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Curriculum for Career Counsellors

Case studies & Interactive Activities



AccessCareer
Enhancing Inclusive Access to Career Counselling

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Case studies & Interactive Activities



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Executive Summary

Access Career is an Erasmus+ project dedicated to improving career counselling for socially disadvantaged individuals, including migrants, long-term unemployed persons, women returning to work, and people with disabilities. The project enhances career counsellors' skills, promotes career self-management, and connects guidance services with labour market needs.

Through tailored training, digital resources, and networking opportunities, Access Career empowers individuals to navigate their careers while fostering inclusivity in employment. The project also develops innovative tools, awareness campaigns, and policy recommendations to ensure long-term impact and accessibility for all.

This curriculum is designed to equip career counsellors with up-to-date knowledge and practical skills to effectively respond to the dynamic demands of the labour market and the unique challenges faced by socially disadvantaged individuals. It includes modules focused on raising awareness and addressing biases including those embedded in AI-driven applicant screening systems and on delivering personalized guidance that takes into account each individual's background, capabilities and aspirations. These elements support the development of a holistic and inclusive approach to career counselling.

The curriculum is structured across nine modules, each addressing a distinct and interconnected dimension of inclusive, ethical, and competence-based career guidance practice. This materials document accompanies the curriculum by bringing each module to life through practical application: for every module, it provides one real-world case study that illustrates key concepts in context, and one interactive activity designed to engage counsellors in hands-on reflection and skill-building.

Module 1. Bias Awareness

Case Study: Supporting an Immigrant Woman Facing Hiring Bias

Background

Amira, 32 years old, originally from Morocco, has been living in Italy for 4 years. She holds a high school diploma and previously worked as an administrative assistant in her home country. Although she speaks Italian at an intermediate level, she struggles to be shortlisted for interviews: her foreign name often leads to cultural bias, and many employers require work experience gained specifically in Italy. Amira belongs to a disadvantaged group due to recent immigration, limited local network, and linguistic/cultural bias

Counseling Process

Initial Assessment

The career counsellor identified the following barriers:

- Prevalence of cultural bias and discrimination in recruitment processes
- Difficulty in self-promotion and insecurity with Italian language
- Lack of formally recognized work experience in Italy
- Lack of confidence and self-esteem

Goal Setting

Agreed goals:

- Short-term: improve professional Italian and update CV and LinkedIn profile
- Long-term: secure an administrative role within a multicultural organisation

The counsellor supported Amira in creating professional profiles on:

- LinkedIn – for networking and job search.
- EURES – to explore European job opportunities and mobility options.

Skills Development

Amira attended upskilling opportunities to reinforce employability:

- National public employment services – job-search support and interview simulations
- Coursera – customer care and professional communication
- Free local language courses – Italian Level B2

She also attended workshops organised by:

- Employment Centre – CV building and mock interviews
- Women’s associations (e.g. Dress for Success) – inclusion and empowerment programs

Empowerment and Motivation

Weekly coaching sessions based on narrative techniques and role-play to:

- Increase self-efficacy
- Reduce language anxiety in interviews

Suggested tools:

- MindTools – resilience and stress-management exercises

Job Placement Support

The counselor helped Amira tailor applications to Italian recruitment standards and identify organizations with cultural inclusion policies. After several interviews, Amira secured a role as a front-office administrative assistant in an international social cooperative.

Outcomes

After 8 months, Amira reported:

- Stronger integration and increased confidence in her skills
- Improved spoken and written Italian
- Financial stability and career growth prospects

Key Lessons for Career Counselors

- Address cultural stereotypes by recognising and validating prior experience
- Use assessment tools to certify foreign-acquired skills
- Foster partnerships with inclusive and multicultural employers

Case Study: Supporting a Job Seeker Over 50 Facing Age Discrimination

Background

Roberto, 56 years old, worked for more than 25 years as a specialized industrial maintenance technician. After a company restructuring, his position was made redundant. Despite his solid technical background, he faces discrimination linked to age: many recruiters assume senior candidates lack flexibility or digital competence. Roberto is disadvantaged due to ageism in the labour market.

Counseling Process

Initial Assessment

Identified challenges:

- Limited experience with the latest technology
- Loss of confidence after redundancy
- Recruiter bias prioritising younger candidates

Goal Setting

Agreed goals:

- Short-term: digital upskilling and results-oriented CV revision
- Long-term: reemployment in a technical role with opportunities for mentoring

Channels activated:

- LinkedIn – professional storytelling and showcasing long-term achievements

- Adult training programmes – continuous professional development

Skills Development

Roberto completed:

- Industry 4.0 training (CNC, digital tools)
- Employment Centre workshops on personal branding
- Mentor/tutor training to support young technicians

Empowerment and Motivation

Career coaching techniques were used to:

- Reinforce the value of experience and leadership
- Transform the “age perception” into professional credibility

Roberto also joined a 50+ peer support group for knowledge-sharing and networking.

Job Placement Support

Recruiters and local employers with Inclusive employment policies were contacted. Roberto was hired as a Senior Technician and Internal Trainer in a mechanical manufacturing company.

Outcomes

After 5 months:

- Roberto feels valued as a mentor and expert
- He refreshed his digital skills
- He regained financial and professional stability

Key Lessons for Career Counselors

- Reframe age as a competitive advantage (experience, reliability, mentoring)
- Provide targeted training to counter stereotypes about senior workers
- Partner with inclusive employers committed to lifelong learning and Inclusive Policies

Interactive Activity: Bias Awareness in Evaluation Processes

Objective

Participants will develop practical skills to recognize, address, and reduce personal and systemic bias in decision-making processes, especially in contexts such as recruitment, guidance, or assessment.

Scenario

Work in pairs. Read the following case:

You are part of a selection committee evaluating candidates for a competitive training program. One of the applicants, Alex, has a strong academic background but comes from a non-traditional path and displays informal language and minor grammar issues in their application.

Your goal: Evaluate Alex fairly, ensuring that **unconscious biases** do not influence the decision.

Instructions (Interactive Steps)

Identify possible Bias triggers (10 mins)

Write down:

- At least 3 types of bias that could occur in this situation
Examples: Confirmation bias, language bias, social class bias
- Which elements of the application might activate these biases
- Possible consequences on fairness and equity

Select Interventions (10 mins)

Discuss and select 3–5 strategies to reduce bias during evaluation.

Examples:

- Blind review
- Normalizing different communication styles
- Shared scoring criteria
- Second evaluator / cross-checking

For each strategy, explain how it promotes fairness

Create a Step-by-Step Plan (15 mins)

Re-evaluate Alex using the structured criteria provided in the rubric (see below).

Explain:

- What changed from your initial judgment?
- How does eliminating bias improve the quality of the decision?

Peer Feedback (10 mins)

Share your evaluation process with another group.

Discuss:

- Did you identify bias clearly?
- Were the selected strategies appropriate and realistic?
- Has the final decision become more evidence-based and equitable?



Optional Challenge

Conduct a 5-minute mini-counseling session in pairs, using the plan you created. One participant will take the role of a career counselor, and the other will take the role of the client.

Focus on motivational interviewing, empathy, and practical guidance.



Module 2. Personalized Guidance

Case Study: Woman Returning to Work After a Caregiving Break

Background

Elena is a 38-year-old marketing professional returning to the workforce after an 8-year childcare career break. She previously held a mid-level marketing role but stepped away from employment to focus on raising her children. Now, as she plans to re-enter the job market, she feels insecure about her outdated skills, struggles with low confidence, and worries about balancing professional and family responsibilities. Elena represents a group often facing re-entry challenges, including self-doubt, technological skill gaps, and limited access to professional networks.

Guidance Process

Initial Assessment

The career counselor conducted a personalized needs assessment to explore Elena's strengths, values, and challenges.

Key barriers identified:

- Feelings of low confidence and self-worth after a long absence from work
- Perceived gap in digital marketing and social media tools
- Uncertainty about how to explain her career break positively
- Need for flexible or hybrid work arrangements

To support reflection and self-awareness, the counselor used:

- SkillsMatch (by CEDEFOP) – to identify transferable competences

- CareerGuide Compass – for values and motivation assessment
- Wheel of Life – to visualize balance across personal and professional priorities

Goal Setting

Together, they developed SMART goals focused on both confidence building and employability:

- Short-term goals: Refresh digital skills, update LinkedIn and CV, and reconnect with former colleagues.
- Long-term goals: Secure part-time or remote employment in digital marketing or communications.

They also created a Personalized Action Plan, prioritizing manageable weekly steps and accountability check-ins.

Skills Development

To bridge her skill gap and enhance employability, Elena participated in:

- LinkedIn Learning: for digital marketing, content strategy, and analytics courses.
- Grow with Google – Digital Garage: for free certifications on digital tools and online visibility.
- Coursera – Career Reboot for Women: for professional confidence and work-life reintegration.

She also joined a local career returners' mentorship group, providing networking opportunities and shared learning experiences.

Empowerment and Motivation

Throughout the process, the counselor used motivational interviewing and solution-focused techniques to help Elena:

- Reframe her career break as a period of skill development (organization, empathy, multitasking).
- Build self-efficacy through small achievements and reflection exercises.
- Set realistic self-care routines to prevent overwhelm.

For ongoing personal development, she used:

- MindTools for confidence-building and stress management resources.
- Resilio Hub for peer support for professional women returning to work.

Outcome

After six months, Elena successfully secured a part-time remote marketing position in an NGO focused on community initiatives.

She reported:

- Renewed confidence and motivation.
- Improved digital and communication skills.
- Better work-life integration through flexible scheduling.

Key Lessons for Career Counselors

- Apply personalized, holistic approaches addressing both skill and emotional readiness.
- Integrate confidence-building and career identity reconstruction early in the process.
- Use accessible e-learning platforms for digital upskilling.



- Encourage participation in peer networks and mentoring programs to sustain motivation and connection.



Interactive Activity: Personalized Guidance

Objective

Participants will understand the concept of personalized guidance and how it differs from other support approaches such as coaching and mentoring. Through reflection and discussion, they will identify how these principles can be applied both to their own professional growth and in guiding their clients toward personal and career development.

Scenario

You are a professional supporting individuals with diverse needs and backgrounds.

- You aim to understand how personalized guidance integrates both personal and professional dimensions.
- This approach helps tailor support to each person's strengths, goals, and circumstances—whether for yourself or for clients.
- You will reflect on your past experiences with guidance and identify how a more personalized, holistic method can enhance development outcomes.

Instructions (Interactive Steps)

Step 1:

- The trainer introduces the concept of personalized guidance using simple, practical language.
- Review a visual comparison table outlining key differences between Coaching, Mentoring, and Personalized Guidance:
 - Focus (skills, growth, or self-direction)
 - Role of the facilitator (directive vs. collaborative)

- Outcome (performance vs. empowerment)
- Emphasize the holistic and adaptable nature of personalized guidance and its importance in early professional roles.

Step 2: Knowledge Mapping Activity (10 min)

In small groups, participants brainstorm:

- Which types of guidance they have experienced (e.g., formal supervision, informal mentoring, peer support).
- What worked well and what didn't.
- What they expect or need from personalized guidance.

Capture key points on a shared flipchart or worksheet.

Step 3: Discussion & Reflection (10 min)

Participants share insights in pairs or small groups.

Trainer facilitates a short discussion on:

- What distinguishes personalized guidance from traditional methods.
- How it can be applied to support clients or enhance their own professional development.
- How personal reflection and adaptability play a role in effective guidance.

Optional Challenge

Conduct a 5-minute micro-demo:



- One participant acts as the guidance facilitator and the other as the client or peer professional.
- The facilitator practices asking reflective questions (e.g., “What support style helps you feel most motivated?”).
- Focus on listening, empathy, and co-creating a next step.



Module 4. Career Self-Management

Case Study: Enhancing career Self-Management through strategic planning

Background

Luca, 30, is a junior graphic designer who has been working in a small marketing agency for six years. He was born with a mild physical disability that limits his mobility and sometimes affects his confidence at work. Although talented and creative, he often feels overlooked for advancement opportunities and uncertain about his career path.

He says, “I’m not sure I can keep up with others,” which reflects both self-doubt and limited access to supportive career development. His situation highlights the importance of self-awareness, realistic goal-setting, and proactive planning for individuals with disabilities to strengthen their career self-management skills.

Counseling Process

Initial Assessment

The career counselor conducted a comprehensive assessment and identified key challenges:

- Limited confidence due to previous experiences of exclusion.
- Lack of clarity about long-term career goals.
- Inconsistent networking and professional visibility.

To support reflection and self-knowledge, the counselor used:

- Strengths & Interests Matrix – to identify Luca’s professional competencies and personal interests.

- Career Vision Worksheet – to design his desired working conditions, taking accessibility into account.

Goal Setting

Together, they defined:

- Short-term goals: Update portfolio, attend one inclusive networking event per month, and identify free or subsidized training on design leadership.
- Long-term goals: Develop a career roadmap leading to a senior designer or creative lead position within 2–3 years.

Skills Development

Luca participated in workshops on career planning and self-management, focusing on:

- Prioritizing skill development and managing time effectively.
- Networking with organizations that promote inclusive employment.
- Reflection journaling to monitor progress and confidence growth.

The counselor introduced him to resources such as Coursera (for design and leadership courses), LinkedIn Learning (for career development skills), and Behance (for portfolio visibility).

Empowerment and Motivation

Through weekly sessions, Luca realized that small, consistent actions—such as posting his work online or joining disability-inclusive design communities—helped him regain confidence. The counselor used motivational interviewing to reinforce self-efficacy and positive reinforcement to sustain momentum.

Career Transition Support

Using his personalized Career Roadmap, Luca updated his CV and portfolio, reached out to inclusive employers, and prepared for interviews. Within four months, he received an offer for a senior position in an agency that values accessibility and diversity..

Outcomes

After six months, Luca reported:

- Increased confidence and self-advocacy skills.
- Greater engagement in learning and networking.
- Stronger belief in his ability to shape his career independently.

Key Lessons for Career Counselors:

- Ensure accessibility and inclusion in all career development tools.
- Encourage clients to recognize and build on their unique strengths.
- Support realistic, step-by-step planning toward independence and empowerment.

Interactive Activity: The Confidence Ladder

Objective

Participants will practice identifying small, achievable actions that help a long-term unemployed person rebuild self-efficacy and personal agency, while reflecting on emotional and behavioral progress during career reintegration.

Scenario

Work in pairs.

Your client is Marco, a 45-year-old man who has been unemployed for over four years. After losing his job during an economic downturn, he struggled to find stable work and gradually lost confidence in his abilities. Marco feels disconnected from the labor market, doubts his skills are still relevant, and often says, “It’s too late to start again.” However, he genuinely wants to re-enter the workforce and regain a sense of purpose.

Your goal: Help Marco rebuild confidence through small, realistic steps and create a short Personal Agency Plan for re-employment.

Instructions (Interactive Steps)

Identify Barriers and strengths (10 mins)

Write down:

- Three barriers Marco faces, such as:
 - Low self-esteem due to long unemployment.
 - Outdated skills or lack of digital knowledge.

- Social isolation and fear of rejection.
- Three strengths or opportunities, such as:
 - Previous work experience and reliability.
 - Motivation to improve his situation.
 - Supportive family or community center.

Build the Confidence Ladder (10 mins)

Draw a simple ladder with five rungs.

Each rung represents a small goal that helps Marco regain confidence and professional readiness.

Example progression:

1. Update his CV with recent informal experiences or volunteer work.
2. Attend one job-search workshop or training session.
3. Contact a local employment counselor or mentor for feedback.
4. Apply for two suitable job positions or internships.
5. Participate in a mock interview or real interview.

Discuss in pairs:

- How does each step build Marco's confidence and sense of control?
- What emotional or behavioral changes occur at each stage?

Create a Personal Agency Plan (15 mins)

Participants design a 3-step plan for Marco (or a similar client), indicating:

- One small, achievable goal.
- Resources or support needed (e.g., career counselor, online training, peer group).
- A realistic timeline and self-reward upon completion.

Peer Feedback (10 mins)

Share your ladder and plan with another pair. Discuss:

- Are the goals achievable and motivating for someone unemployed long-term?
- Does the plan promote gradual confidence-building?
- How can the counselor reinforce hope and self-belief throughout the process?

Optional Challenge

Role-play a 5-minute mini-counseling session.

One participant plays the career counselor, and the other plays Marco.

Focus on:

- Active listening and empathy.
- Positive reinforcement (e.g., “You’ve already taken the first step by updating your CV.”).
- Encouraging small wins and recognizing progress.

Module 5. Digital Tools

Case Study: Digital Skills and Tools for Career Counsellors

Background

John is a 42-year-old career counsellor working in a public employment agency. His clients are mainly young adults from disadvantaged backgrounds, including recent immigrants and long-term unemployed individuals. Despite his strong experience in traditional counselling methods, John struggles with the increasing demand for digital services, online platforms, and data-driven tools used for labour market guidance.

He recognizes that improving his digital competencies is essential to support his clients more effectively, particularly in helping them navigate online job search platforms and remote learning tools.

Counseling Process

Initial Assessment

John completed a self-evaluation of his digital capabilities using:

- Europass Digital Skills Self-Assessment
- DigComp Framework for Guidance Professionals — to understand areas requiring improvement
- NICE Competence Framework — mapping digital competencies to professional standards

Key gaps identified:

- Limited familiarity with AI-based career exploration tools
- Low confidence in online workshop delivery

- Need for data literacy to analyse labour market trends

Goal Setting

Together with his supervisor, John set the following development goals:

- Improve digital confidence and master job-matching platforms
- Deliver hybrid/online guidance sessions
- Master MS Teams, Zoom, Canva for visual materials

Skills Development

John attended several digital training programmes:

- Coursera – Career Guidance in a Digital World
- EURES training – improving support for mobility and cross-border opportunities

In his practice, John adopted new tools including:

- Job Teaser and Indeed — to support job search
- Padlet — collaborative labour market exercises
- AI-powered CV analyzers and ATS-friendly CV templates to support clients' job applications.

Empowerment and Motivation

After implementing digital tools, John noticed:

- ☒ Increased client participation in online sessions
- ☒ Faster job-matching due to structured use of digital labour market analytics
- ☒ Enhanced accessibility of guidance services

One positive example: a client with low confidence secured a remote internship after John helped improve his CV using an AI-based writing tool and practiced a recorded virtual interview through Google Meet.

Outcomes

After four months, John demonstrated:

- Stronger digital fluency and confidence
- Increased capability to support diverse learners online
- More efficient job-placement workflows through different platforms
- Recognition from colleagues as a digital transformation role model

He continues to track his progress through annual digital competency reviews.

Key Lessons for Career Counsellors

- Continuous digital upskilling is essential to meet evolving labour market needs.
- Combining AI tools, virtual guidance, and data literacy improves outcomes for disadvantaged groups.
- Peer collaboration accelerates learning and reduces resistance to new technologies.
- Digital empowerment of counsellors directly enhances the digital empowerment of clients.

Interactive Activity: Using Digital Tools for Effective Career Counseling

Objective

Participants will explore and evaluate a range of digital platforms to design an effective and client-centered career support plan, improving accessibility, guidance quality, and employability outcomes.

Scenario

Your client is Daniel:

- Age: 29
- Background: Undergraduate degree in Economics from Ukraine
- Current situation: Unemployed, wants to find a job the finance sector
- Challenges: Limited professional network in finance, outdated CV, low confidence in job-search strategies
- Strengths: Analytical skills, accounting internship experience, high motivation

Your goal: Help Daniel transition into an entry-level finance role using digital tools effectively.

Instructions (Interactive Steps)

Identify key needs (10 mins)

Write down:

- At least 3 core objectives for Daniel
- Examples: Improve CV, expand professional network, gain relevant finance skills

- Barriers blocking his progress
- Which needs may require the support of digital platforms

Select Interventions (10 mins)

Choose 4–6 digital tools/platforms from the list below:

- LinkedIn
- LinkedIn E-learning
- Indeed
- Coursera
- Glassdoor
- Canva
- Europass CV
- JobScan
- SkillsMatch
- EURES
- Sector-specific finance job boards (e.g. eFinancialCareers)

For each tool, explain:

- Why it is relevant to Daniel
- Which part of the career plan it supports (skills, networking, applications, research)

Create a Step-by-Step Plan (15 mins)

Map a timeline of actions for Daniel including:

- Update CV to finance focus
- LinkedIn+ JobScan

- Job search & placement

Indicate which platform/tool will be used at each step and Include skill development, networking, and application strategy.

Peer Feedback (10 mins)

Share your plan with another group. Discuss:

- Are the selected tools aligned with Daniel's goals?
- Does the plan provide equal focus on skills, network, and job access?
- How could the support be more personalized or inclusive?

Optional Challenge

Conduct a 5-minute digital coaching demo:

- One participant acts as the career counsellor
- The other plays Daniel

Focus on:

- Clear digital instructions
- Encouraging autonomy
- Showing how to use and personalise online tools

Example script prompt: "Let's optimize your LinkedIn profile to highlight your skills and attract finance recruiters."

Module 7. Burnout Prevention

Case Study: Supporting a Career Counselor Experiencing Professional Burnout

Background

Leticia is a 42-year-old career counselor woman working in a community employment center that supports disadvantaged job seekers. She has more than 10 years of experience and manages a demanding caseload of clients daily.

In the recent months, Leticia has begun to experience symptoms of professional burnout:

- Persistent fatigue and emotional exhaustion
- Reduced motivation and feelings of ineffectiveness
- Difficulty concentrating during sessions
- Withdrawal from teamwork and peer collaboration

Her high workload, limited supervision, and constant exposure to clients' challenges have led to stress accumulation. Despite her dedication, she now struggles to maintain her usual empathy and energy.

Assessment Process

Initial Observation

During a supervision meeting, her manager noticed signs of burnout and encouraged Leticia to participate in a self-assessment using:

- Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) - to evaluate emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and sense of accomplishment.

- MindTools Burnout Self-Test - for reflection on energy levels and work-life balance.

Identified Barriers

The assessment highlighted:

- Lack of boundaries between work and personal life
- Overcommitment to clients' problems
- Limited peer support and supervision
- Poor time management due to reactive workload

Recovery and Prevention Planning

Together with a supervisor, Leticia developed a personalized burnout prevention plan that included:

- Short-term goals:
 - Schedule regular breaks and digital downtime.
 - Reorganize daily tasks using the Eisenhower Matrix to prioritize effectively.
- Long-term goals:
 - Participate in professional development on self-care and emotional resilience.
 - Strengthen peer collaboration through supervision groups.

Leticia also began using digital tools such as:

- Notion or Trello: for workload organization and prioritization.
- Insight Timer or Calm: for short mindfulness breaks during work.

- LinkedIn Learning: for courses on emotional intelligence and stress management.

Empowerment and Support

The supervisor applied a personalized guidance approach, combining elements of coaching and mentoring to rebuild Leticia's confidence and sense of control.

- Regular check-ins focused on celebrating small achievements.
- Peer meetings created space for shared reflection and emotional support.
- Leticia was introduced to a peer-support network for career counselors through local professional associations and online forums.

These measures helped her reconnect with her purpose and professional identity.

Outcomes (After 3–6 Months)

Leticia reported:

- Improved emotional balance and job satisfaction.
- Better time management and reduced overwhelm.
- Renewed motivation and empathy towards clients.
- Increased self-awareness and use of reflective practice.

Key Lessons for Trainers and Professionals

- Burnout prevention requires a holistic and proactive approach integrating self-awareness, time management, and peer support.
- Encourage regular self-assessment using structured tools (e.g., MBI, stress mapping, reflection checklists).



- Integrate digital well-being tools and practical scheduling systems.
- Create organizational cultures that normalize supervision, rest, and emotional support.
- Reinforce the idea that supporting others effectively begins with supporting oneself.



Interactive Activity: Burnout Prevention for Professionals Working with Disadvantaged Groups

Objective

Participants will explore and evaluate professional stressors, particularly those affecting professionals working with disadvantaged groups, to raise awareness and prepare for targeted stress management strategies.

Scenario

Your role:

- Professional working with disadvantaged groups.
- You face high emotional demands, complex cases, and tight deadlines.
- Your goal is to identify which stressors most affect your well-being and work performance.

Instructions (Interactive Steps)

Step 1: Identify Key Stressors (5 min)

- In small groups, brainstorm all stressors encountered in your professional role.
- Examples: high caseload, emotional fatigue, administrative burden, lack of resources, challenging client interactions.

Step 2: Prioritize Stressors (5 min)

- Identify the 3–5 stressors that have the biggest impact on your well-being.
- Note which stressors may require organizational support vs. personal coping strategies.

Peer Feedback (5 min)

Share your list with another group. Discuss:

- Are the identified stressors common across roles?
- How could stressors be mitigated?
- Are there strategies to prevent these stressors from leading to burnout?

Optional Challenge

Conduct a 5-minute peer coaching demo:

- One participant acts as coach, the other as professional.
- Focus on: clarifying stressors, suggesting strategies, encouraging reflection.

Module 8. Life & Competence Skills & Agency

Case Study: Strengthening personal agency through resilience

Background

Elena, 42, is a migrant woman and single mother who recently lost her administrative job due to company restructuring. Living alone with her child in a new country, she faces financial pressure, limited childcare options, and language barriers. Despite strong organizational and interpersonal skills, repeated rejections have eroded her confidence. She often says, “No one wants to hire a single mother with an accent.” Her case highlights how migration-related challenges and caregiving responsibilities can undermine self-efficacy and emotional resilience.

Counseling Process

Initial Assessment

The career counselor conducted a holistic needs assessment and identified Elena’s main challenges:

- Low self-confidence and negative self-talk.
- Difficulty managing stress linked to economic and parenting responsibilities.
- Limited professional network and local job-search knowledge.

To support self-reflection, the counselor introduced tools like:

- Emotion Chart Worksheet – to recognize and name emotions associated with her job loss and migration stress.
- Stress-Trigger Mapping Sheet – to identify common stressors and coping responses.

Goal Setting

Together, they defined:

- Short-term goals: Reframe negative thoughts, practice daily self-affirmations, and complete a resilience exercise once a week.
- Long-term goals: Build a personal agency roadmap for re-employment and career growth within six months.

Skills Development

Elena joined group workshops for migrant women focused on emotional resilience and employability. She practiced:

- Mindful breathing and reframing negative thoughts.
- Assertive communication and seeking feedback confidently.
- Writing a weekly reflection journal to record small wins.

The counselor introduced her MindTools (for stress management) and LinkedIn Learning (for emotional intelligence courses).

Empowerment and Motivation

Through bi-weekly counseling, Elena recognized her progress and regained control by connecting with local women's associations and former colleagues. The counselor used motivational interviewing to build her confidence as both a mother and professional, reinforcing the value of small, consistent actions.

Job Placement Support

Using her Personal Agency Roadmap, Elena updated her CV, reached out to community job centers, and applied for roles with flexible schedules. Within four months, she secured a part-time administrative position compatible with childcare responsibilities.

Outcomes

After six months, Elena reported:

- Increased confidence and resilience.
- Reduced stress and improved self-awareness.
- Renewed belief in her capacity to build a stable future for herself and her child.

Key Lessons for Career Counselors:

- Address intersecting barriers (gender, migration, parenting) through tailored support.
- Foster emotional awareness and resilience alongside employability skills.
- Encourage community networking to reduce isolation and build agency.

Interactive Activity: The Confidence Ladder

Objective

Participants will practice identifying small, achievable actions that strengthen self-efficacy and personal agency, while reflecting on emotional and behavioral growth.

Scenario

Work in pairs.

Your client is Ahmed, a 35-year-old newcomer who recently moved to a new country. He struggles to communicate confidently in the local language and often avoids social interactions at work, fearing mistakes. However, he wants to feel more integrated and assertive in his workplace.

Your goal: Help Ahmed build confidence through gradual, realistic steps and develop a short Personal Agency Plan.

Instructions (Interactive Steps)

Identify Barriers and strengths (10 mins)

Write down:

- Three barriers Ahmed faces (e.g., fear of judgment, language insecurity, isolation).
- Three strengths or opportunities (e.g., motivation to learn, supportive colleagues, positive attitude).

Build the Confidence Ladder (10 mins)

Draw a simple ladder with five rungs. Each rung represents a micro-goal leading to greater confidence.

Example progression:

- Greet one colleague daily.
- Participate in a short team discussion.
- Ask a colleague for feedback.
- Volunteer to explain a simple task.
- Lead a brief presentation or meeting.

Discuss in pairs:

- How does each step build self-efficacy?
- What emotional or behavioral change occurs at each stage?

Create a Personal Agency Plan (15 mins)

Participants design a 3-step plan for Ahmed (or a similar client), indicating:

- One small, achievable goal.
- Resources or support needed (e.g., mentor, language app, encouragement).
- A timeline and self-reward for completion.

Peer Feedback (10 mins)

Share your ladder and plan with another group.

Discuss:

- Are the goals realistic and motivating?
- Does the plan promote gradual confidence-building?
- How can the counselor reinforce self-belief and resilience?

Optional Challenge

Role-play a 5-minute mini-counseling session. One participant acts as the counselor and the other as Ahmed.

Focus on:

- Active listening and empathy.
- Using positive reinforcement (“You’ve already made progress by trying”).
- Encouraging ownership of small successes.



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