

Hi, I'm Dr. Scott Branson

Welcome to the Counseling Clients Who Use Substances course. In this video, I will give an overview of the course including learning objectives and course content.

Addiction is a substantial mental health concern that has probably impacted every student taking this course. Even if you don't personally take substances, it is likely that someone you know - perhaps a family member, friend, neighbor, teacher, or romantic partner - struggles with addiction. Thus, it is important that professional counselors be prepared to counsel clients with substance use disorders. Even elementary school counselors require knowledge about substance use counseling, as young children can be profoundly impacted by a parent or caregiver with a substance use disorder.

If you're watching this video, you're probably already in the course's introduction unit. After you watch this video, spend some time familiarizing yourself with the course resources. The language and perception portion of the unit explores how language, like calling someone a "substance abuser" instead of a "client with a substance use disorder" impacts clinicians' perceptions of clients. As you progress through the course, apply your learning about how language impacts perception by avoiding stigmatizing language, like "clean and dirty" and "abuse or abuser". In addition to perpetuating stigma, the term "substance abuse" is not consistent with current diagnostic terminology. Instead of "abusing substances", a person has a "use disorder" or is "dependent" on a substance.

During the second unit, we will review commonly misused substances. Resources such as the National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA) website provide descriptions of drugs and prevalence statistics. It is likely that you will come back to these resources as a professional to research drugs that your clients disclose taking.

After learning about drugs, we will look at how a neuron works, which is important since all drugs work by altering one's neurochemistry.

Integrating research with practice is an integral skill for counselors, and we will briefly review types of research as well as resources for locating evidence based approaches and interventions. During later units, you will apply your learning from the research unit to critique the research base for different conceptual frameworks and treatment approaches.

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Throughout the course, I encourage you to consider whether you think drugs should be illegal. As advocacy is a core part of the professional counselor identity, it is important for counselors to take a stand on legal issues that intersect with mental health care, including the intersection between people with substance use disorders and the law. As you progress through the course, consider the extent to which the information from the physiology and conceptualizing units is congruent with how the law addresses substance use disorders.

While designing this course, I conceptualized the counseling process as consisting of distinct stages. Following informed consent, the first stage of the counseling process involves forming a counseling relationship that is based on empathy. During the second stage, the relationship is used to elicit information from the client via formal and informal assessments. This assessment information feeds the third stage, which is diagnosis. The counselor then combines the client's diagnosis with formal and informal assessment information to generate a conceptualization of the client. The client conceptualization is like a custom road map that the counselor uses to determine what theories and techniques are most likely to promote mental wellness for a particular client. These steps are not necessarily linear, and repeating them can be important, as it allows for ongoing modification and customization of the treatment plan.

The last four units in this course are designed around these stages, and they take an in depth look at assessing, diagnosing, conceptualizing, and treating substance use disorders. These units build on the foundational knowledge developed in the first five units and demonstrate how that knowledge is applied. During these units, I encourage students to apply what they are learning by completing a hypothetical case conceptualization based on a fictional character with a substance use disorder. An example conceptualization is posted in the treating substance use unit. Similarly, approaches such as motivational interviewing can be practiced through role plays.

While you are navigating the course, I encourage you to take the extra time to make sure that you review each resource in the recommended readings and resources list and to read the learning objectives for the unit. Each unit has a lot of different links and citations, and the recommended readings list is designed to help you sort out what is worth reviewing in depth.

After you complete a unit, re read the learning objectives, asking yourself how well you feel you have achieved each objective. Similarly, taking the time to reflect on the exploration questions that are posted throughout the course will help you develop a deeper understanding of your own values, biases, beliefs, and experiences, which can reduce the impact that your personal biases have on your clients.

As you will see in the language section of this unit, drugs and addictions are heavily stigmatized topics, so it is particularly important that you use this course to understand and fact check your biases. I've designed this course to promote independent learning, and you will get much more out of the course if you take the time to reflect on your learning.

I hope that you enjoy the course!

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