from a gender-inclusive version such as, for example, the following: NRSV (2022), TEV/GNB/GNT (1976), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), NIV (2011), and the CEB (2011).

**Submission of Written Work:** This course is uniquely structured so that the book assignments prepare the student for what will be practiced in class. Therefore, the following will be strictly observed:

**1. Chapter question assignments:** Due at the beginning of each class. **Docked 50% for late submission.**

**2. Small Group Role Play assignments:** Due at the beginning of each class, they must be submitted online through Avenue to Learn (A2L). An MS Word template is provided for each assignment. The group is responsible for scheduling their skill practice and making sure all members complete the assignment. **Late submissions will be docked 50%.**

**3. Final Interview Project:** Must be handed in on Avenue to Learn, with digital audio/video recording uploaded as well (digital format to be explained in class).

**Cell Phone/Computer Policy:** Students are to refrain from texting or conducting cell phone conversations while class is in session. Should you need to maintain contact with family members and/or your church or ministry, please turn off the ringer to avoid disturbing others; upon receipt of an urgent call, you may excuse yourself from the classroom or video conference. The same policy applies to all computer-generated sound schemes or other electronic annunciation systems. **It is expected that the student will have their camera on for all virtual/livestreamed lectures, but to mute their microphone unless instructed otherwise.**

**Copyright:** *This syllabus is the property of the instructor and is prepared with currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make changes and revisions up to and including the first day of class.*

## 8. TENTATIVE COURSE OUTLINE: READINGS AND ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE (Due on class date indicated)

*\* All assigned chapter questions in each chapter are to be answered in written form and uploaded before class\**

*\* For Assigned Chapter Questions – See separate list\**

### Week 1 - Tuesday Sept 9th

**Reading Assignment Due:** Sbanotto et al, Introduction and Chapters 1&2 (pp.1-54) (54 pgs.); Carlson article (on A2L)

**Lecture Topics:** Introduction and Introductions - Goals and Expectations of the Course

#### **Foundations for Therapeutic Dialogue I**

Definition of Pastoral Counselling vs. Psychotherapy/Controlled Act

Relationship as the Foundation of Change

The Nature, Importance and Function of Empathy in Relationship

### Week 2 – Tuesday Sept 16<sup>th</sup>

**Reading Assignment Due:** Sbanotto Chs. 3, 4 & 5 (pp.55-110) (54 pgs.)

Hambrick – Part 4 – Listening and Empathy (see link on A2L -15 mins)

Video on Micro-expressions (25 mins) – link on A2L

**Assigned Chapter Questions Due:** Ch. 2 - See A2L Assignment folder/ description

**Lecture Topics:** **Foundations for Therapeutic Dialogue II**

Micro-skills: **Perceiving and Attending Skills**

Micro-skills: **Reflecting Content**

**In class Exercise/Demo:** Reflecting Content

**First Reflection Paper due:** The Person of the Therapist (ch.2)

**Week 3 - Tuesday Sept 23<sup>rd</sup>**

**Role Play Worksheet Due:** Ch.5 Reflecting Content (pp.393-395)

**Reading Assignment Due:** Sbanotto Chs. 6 & 7 (pp.111-150) (48 pgs.)

**Lecture Topic:** *Foundations for Therapeutic Dialogue III*

Micro-skills: *Reflecting Feeling*

Micro-skills: *Connecting Empathically*

**Week 4 - Tuesday September 30<sup>th</sup>**

**Assigned Chapter Questions Due:** Chs. 6 & 7 – See list

**Class Feedback and Q & A on Ch.5 Role Play**

**In-Class exercises/demonstrations of Basic Empathy Response (Reflection of Content +Feeling)**

**Week 5 – Tuesday Oct 7<sup>th</sup>**

**Role Play Worksheet Due:** Ch. 7 Basic Level Empathy (pp.400-403)

**Reading Assignment Due:** Sbanotto Chs. 8 & 9 (pp.151-190) (39 pgs.)

**Assigned Chapter Questions Due:** See List

**Lecture and Discussion Topics:** Micro-skills: *Clarifying*

Micro-skills: *Intuitive Empathy*

**Week 6 – Tuesday Oct 14<sup>th</sup>**

**READING WEEK – NO CLASS**

**Week 7 – Tuesday Oct 21<sup>st</sup>**

**Role Play Worksheet Due:** Ch. 9 Clarifying & Intuitive Empathy (pp.412-417)

**Reading Assignment Due:** Sbanotto Chs. 10 (pp.191-210) (19 pgs.)

**Assigned Chapter Questions Due:** See List

**Lecture and Discussion Topics:** *Expanding Therapeutic Options*

Micro-skill: *Using Metaphor*

**Week 8 – Tuesday Oct 28<sup>th</sup>**

**Reading Assignment Due:** Sbanotto Chs. 11 (pp.211-234) (23 pgs.)

**Assigned Chapter Questions Due:** See List

**Lecture and Discussion Topics:** *Reflecting Apparent Discrepancies*

Micro-skill: *Confrontation*

**In class Exercise/Demonstration:** Practicing Confrontation

**Week 9 – Tuesday Nov 4<sup>th</sup>**

**Role Play Worksheet Due:** Ch. 10 Clarifying, Intuitive Empathy and Metaphor (pp, 412-416)

**Reading Assignment Due:** Sbanotto Ch. 12 (pp.2135-252) (18 pgs.)

**Assigned Chapter Questions Due:** See List

**Lecture and Discussion Topics:** *Using the Here and Now*

Micro-skills: *Authenticity, Immediacy, Self-Disclosure*

**Week 10 – Tuesday Nov 11<sup>th</sup>**

**Reading Assignment Due:** Hambrick, Parts 1-3 & 6 (read pdf on A2L and/or watch videos – see links on A2L); McMinn, Chs. 1-3

**Lecture and Discussion Topics:**

***Managing Ethical and Legal Boundaries in Pastoral Counselling & Psychotherapy***

**Week 11 – Tuesday Nov 18<sup>th</sup>**

**Role Play Worksheet Due:** Ch. 12 Immediacy and Confrontation

**Reading Assignment Due:** Sbanotto Ch. 13 (pp.253-274) (21 pgs.); McMinn Chs. 4-6.  
Hambrick – Part 5 Goal Setting (see pdf and video link on A2L)

**Lecture and Discussion Topics:** ***Strategies for Growth/ Implementing Change***

Interventions: Increasing Coping and Emotional Regulation Skills

**Week 12 – Tuesday Nov 25<sup>th</sup>**

**Reading Assignment Due:** Sbanotto Ch. 14 (pp.275-296) (21 pgs.), McMinn, Ch.7-8

**Lecture and Discussion Topics:** ***Thinking Systemically and Using the Relational System***

**Second Reflection Paper Due:** ***Growth in understanding of Safe and Effective Use of Self***

**Week 13 – Tuesday Dec 2<sup>nd</sup>**

**\*PLEASE NOTE FINAL INTERVIEW PAPER IS DUE THE FRIDAY BEFORE CLASS: Nov 28<sup>th</sup> at 8 am.**

**Reading Assignment Due:** Sbanotto Ch. 15 (pp.297-320) (23 pgs.) & Appendix D (pp.441-450) (31 pgs.)

**Lecture and Discussion Topics:** ***Appreciating the Sacred***

Interventions: Spiritual Practices as Clinical Intervention

**Week 14 – Tuesday Dec 9<sup>th</sup>**

**Submit Course Evaluations**

**Reading Assignment:** Sbanotto Ch. 16 (pp. 321-346) (25pp), Hambrick Parts 7 & 8  
(read or watch video - links on A2L).

**Lecture and Discussion Topics:** ***Endings and New Beginnings***

Interventions: Bringing Closure, When and How to Make Referrals