

Essential Qualities of a Peer Counselor

1. **Empathy**¹ (enables counselor to accurately identify and understand the client's feelings)
2. **Humility**² (aware of her/his limitations, humility motivates counselor to seek help and advice when needed)
3. **Emotional Stability & Calm Demeanor**³ (counselors set the tone in therapeutic relationships and the counselor's ability to remain calm aides the client's emotional regulation)
4. **Compassion**⁴ (motivates one to help and prevents unfair judgments of clients)
5. **Good Communication Skills**⁵ (essential to building trusting relationships with clients and to understanding both the verbal and nonverbal messages from clients)
6. **Authentic/Genuine**⁶ (counselors who behave genuinely give permission to their clients to be who they really are as well)
7. **Consistently Reliable**⁷ (essential to building trusting, therapeutic relationships)
8. **Aware**^{8, 9} that each client has her/his own story (i.e. does not assume that all clients experience abortion in the same way)
9. **Knowledgeable**^{10, 11, 12} regarding the risk factors for post-abortion mental health problems and the range of adverse psychological effects of abortion
10. **Healed**¹³ from own abortion experience (or other traumatic life event) if that is a part of the counselor's history

Prepared by the *Alliance for Post-Abortion Research & Training*

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- ¹ Rogers, C. (1980). *A way of being*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- ² Hays, PA. (2001). *Addressing cultural complexities in practice: A framework for clinicians and counselors*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- ³ Rogers, C. (1980). *A way of being*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- ⁴ Gilbert, P. Ed. (2005). *Compassion: Conceptualisations, research, and use in psychotherapy*. New York: Routledge.
- ⁵ Brems, C. (2001). *Basic skills in psychotherapy and counseling*. Pacific Grove, CA: Cole Thomson Learning.
- ⁶ Rogers, C. (1980). *A way of being*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- ⁷ Ackerman, S. J. & Hilsenroth, M.J. (2002). A review of therapist characteristics and techniques positively impacting the therapeutic alliance. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 43 (1), 1-33.
- ⁸ Ziegler, M. & McEvoy, M. (2000). Hazardous terrain: Countertransference reactions in trauma groups in Klein, R.H & Schermer, V.L. (Eds.), *Group psychotherapy for psychological trauma*. New York: Guilford Press.
- ⁹ Watson, J.C., Goldman, R. & Vanaerschot, G. (1998). Empathic: A postmodern way of being. In Greenberg, L.S., Watson, J.C. & Lietaer, G. (Eds.) *Handbook of experiential psychotherapy*. New York: Guilford.
- ¹⁰ McAll, K. (1987). Ritual mourning for unresolved grief after abortion. *Southern Medical Journal*, 80 (7), 817-821.
- ¹¹ Speckhard, A.C. & Rue, V.M. (1992). Postabortion syndrome: An emerging public health concern. *Journal of Social Issues*, 48 (3), 95-119.
- ¹² Worden, J.W. (2008). *Grief counseling and grief therapy: A handbook for the mental health practitioner*.
- ¹³ Jennings, L. & Skovholt, T.M. (1999). The cognitive, emotional, and relational characteristics of master therapists. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 46 (1), 3-11.