

Counselling and Psychotherapy

Both '*psychotherapy*' and '*counselling*' are terms that are used to describe the same process. Both terms relate to overcoming personal difficulties and working towards positive changes. Counselling is a **helping approach** that highlights the emotional and intellectual experience of a client, how a client is feeling and what they think about the problem they have sought help for. Psychotherapy, however, is based in the **psychodynamic approach** to counselling - it encourages the client to go back to their earlier experiences and explore how these experiences effect their current 'problem'.

A psychotherapist, therefore, helps the client to become conscious of experiences which they were previously unaware of. Counsellors, however, are less likely to be concerned with the past experiences of the client and are generally trained in a **humanistic approach**, using techniques from client-centred therapy.

The Role of the Counsellor

First and foremost the counsellor is aware that no two people are alike. No two people understand the same language in the same way; their understanding will always be linked to their personal experience of the world. Therefore, during the counselling process, it is important that the counsellor does not try to fit clients into his/her idea of what they should be and how they should act.

The role of the counsellor is to enable the client to explore many aspects of their life and feelings, by talking openly and freely. Talking in such a way it is rarely possible with family or friends, who are likely to be emotionally involved and have opinions and biases that may be detrimental to the success of the counselling. It is important that the counsellor is **not** emotionally involved with the client and does not become so during counselling sessions. The counsellor neither judges, nor offers advice. The counsellor gives the client an opportunity to express difficult feelings such as anger, resentment, guilt and fear in a confidential environment.

The counsellor may encourage the client to examine parts of their lives that they may have found difficult or impossible to face before. There may be some exploration of early childhood experiences in order to throw some light on why an individual reacts or responds in certain ways in given situations. This is often followed by considering ways in which the client may change such behaviours.

Effective counselling reduces confusion, allowing the client to make effective decisions leading to positive changes in their attitude and/or behaviour. Effective counselling is not advice-giving and is not acting on someone else's behalf (these are more the roles of a life coach). The ultimate aim of counselling is to enable the client to make their own choices, reach their own decisions and to act upon them accordingly.

Counselling Skills

Communication skills are obviously of utmost importance to counsellors, these skills including: active listening, clarification, reflection and effective questioning skills.

The counsellor will attempt to build a certain amount of rapport with their client, but not to an extent that would allow them to become emotionally involved.

Counsellors need to be empathetic, seeing things from the client's point of view, rather than sympathetic (feeling sorry for their clients). Empathy can help the counsellor to ask appropriate questions and lead the client to positive conclusions.

SOME MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT COUNSELLING

For some people, seeking professional help is out of the question. Counselling is thought to be for losers, not people who are strong and capable. However, the vast majority of people who seek counselling do so because it takes great courage and strength to work on their own issues and become proactive in improving their life. How do you view counselling? The following are some misconceptions about what counselling is and how it works:

- **Counselling is only for people who have serious emotional or mental problems.**
You don't have to be in a crisis to go for counselling. When your vehicle isn't running properly or as well as it should, it doesn't necessarily mean it needs a major overall but rather a tune-up. The same could apply to you; counselling could be used only as a tune-up for problems you may be facing. Why wait until you can no longer function at home, school, work before seeking help. When you are not feeling well physically, you seek the help of a physician. The same principle applies to if you are not feeling good about your life or some aspect of it.
- **Counselling is for people who are too weak to overcome an addiction or has some other type of inadequacy in dealing with problems on their own.**
An individual is not psychologically impaired or weak if they are going for counselling. Confronting and addressing your problems through counselling takes courage, self-discipline and motivation. It is a proactive, smart decision to address issues before they start affecting you negatively. The main purpose of going for counselling is to get good advice.
- **The counsellor will teach you how to cope with your problem.**
Counselling helps to draw out answers within yourself and identifies your beliefs, values, and thoughts which affect how you act and feel. Counselling can teach you how to express repressed feelings of anger, joy, guilt, etc. Counselling is essentially a safe place for an individual to explore their lives and help to process their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, etc. This is not to say that counselling is not a place to find solutions. Yes, finding solutions that make sense to the client is critically important! But it can be much more.
- **A good counsellor will provide you with a quick solution to your problems with little to no effort on your part if you ask them.**
The counselling process requires some patience. Although the process may seem slow and drawn out at times. Counselling is not an instantaneous answer to all problems. It can take a lot of self exploration. Before things can get better, they often get worse



because old wounds are being opened up and looked at in order to deal with them in an effective manner.

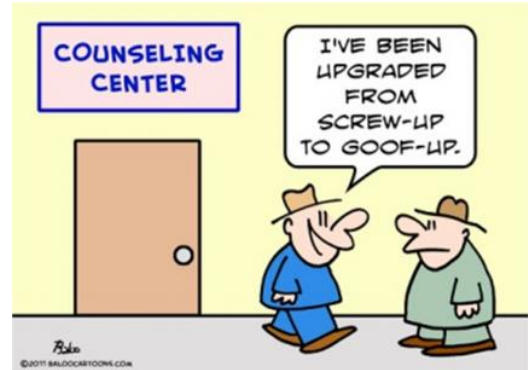
- **When in counselling, the counsellor does most of the talking and you listen.**
People tend to have two different views about this. Some people seem to think that all counsellors do is sit and listen to clients with no input at all. Other people think that counsellors do all the talking and that clients are going to get lectured to. Counsellors are listeners, but the process of working through a person's problem is a collaborative one. Counsellors need to go at the "speed" of the client and need to custom fit their way of working to suite the needs and desires of the client. This means that there will be an interaction that involves participation of both the client and the counsellor.
- **Counsellors will work towards changing your beliefs and values to conform to the right way to feel and act.**
Counsellors help you draw out answers from within yourself. Each person is different and dealing with problems takes personal evaluations and self-discovery in order to deal with the problem effectively.
- **If you choose to seek profession help, you are considered mentally unhealthy.**
Quite the contrary, confronting and addressing your problems through counselling takes courage, self-discipline and motivation. There are many reasons for seeking professional help; the following are some of them:
 - Feel depressed, sad, downhearted, hopeless and don't understand why or what to do to change the way you feel.
 - Have no purpose or direction in your life.
 - Going through a personal or professional transition.
 - Feeling stressed due to work, school, family or financial problems.
 - Is or has been a victim of abuse, whether physical or mental.
 - Cannot control your anger, becomes resentful and says/does things you regret later.
 - Have lost someone close to you and feel you cannot go on with your life.
 - Feel alienated from yourself from others.
 - Not able to make friends.
 - Arguments with spouse almost never result in an efficient compromise.
 - Time spent gambling is taking away from my family life.
 - In the process of ending a relationship.
 - Have problems communicating with your parents.



Counselling doesn't stay and end in the counselling room. The skills you learn can be applied to many aspect of your life, to empower and enrich your relationships at home, at work and in your community, as well as provide you with increased well being to becoming the person you were meant to be and always wanted to become. The skills and growth you experience will be carried with you in your everyday life.

- **Counselling is painful, unpleasant and serious!**

As much as issues can be painful and hard to face, the counselling relationship can be very pleasant. There can be times when there is a lot of humour within the counselling room. Some people become relieved that they can simply be themselves within the counselling room and once they experience that it is a safe place for them, they relax and enjoy working on improving their life. They learn that the counsellor is not there to judge them or make them feel bad. Once safety and trust has been established, counselling can be the best investment you ever make in yourself!



- **Can it really be confidential?**

No information disclosed (even the fact that you walked in the door) by you can be divulged to any third party without your written permission to do so. As a matter of fact, even if you gave your written consent, you have the power at any point in time of revoking your consent. In other words, you are the one in the "driver's seat" with regards to who you wish to have and not have your personal information. If you have any questions regarding confidentiality, can ask your counsellor regarding it.

“An unresolved issue will be like a cancer with the potential to spread into other areas of your relationship, eroding the joy, lightness, love and beauty.”