



# CENTER FOR THE ARMY PROFESSION AND LEADERSHIP

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## The Four Stage Counseling Process

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### Counseling Toolkit Hotlink:

<https://capl.army.mil/junior-enlisted.php>

Reference: ATP 6-22.1, DA Form 4856

## Doctrine

### STAGE 1: IDENTIFY THE NEED FOR COUNSELING:

#### Performance Counseling:

Performance counseling is the review of a subordinate's duty performance during a specified period.

#### Professional growth counseling:

Professional growth counseling includes planning for the accomplishment of individual and professional goals. During the counseling, leader and subordinate conduct a review to identify and discuss the subordinate's strengths and weaknesses and to create an individual development plan that builds upon those strengths and compensates for (or eliminates) shortcomings.

#### Event Counseling:

- Specific instances of superior or substandard performance.
- Reception and integration counseling.
- Crisis counseling.
- Referral counseling.
- Promotion counseling.
- Transition counseling.
- Adverse separation counseling.

### STAGE 2: PREPARE FOR COUNSELING:

Successful counseling requires preparation in the following areas:

- **Select a suitable place.**
- **Schedule the time.**
- **Notify the subordinate well in advance.**
- **Outline the components of the counseling session.**
- **Organize information and draft a plan of action.**
- **Plan the counseling strategy.**
- **Establish the right atmosphere.**

## Counseling

### STAGE 3: CONDUCT THE COUNSELING SESSION:

Army leaders use a balanced mix of formal and informal counseling and learn to take advantage of daily events to provide Soldiers and Army Civilians with feedback.

Even during informal counseling, leaders should address the four basic components of a counseling session:

- **Open the session.**
- **Discuss the issues.**
- **Develop a plan of action.**
- **Record and close the session.**

### STAGE 4: FOLLOW-UP:

#### Leader Responsibilities:

The counseling process does not end with the initial counseling session. It continues throughout the implementation of the plan of action consistent with the observed results.

Sometimes the initial plan of action will require modification to meet the desired outcomes.

Leaders must consistently support their subordinates in implementing the plan of action by teaching, coaching, mentoring, or providing additional time, referrals and other appropriate resources. Additional measures may include more focused follow-up counseling, informing the chain of command, or taking more severe corrective measures if appropriate.

#### Assess the Plan of Action:

During assessment, the leader and the subordinate jointly determine if the desired results happened. They should determine the date for their initial assessment during the initial counseling session. The plan of action assessment provides useful information for future follow-up counseling sessions.

## Organization & Functions

To overcome resistance in counseling, leaders can employ several techniques to redirect the subordinate:

- Reconfirm the counseling session purpose—be specific and keep focused on the details (such as conditions, triggers, and outcomes) of the situation; refrain from any personal attacks on the subordinate.

- Keep the discussion professional and balanced in tone—do not argue or place blame on any party.

- Discuss the suspected resistance openly with the subordinate and respect his or her response.

- Slow the tempo of the session—rely on pertinent open-ended questions to give the subordinate the appropriate time and ability to reveal information and be an active participant in the counseling session.

- Focus on one specific behavior, its effect, and the consequences to minimize overwhelming the subordinate. It may be necessary to divide the session into multiple meetings to address each area adequately. Further, the leader should prioritize these discussions based on the needs of the individual and unit.

## Tools and Products

Leaders conduct effective counseling sessions and improve their counseling skills when they follow these general guidelines:

- Determine the subordinate's role in the situation and what has been done to resolve the issue. Focus attention on the subordinate. Listen to what is said and how it is said to understand what the subordinate says and feels.

- Encourage the subordinate to take the initiative and speak aloud.

- Remain objective; avoid confirming a subordinate's prejudices.

- Display empathy when discussing the issue. Be receptive to the subordinate's emotions without feeling responsible.

- Ask open-ended questions for relevant information; avoid interrogating the subordinate.

- Listen more and talk less; avoid interrupting.

- Keep personal experiences out of the counseling session.

- Draw conclusions based on all available information, not just the subordinate's statement.

- Enable the subordinate to help himself or herself.

- Know what information to keep confidential and what to present to the chain of command, if necessary.

## Active Listening

Key elements of active listening include:

- Eye contact. Maintaining eye contact without staring helps show sincere interest. Occasional breaks of eye contact are normal and acceptable, while excessive breaks, paper shuffling, clockwatching, and repeated mobile telephone checks may indicate a lack of interest or concern.

- Body posture. Being relaxed and comfortable will help put the subordinate at ease. However, an overly relaxed position or slouching may be interpreted as a lack of interest.

- Head nods. Occasional nodding indicates attention and encourages the subordinate to continue.

- Facial expressions. Keep facial expressions natural and relaxed to signal a sincere interest. Verbal expressions. Refrain from talking too much and avoid interrupting. Let the subordinate do the talking, while keeping the discussion on the counseling subject.

- Check for understanding. Paraphrase or summarize points back to the subordinate for confirmation; for example, "What I heard was..."

- Nonverbal indicators of leader and subordinate attitude include: Interest, friendliness, and openness. Be aware that counselor actions must be context and situation specific. For example, leaning toward the subordinate may be considered as expressing interest or being aggressive—the counselor must be able to understand how the subordinate will interpret this action