



Handling Personal Questions Teacher's Guide

Context: This in-class exercise can be conducted in a section on professional boundaries. See PowerPoint slides #54-56 and the Personal Questions video.

Note: *For this exercise, I recommend that the students role-play a client in a typical nutrition counseling setting (i.e., diabetes or weight loss clinic). If possible, it is best for them to be paired with someone they don't know very well (i.e., not their best friend whom they sit next to every day). These pairs exercises work best with groups of less than 30. If you have more, find a way for them to practice this outside class or in a smaller section.*

Suggested introduction: Each of you will have a chance to be the client and the counselor. This session is occurring in a diabetes clinic. As the client, you have had diabetes for several years and have been following your diet only fairly well.

As the counselor, you will begin the role play by talking about some of the diet changes you believe your client should make. After a few exchanges with the counselor, the client should throw in one personal question such as:

- Do you have diabetes?
- What do you eat?
- How do you stay so thin?

The counselor will then use the suggested format to address the question:

- Figure out what you are willing to disclose, if anything.
- Bring out where the question comes from and what's behind it.
- Respond to what matters to the client.
- Very briefly self-disclose (if you are willing and believe it will be useful).
- Word your answer so that it serves the client's needs.
- Redirect the topic back to the client.

It will likely feel quite awkward. Feel free to ask to run it again or to stop for a moment to think about what to say next. Don't answer the direct question until you have completed the first three steps and still feel that a direct answer may be useful. It is OK to not answer the direct question.

Note: *This is a very difficult process to learn to do smoothly. Expect that the students will be uncomfortable and frustrated. It may be useful to debrief the students after the first run-through so the second set of students can learn from what happened.*

Debrief after doing both sides:

- When you were the client, what was it like that your counselor answered your question with questions? Did you get to a more important issue?
- When you were the counselor, what was hard? Did you come up with wording that helped the process? What seemed to happen in your client?
- How can you practice this skill more until it becomes second nature? Brainstorm situations to practice in.

Ask the students to jot down one thing that they discovered/learned about this particular counseling process today and to write a goal for practice.

This is a useful one to practice since we are generally caught off guard by these questions.