



## The First Placement Hour

So the day has arrived that you have been waiting for, possibly for years, your first ever real client in a real setting.

This can be a real mix up of emotions.

By this point your course provider will have agreed that you are fit to begin practice, your placement agency will have inducted you and decided they feel ready to let you take on board a client.

Possibly you have had an initial supervision session, or meeting with another counsellor who would have carried out the client's initial assessment, and decided they are suitable for your level of skill.

This can be when the nerves can kick in –

- Am I actually ready?
- I feel like an imposter – perhaps I've just been presenting well, but really I'm not ready?
- What if my client realises they are my first client?
- What if I do or say something really wrong?
- Will I remember my theory? SHOULD I be remembering my theory or just BE with the client?
- What if it's really different to how it is in class?

All of these nerves are normal and really important, it is rare for any student to feel 100% confident walking into their first client. I always used to say to my students if you wait until you are 100% confident you'll never be ready, because until you've done it you won't know that it's going to be ok.

Being nervous means you want to be a good counsellor for your client – and that is great.

Can you prepare for it?

In some ways yes – you can work to prepare yourself to be ready for the process, but if you try to overprepare and “script” how you will run your first session you risk becoming too rigid and losing focus on the client.

Preparation might include:

- Looking at ways to deal with any anxiety you might feel – breathing techniques, grounding yourself beforehand
- Talking to peers who have been there and finding out how it was for them
- Reading the client notes or assessment paperwork so you are aware of what they might want to talk about
- Recalling skills sessions you have done where it went really well
- Remembering that no matter how nervous you might feel, that client is coming to meet a counsellor (possibly for the first time) and they are likely far more nervous than you. It is about them, and your first task is to put your nerves to the side so you can focus on how they are feeling when they enter the room.

Prepare yourself for what you will do after the session:

- Debrief with a person at your agency
- Reflect on how it went, journal about it
- Celebrate – I suggest preparing a little celebratory treat for yourself! A little bit of self-care never goes amiss.