

Family and Relationship Counsellor interview questions

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What to expect

Family and relationship counsellor interviews in Australia typically assess your clinical judgement, ethical practice and ability to build rapport with clients. You may be asked to respond to scenarios involving family violence or complex family dynamics.

- **Motivation and fit:** Questions about why you want to work as a counsellor and why you are drawn to this organisation.
- **Behavioural:** Questions asking for examples of how you have worked with clients, managed conflict or handled difficult situations.
- **Scenario or case study:** Hypothetical situations that test your clinical reasoning, risk assessment and decision-making.
- **Technical or clinical knowledge:** Questions about counselling approaches, case noting, privacy and professional standards.
- **Safety and risk:** Questions about family violence, mandatory reporting, safety planning and working with children.

The interview is usually a panel with a hiring manager and a senior counsellor. It often starts with an introduction and motivation questions, then moves to behavioural and scenario-based questions. You may be asked to complete a short case study or written exercise. The panel will usually leave time for your questions at the end.

1. Tell me about a time you worked with a couple or family in high conflict. How did you help them move forward?

Why they ask

This behavioural question assesses your ability to manage intense emotions, facilitate communication and maintain neutrality.

How to structure your answer

Use the STAR method: describe the situation, the task, the actions you took and the result. Highlight your specific interventions and the outcome for the family.

Example answer

"In my previous role at a community health centre, I worked with a couple who were separating and constantly arguing about their children. They were referred by a family support service after several failed mediation attempts. My task was to help them reduce conflict and agree on a parenting plan. I met with each parent individually first to understand their concerns and goals, then facilitated joint sessions where I taught them a structured way to communicate without blame. I also used a co-parenting app to help them track schedules and messages. After eight sessions, they reached a written parenting agreement and reported fewer arguments during handovers. They both said the sessions helped them focus on their children's needs rather than their own grievances."

2. A client discloses that they are experiencing family violence. What steps do you take?

Why they ask

This scenario question tests your knowledge of safety planning, mandatory reporting and referral pathways.

How to structure your answer

Outline your immediate actions, risk assessment, safety planning, reporting obligations and follow-up. Show that you prioritise the client's safety and follow legal and ethical requirements.

Example answer

"First, I would ensure the client is safe in the moment and ask whether they need immediate help, such as contacting police or a family violence service. I would listen without judgement and validate their experience. Then I would conduct a risk assessment using a tool like the Common Risk Assessment Framework, if appropriate to my role. I would discuss safety planning, including safe places to go and emergency contacts. If there are children involved, I would follow mandatory reporting requirements for my state or territory. I would also refer the client to a specialist family violence service and document everything in my case notes. I would schedule a follow-up session to check on their safety and adjust the plan as needed."

3. How do you approach building rapport with a client who is reluctant to engage in counselling?

Why they ask

This technical question explores your engagement skills and ability to work with resistance.

How to structure your answer

Explain your approach step by step, focusing on empathy, pacing, and collaboration. Give examples of techniques you use.

Example answer

"I start by acknowledging that it takes courage to come to counselling and that it is okay to feel unsure. I ask open-ended questions about what brought them here and what they hope to get out of it, without pushing. I use active listening and reflective statements to show I am trying to understand their perspective. I might say, 'It sounds like you have had some difficult experiences with counselling before.' I also work at their pace, and if they prefer, we can start with practical goals rather than deep emotional work. I check in regularly about how they are finding the sessions and adjust my approach. In my experience, when clients feel heard and not judged, they become more willing to engage over time."

4. Describe your experience with case notes and client records. How do you ensure confidentiality and accuracy?

Why they ask

This technical question assesses your administrative skills, attention to detail and understanding of privacy laws.

How to structure your answer

Talk about the systems you have used, your process for writing notes, and how you handle confidentiality. Mention relevant legislation like the Privacy Act and professional codes.

Example answer

"I have used Halaxy, Penelope and Cliniko for client records. I write case notes within 24 hours of each session, focusing on key themes, interventions and any risk issues. I record only what is necessary for continuity of care and avoid unnecessary personal details. I store notes securely, either in the practice management system or in a locked cabinet for paper files. I am familiar with the Privacy Act and the confidentiality requirements of my professional body, such as PACFA. I always obtain written consent before sharing information with other services, unless there is a risk of harm that requires disclosure. I also regularly review my notes to ensure they are accurate and up to date."

5. Why do you want to work as a Family and Relationship Counsellor, and why here?

Why they ask

This motivation question helps the panel understand your commitment to the field and your fit with the organisation.

How to structure your answer

Connect your personal values and career goals to the role and the organisation. Show that you have researched the employer and can articulate why you want to work there specifically.

Example answer

"I want to work as a family and relationship counsellor because I have seen how much difference it makes when people feel heard and supported to make changes in their relationships. I enjoy helping couples and families find new ways to communicate and solve problems. I am particularly interested in working at [Company Name] because of your focus on supporting families through separation and your commitment to early intervention. I share the value of accessible, client-centred care, and I would like to contribute to a team that makes a real difference in the community."

6. Can you give an example of how you have worked with a client from a different cultural background?

Why they ask

This behavioural question assesses cultural competence and your ability to adapt your practice.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR. Describe the client's background, the challenges, your culturally responsive actions and the outcome.

Example answer

"I worked with a refugee family from Afghanistan where the parents were struggling with their teenage daughter's desire for more independence. The family was referred by a school counsellor. I recognised that my own cultural lens might differ from theirs, so I spent time learning about their cultural values and the challenges they faced settling in Australia. I asked questions about their expectations and used an interpreter for sessions with the parents. I also connected them with a community leader from their cultural background who could support the family. Over several sessions, we worked on balancing respect for their culture with the developmental needs of their daughter. The parents agreed to allow their daughter to attend after-school activities, and the family reported improved communication. I documented the sessions carefully and sought cultural consultation from a colleague with relevant experience."