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## Constructing stories about clients' needs: developing skills in formulation

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### Introduction

It is one thing to be able to gather information during an initial assessment with a client, but it is quite another to know what to do with this information once you have it. How do you make sense of it all? How do you combine what the client has told you with the theory you are learning about in the taught components of your training? And how do you use this information to identify a suitable intervention plan?

During your training, considerable time and effort will be devoted to learning how to make sense of the psychological 'puzzles' which your clients present. The ability to arrive at coherent and useful explanations of clients' issues is an essential part of effective practice and the art of formulation is central to this process. It is, therefore, a skill on which you can expect to be assessed, both in supervision and in your written work.

Formulation is a complex skill and, arguably, relatively poorly understood. Indeed, compared with other aspects of therapeutic work it has, until recently, received surprisingly little attention in the literature on professional practice. Moreover, formulation can mean different things in different situations, depending on the therapeutic approach you are using and the context in which the therapy takes place. It is not surprising then, that the concept of formulation can feel somewhat mysterious and daunting in the early stages of your career.

The aim of this chapter is to introduce you to the role of formulation in counselling psychology and psychotherapy practice. We will explore how constructing formulations can enhance your clinical decision making and interventions with clients, and then present some general principles on how to develop formulations in your own work. We also give a case example of what developing a formulation can look like when working with multiple clients and multiple models. Specifically, we will consider the following areas: