

“Counseling Techniques – Micro-Skills III” Program Transcript

NARRATOR: Aaron and Robyn are seeing a counselor as they are concerned about the alcohol drinking behavior of their adolescent daughter, Michelle. As you watch this segment, observe the techniques used by the counselor.

COUNSELOR: So I'm wondering if you would do something for a minute. I'm wondering if you could share with your dad what he doesn't get about you. If you were to think about your dad really being in a place of really not knowing what it is that you are or who you are. To be able to say to him, this is what you're not getting about me. And Dad, I'm wondering if you could just hear what she has to say. And then I want to talk with you a little bit about that.

AARON: I have to be quiet?

COUNSELOR: Yeah.

AARON: That's going to be hard.

COUNSELOR: Yeah. I'm sure it will, yeah.

AARON: I'll give it a shot. I'll give it a shot.

MICHELLE: Well, I'm not a robot. And I'm not your little Barbie doll toy. And I'm not your dancing monkey when we go out places. I don't like performing for people. And get things that I get-- who I am. I am a person. And I want to make my own decisions. And maybe I don't know what I want to do. And I think that should be OK.

COUNSELOR: Anything else? Now I want to stop for a second. It looked to me, as you were talking to dad, that there were a couple times where you were looking to mom, almost for some reassurance. I wonder if you noticed that, Mom. Yeah. And Dad, what were you hearing? What were you hearing Michelle say?

AARON: I've got to be honest with you. My internal language was just telling me to just be quiet and listen to her. So I was hearing my own internal voice at the same time I was trying to listen to her. But I kept hearing words like "Barbie doll" and "dancing monkey." And that's not what I want my daughter to think that I want of her.

MICHELLE: You get the message that she feels like you want her to perform.

AARON: Yeah, that's what I heard. It just That's not what I want at all.

COUNSELOR: So one of the things that may be happening in your family is that you may be making some assumptions about your dad, about what he wants you to do, that may not be his intention. Do you think that he wants to have you dance around like a dancing monkey or to perform and be the perfect person? How does he want you to do that?

MICHELLE: Well, if we're out somewhere and if I'm not happy, I shouldn't be forced to smile. Or if we're out at a church function or something like that, and if I don't really want to mix and mingle and meet whoever you want, I just don't feel like I should have to be really happy and go and entertain them or share stories about something that happened at school or share about something that I did. I just don't feel like I should have to be doing that.

AARON: I'm just very proud of you. You've had good grades up until recently. And I'm proud of you. That's why want you tell folks these things. I'm just so proud of you and the good grades that you make. But I'm worried about the-- the drinking's going to-- I get that next report card and it's going to be all B's and C's instead of A's. And it's been all A's ever since. And that's what I want for you.

ROBYN: You know, she and I have talked about this before. She feels like she's your trophy. And I know I feel that way sometimes, too. You can't have a relationship with a trophy.

COUNSELOR: So one of the things that you experience, Robyn, that you experience yourself as a trophy, and not just Michelle-- because again, it's almost like you were talking for Michelle. She feels like you view her as a trophy. But you feel that way, too. And so what does feel to be like a trophy?

ROBYN: That I am in his life just to show off, some other acquisition or evidence of success that he has. And that he doesn't really care about who I am as a person, or care about our family. You know, he's gone all during the week and when he comes home, you know what he does? He does and plays golf all day Saturday. So there's this idea of, you have to be perfect. And you have to be this way. You have to look that way. And you have to do all these things so the rest of the world can see how successful he is or I am. But there's no connection.

COUNSELOR: It's interesting. During the week, you don't have to be a trophy. It's almost like y'all can get together and just do what you need to do. So in some ways, his working during the week serves you. It helps you to do-- to put off the trophy and to live how you want to live.

MICHELLE: Yeah, we can just relax and chill together.

COUNSELOR: And so my hunch is that if that arrangement were to change, that would be pretty interesting to see what would happen in this family. Meaning if

you weren't on travel so much, if you were home, that would certainly be different for you and this family.

AARON: Yeah. I wouldn't have drinking buddies to come home to.

NARRATOR: Well and the other thing, too, Aaron is that I get the sense that you've depended upon this partner that you have-- who is your equal, who is your wife-- to keep the homefront a certain way. And so when you were talking earlier about them being buddies, you don't like the coziness. And what you're saying is you don't like the fact that Robyn has abandoned her parenting role to be a friend.

AARON: Yeah. When I hear "buddies," I'm just worried about where the parent side of you comes from. That's my concern. I love that you two get along so well, but I just have a hard time with mom and daughter drinking. I really struggled with that.

COUNSELOR: So what's your what's your feeling about that?

ROBYN: Sometimes I do feel like we're at opposite ends of the spectrum. Here's this cold, hard, distant dad. And so my job is to make up for it and give her all the relationship for both of us together.

COUNSELOR: So almost like you have to offset that harshness that dad brings in.

ROBYN: Right. Because if I were more parental-- by his definition-- what would she have? She'd have parents who she felt like didn't care about her as a person.

COUNSELOR: So drinking with Michelle is a way that you show that you love her.

ROBYN: It's not really drinking. We just-- every once in a while we'll make some daiquiris together and we just relax. And I guess this last time, we probably put too much rum in the daiquiris she just got drunk. But it's not like we're going out driving or going to bars. We're just hanging out together. We're just connecting and relaxing before he comes home.

COUNSELOR: Right. And you have this special time together. And it's just you two. And it doesn't involve him. And it doesn't even involve your friends, too.

MICHELLE: I mean, they'll come over. They know she's a cool mom. But not all the time.

COUNSELOR: So do your friends know that you drink with your mom?

MICHELLE: Yeah they know how cool she is. And she understands. And we can talk to her about anything.

COUNSELOR: So being a cool mom is a pretty important thing to you.

ROBYN: Oh, it's great. I can go out around town, see one of them, they call me "mom," and come over and hug me. It's wonderful to have her friends like me. So I get to really stay connected with them and know what's going on.

COUNSELOR: So you're a couple of years away from going to college. And I'm wondering what it's like for you, Robyn, to think about her leaving and--

ROBYN: Oh, I don't think about it.

COUNSELOR: Because she goes off to college and then you're home by yourself with a cold-hearted husband who is home on the weekends.

AARON: Never thought of it that way. It's hard to hear.

COUNSELOR: And that's where I'm curious. It looks like that it's really difficult for you hear yourself being perceived that way, like "is this all I am? Just this cold-hearted--"

AARON: In my own head, I provide for my family. And that's how I show my love. And it's just hard to hear the talk about cold and hard and not there and all that stuff. Just hard to hear.

ROBYN: But you weren't always that way. There was a time, when Michelle was really young, we used to go on picnics together and do stuff together. And as she got older and the years when by, work became more important to him than us.

COUNSELOR: And one of the things that you're saying, Robyn, is that what's happened over the years is that you've grown apart. That you and Aaron have grown apart. Because I hear the family piece. I hear that's not only has he grown apart from both of you. But you have felt some distance in your relationship. So I wonder if in some ways Michelle has replaced that connection that you seek.

Like she's somebody-- I envision when you have these moments together during the week where you're together and-- yeah it may involve alcohol, but you share things with each other about each other's lives. And you feel like you're close friends. And I'm hearing that you don't-- it doesn't seem obvious that you have that with Aaron.

ROBYN: No. I mean, we still had a good relationship, but she was younger. And we couldn't really have conversations. And I did feel really, really lonely. And now I don't feel lonely anymore.

NARRATOR: Shawn and Weston are seeing a counselor as they are dealing with feelings of "growing apart" in their relationship. As you watch this segment, observe the techniques used by the counselor.

COUNSELOR 2: We've got just a few minutes left. And so I think that one of the important things that we do next is to take what we've spoken about today and really translate that into action steps. So what I'd like-- and I'll start with you, Weston. I'd like you to summarize the things that you heard Shawn say to you. And the way that I want you to do that is to say, "What I heard you say was--" and again, provide a summary of that. And then close that with, "And in response to that, I will--" Blank Whatever you're going to do in response to that.

WESTON: OK. What you just said there kind of clicked for me. You're a man of action versus words. And I tend to be of more words than action. And it's like two ships that need a better job talking to each other. Because we're both powerful personalities. I'd like to commit or propose let's come up with a date night. Whether we just go out for a coffee date, dinner date, dancing date, let's pick a night where it's just the two of us. I be home. You be home. We all be home by 4:00 or 5:00. That night's ours. And it's sacred. And my guess is that might be an action step where you know that time is yours so we can have fun together.

I think the other thing I'd offer is I will try to keep my downtime when I get home to 45 minutes. Maybe even set an egg timer-- mm-ding-- and then I check in with you about where I'm at and check in with you about where you're at for the day. And we see where it goes for the evening.

COUNSELOR 2: I know you're probably thinking about your response. And before you do formulate that, I think what I'd like to do, Weston is to challenge you a little bit further. You said, "I will try to set an egg timer for the 45 minutes." I'd really like to hear you commit to that 45-minute downtime period each day.

WESTON: I will commit to the 45-minute period each day.

COUNSELOR 2: OK. And we can certainly test it out for the next week and see what happens. And so there were two things that I heard that you were offering as new possibilities. First of all, there's this very concrete action that's the "I will use an egg timer and I will keep my time to 45 minutes, recognizing that you need time, too." And also, "I want us to have a date night." And so, really responding to, "here's what I want, and this is my yearning. And in order to do that, in order to facilitate that, and move us forward to creating this possibility, here's what I'm willing to do." What's it like to have named those things?

WESTON: I think it's easy to name them. I think where the difficulty will be is the follow-through in the next week or so. I'm excited by them. But I'm also like, now I got to do it. I'm just kind of hesitant, or anxious, or nervous, about making that commitment.

COUNSELOR 2: OK. So feeling some anxiety over making a commitment that's going to really be changing. Does it feel at all vulnerable?

WESTON: Vulnerable as in "scary," no. Vulnerable as in "will it work?" I'm cautious. I want to have hope. But I don't know if it's there completely yet.

COUNSELOR 2: OK. Great. So really wanting to move back into connection, yet also wondering if the possibility really exists, and really knowing that you're sticking your neck in a way by making some changes-- or proposing some changes-- and really making a concerted effort toward doing that. OK. Now let me ask you. Before you respond to that, what was it like to hear that summary and then the proposal for his commitment and then also his hoped-for outcome of that?

SHAWN: Well, it was nice to hear. And yeah, it was nice. It lets me know that he's heard what my concerns are and he's willing to try address them. So that was good. So I'm encouraged. And I agree. I think he's right. It is nervous in terms of whether or not it is actually going to happen. And I think my nervousness centers around, well, if he doesn't do it one day, how I going to respond to that? Am I going to be like, well, he is trying. Is trying enough? And I know that in my mind, trying is enough, but like I said earlier, with the zingers, sometimes they just come out before I think about the fact he is trying. So that's where my nervousness stems from. But I am encouraged, though. Definitely encouraged.

COUNSELOR 2: And the thing I'd like to caution you against is creating a bad scenario before it happens. I think an important thing to do is to give this is an opportunity before saying, but I also know that it may not happen. And here's what I'm thinking and how I'm going to respond to that. And I'd rather you approach this from a different perspective rather than trying to anticipate how you'll respond if things don't happen. I'd like to consider the possibility that these things will happen, and what that might mean for you. And while you're holding that in your mind, I'd like you to also provide that same summary to Weston that you' heard him say, Shawn, which is the, "What I heard you say was--" Provide the summary. And then end that with, "And in response to that, I will--" And you fill in the blank.

SHAWN: OK. OK. Well, what I heard you say was that you would like to have a night that's ours, a date night that we would have between us. We both would get off at around 5:00 and then just make that date our night. And that you'd also be willing to have 45 minutes when you got home for your downtime. And then the other time would be spent processing and talking with me.

And in response to that, I'm willing to allow you to have those 45 minutes by not being in your face as soon as you walk through the door, and allowing you to have that time. And also I'm willing to organize my thoughts, the things that I

want talk about, and just take away the things that maybe aren't that important. Because I do recognize that a lot of stuff that happens at the job you don't want to hear. So I do understand that. And so I will do that so that when we do have that time it'll be more focused. And so I'm willing to do that.

NARRATOR: Billie is coping with the loss of a significant relationship. For six months, she has been working with a counselor, which is now concluding today. As you watch this segment, observe the techniques used by the counselor.

COUNSELOR 3: Do you have words of wisdom? Things that, if this had been different, if this had been even better, what could we have done differently over this course of these counseling sessions?

BILLIE: What could have been done differently? I think that-- I don't know, it's really hard to say. I think because of where I was when I came in-- I was a whirlwind of mess-- and I'm hoping-- really on my end, I guess on what could have been differently, if I could have been a bit more receiving at first. It took me a little while to get to the point with working with you that I can be an independent person. That I can coexist with a person as opposed to existing within a person.

COUNSELOR 3: But how could you have? That first day, you were really hurt.

BILLIE: I was. I was. It was really a lack of words. I keep using stormy-type of words, and "tornado," because I felt totally wiped out. But just being able to do differently for me, I think, is to-- as far as in relationships, is to coexist with the person. And in working with individuals, even if I come to see you again, if something happens and I'm really upset about what's going on, it's that I'll know that I'm going to be OK. And that it's not the end of the world, like I thought it was then. So that's the only thing I can think of for me doing differently.

COUNSELOR 3: Any thoughts about-- if we reestablish therapy, if we start back counseling again, what will you want to acknowledge with me or with whomever you're seeing that this particular relationship, the way that we do it, although what you said that you're going to do differently for yourself, are there ways that you want to interact differently with your counselor?

BILLIE: I think how we interacted was appropriate. Nothing seemed out-of-place. We were laughing and we make hit one another. You might hit me or something like that which is perfectly fine.

COUNSELOR 3: We get into it, sometimes.

BILLIE: Right. You know, no. I can't really think of anything that would need to be different. I think it was fine. It was tumultuous at first, it was kind of stormy. But I think over time it worked its way out. Where do you think, as far as with me

moving on, anything in particular you think I should take-- any bullet points you think I would take away from this experience?

COUNSELOR 3: Well, what I've heard from you is that it takes two people that want to be in relationship to be in one. I've heard you say in the past that, I'm worthy of a relationship, even if someone doesn't believe that that's true. And I want you to stay true to those things you told me. I think if you do that then we've been successful.

BILLIE: You know what's great about that is that you used the words that I used and really facilitating me growing as opposed to just telling me what to do. But facilitate me to grow and to enhance my life and to be centered and authentic with myself. So I appreciate that.

COUNSELOR 3: Well, you are, of course, welcome. But those are all things that you've always known but that you somehow didn't trust because of that break-up, right? I think that all of the things that you've told me have come from within you. I wonder what happened along the way, just as we've always said, how is it that we come to not trust those things? Or how do we get wrapped up in someone and then we lose it because they've left us?

BILLIE: That's a really good point. That those answers are always there. And you kind of help uncover them and bring them out. And that makes a lot of sense. And I can take that away with me, that even if I can't connect with you right away, or whatever the case may be, that I can work through them and find those answers within me, that'll help get me through.

COUNSELOR 3: I appreciate that you're so willing to take that and believe it. Even though, in the beginning I think you said that you didn't have that within you.

BILLIE: No, absolutely not. Not in the beginning. Absolutely not. I was not prepared to-- I almost needed convincing that I can exist outside of that relationship. And it sounds so crazy now to say that. That I needed to be convinced. And I didn't even come naturally, on my own, to counseling. My friends were just like, you can't keep being this way, where you're just locked in the house by yourself. And you're not really doing anything.

And they really prompted me to come here, as you know. And it's just interesting to hear me even say that now, that I needed some level of convincing that I can even exist independent of a person. That I could sit here and actually be sitting up as opposed to all slouched in a chair, my face in my hands, and-- I have some hair left.

COUNSELOR 3: Yeah, you didn't pull it all out.

BILLIE: I didn't pull it all out. But it's amazing to see that kind of growth over time. Even though I'm nervous moving own.

COUNSELOR 3: Well, you did trust your friends enough to come in, right? And you did listen to them when they said, hey something's up. And I think there's some relational confidence in knowing that "I can rely on some people that really know me."

BILLIE: Yeah, that's right.

COUNSELOR 3: I think there's some knowledge to say, these people really have something to offer me. And I owe it to them to listen.

BILLIE: Yeah, that's a good point. You're right.

COUNSELOR 3: So what do you think they think now?

BILLIE: Oh, wow. Now that I've emerged out of my house, I think they think that I've made tremendous strides. I'm taking a lot better care of myself. That I'm enjoying life again. I do feel a lot of anxiety around dating again. We talked about that. And trying to move on there. It's one thing to be able to find strength in self, and be able to find out who you are. But there's some apprehension around meeting someone else in the future. What is that going to look like?

I've heard a couple of them say, that hey, you might want to start dating again, and things of that nature. And that I don't know. That I'm still a little nervous about. This is new for me, this owning myself, emerging as a person and feeling worthwhile. But moving into a new relationship, I'm still kind of working on that a little bit.

COUNSELOR 3: We acknowledged a number of qualities that you're going to be looking for if you choose to move into a new relationship with someone. What were some of those things that you identified?

BILLIE: I'm trying to remember. Someone who would value me as a person. That would be first and foremost.

COUNSELOR 3: That's first.

BILLIE: Right, right. That is respectful of my needs and desires and allows me to be independent of him. And I don't have to fully immerse myself in a person. And of course, all those things that people want in relationships. Someone that's kind and nice, and can communicate with me. But really, valuing me as a person, I think, is the key thing you and I talked about.

COUNSELOR 3: So on a day-to-day basis, what will you be doing differently now?

BILLIE: Differently. OK. I would say that-- and some of the things that I had been doing and of course as we've been talking, over the course of all this time, is of course not spending my entire day wondering about "what is he doing? What is he doing now? Who is he talking to now? Who is he calling now?" And I'm not doing that. And when I have these moments of feeling really bad for myself, if I allow myself to feel that way, to be able to talk to myself, like, no, I don't have to be here. I don't have to be in this place. You know?

That I am worthy and I can move forward. So I think that's one of the biggest things I'll do it differently is really doing a lot of self-talk and engaging in my healthy relationships with my friends and coworkers. So really providing a lot more support around me before I jump in the dating pool again. So I think those are some other things I'll be doing differently this time.

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