

2010

Things you should know when seeing a Counsellor

What is Counselling and questions to ask a counsellor

Whether you are thinking about seeing a counsellor for the first time or thinking about seeing a counsellor again, this is a must read. In simple terms, this booklet discusses what counseling is about and what questions you need to ask before seeing a counselor.



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The information presented in this document is for information purposes only and not intended to provide psychiatric, psychological or medical advice.

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What is Counselling

Counselling is a process that focuses on enhancing the psychological well-being of the client, such that the client is then able to reach their full potential.

Psychological well-being

This is achieved by the counsellor facilitating personal growth, development, and self-understanding in the client, which in turn will empower the client to adapt more constructive life practices. Counsellors work in a problem-solving manner with the particular issue.

Confidentiality

Counsellors treat all the information you share as confidential material. Counsellors are involved in case consultations and supervision for the purposes of delivering best practice to the client. Any personal information that may identify a client is removed from the discussion.

Restrictions on of the release of information

Information that may identify you and the issues and concerns you share with your Counsellor will not be released to anyone without your prior written permission, except under certain circumstances as indicated by relevant State and Commonwealth legislation.

The counselling process

The counselling process will depend on the individual counsellor, the individual client and the specific issue. However, there is a general counselling process that the counsellors will follow:

1. Background information collection
2. Identification of core issues
3. Case formulation
4. Goal setting for the therapeutic process
5. Implementation of intervention
6. Evaluation of intervention
7. Closure

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Initial interview

During the initial interview, the Counsellor will discuss your concerns and explore alternative services that may be available to you. By the end of the initial interview you and your Counsellor may decide on one of the following options:

- That **no further counselling** is required at this time, if during the initial interview you have been able to clarify your concerns, and plan an appropriate course of action;
- That **further appointments** are needed to further explore the issues. This may include some form of assessment;
- That **short-term counselling** to address a concern or concerns is all that is required at the moment as opposed to long term counselling or therapy;
- That **alternative services** may benefit you either in place of counselling or as an addition to counselling. The Counsellor may have identified specific resources for you to consider and pursue.

Further appointments

Following your initial consultation, you and the Counsellor will decide on one of several directions that may be taken by you. If the direction chosen is ongoing counselling then a second appointment will be made.

Differing counselling approaches

Counsellors work from differing theoretical approaches. For some Counsellors, the focus is on solving problems here and now, dealing with more immediate, issues. Different Counsellors will place varying levels of emphasis on behaviour, on thinking and/or on emotional aspects. All Counsellors have a main goal to assist you in increasing your sense of well-being.

Length of counselling

Change doesn't happen quickly for most of us. The period of counselling depends on a number of variables. Variables include and are not limited to: the severity of the problem, the motivation of the client, the type of problem, age, sex, gender, mental illness, and physical disabilities to name a few. The more focused and

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limited the problem is, the shorter the counselling process will be. If counselling addresses emotional issues or injuries, it is likely the counselling process will take longer.

More information about counselling

Counselling is a talking therapy. The Counsellor will listen, challenge and help the client to work through issues to improve the clients' quality of life.

Counselling is not about simply listening to clients' issues, nor is counselling about giving advice. Counselling involves the client being pro active and moving toward positive change. The counsellor helps the client to move toward positive change through the use of proven strategies and self-empowerment.

Counselling is holistic in nature in as much as it takes into account the whole person including their emotional, spiritual and physical environments.

Counsellors are not psychologists unless they are registered with the appropriate State psychological board. Counsellors do not prescribe medication, only a registered medical doctor or a psychiatrist can do this.

There are many types of Counsellors e.g. sex and gender Counsellors, grief and loss Counsellors, relationships Counsellors and so on. Each one will use a different modality and style to suit your concerns. For example, a relationships Counsellor will work with couples and investigate communication issues, attitudes, responses, behaviours etc using modalities that include NLP (Neurolinguistic Programming), Gestalt, Existentialism, Phenomenology, Transactional Analysis, Social Constructivism, Solution Focused Therapy, CBT (Cognitive Behaviour Therapy), Behaviour Therapy or Person Centred approaches. Other approaches or a combination of approaches may be used.

The types of issues Counsellors can help you with are: grief and loss, trauma, anger, mild depression, sexual issues, gender issues, work issues such as bullying, personal problems, parenting issues, stress, life skills, conflict resolution, career guidance and rehabilitation to name a few.

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Counsellors in general, unless they are psychologists, are not qualified to diagnose mental illness such as schizophrenia, paranoia, bi polar disorder or any other disorder found in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual IV TR. Qualified counsellors are aware of mental health symptoms and many undergo training in mental health issues. Counsellors may refer to and work closely with GPs, psychologists and psychiatrists giving the client the benefit of a full treatment plan.

Summary

Counselling is a collaborative process whereby the counsellor and client work together to try to identify, understand and resolve the issue or issues causing concern so that you, the client, can enjoy a better overall quality of life.

Questions to ask your Counsellor

The following questions are in your best interest. You, as a consumer, have rights. These rights cannot be enforced if you use the services of a Counsellor who is not a member of a professional counselling and/or psychotherapy body.

A Counsellor who is a member of a professional body has committed to abide by an agreed code of conduct and meet training and education standards.

Counsellors who are not members of a professional body may not have any industry recognised training. They may have inadequate training that was taken for personal development rather than for formal vocational training. They may be individuals who have experienced a trauma and use this as their qualification. This is simply is not good enough. Counsellors are expected to have formal industry recognised qualifications like any other professional.

Questions and Answers

1. Do you abide by a Code of Conduct that outlines my rights? Can I have a copy?
2. Do you have professional indemnity and public liability insurance?
3. Are you a financial registered member of a professional body?
4. Do you receive regular professional supervision?
5. Are your counselling qualifications recognised by a professional body?
6. Have you completed your training as a Counsellor?
7. What are your hours of business and do I need an appointment?
8. What are your hourly rates and are there any other costs involved?
9. How long is a normal counselling session?
10. What happens if the session goes over time?
11. What are my rights of recourse?
12. Do you take notes? If so, what happens to them? Can I read them and if not, why not?
13. Do you use client/counsellor contracts that outline my rights and responsibilities?
14. Do you have clear and concise privacy and confidentiality policies and statements?

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A Counsellor who answers **yes** to questions 1-6 and has the relevant documentation probably meets the minimum industry training standards.

RelationshipsMen answers to questions 1-6:

1. Do you abide by a Code of Conduct that outlines my rights? Can I have a copy?
YES. The code of conduct is available for you to read.
2. Do you have professional indemnity and public liability insurance?
YES. Professional indemnity insurance as required by membership to the Australian Counselling Association (ACA) and the Australian Society of Sex Education and Research Therapists (ASSERT) is current.
3. Are you a financial registered member of a professional body?
YES. I am a financial registered member of the Australian Counselling Association (ACA) and hold clinical status; and the Australian Society of Sex Education and Research Therapists (ASSERT) and hold professional status.
4. Do you receive regular professional supervision?
YES. Regular supervision is received in compliance with both the Australian Counselling Association (ACA) and the Australian Society of Sex Education and Research Therapists (ASSERT).
5. Are your counselling qualifications recognised by a professional body?
YES. My counselling qualifications are recognised by Australian Counselling Association (ACA) and the Australian Society of Sex Education and Research Therapists (ASSERT).
6. Have you completed your training as a Counsellor?
YES. I completed studies at the Australian College of Applied Psychology and Edith Cowen University majoring in counselling. I hold a Bachelor degree in Social Sciences, an Advanced Diploma of Applied Social Science and have a Certificate in Training and Assessment. My internship was completed at Impotence Australia.

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If a Counsellor answers **no** to any of the questions from 1-6 or is hesitant in answering them regardless of their reasoning may not meet all the appropriate professional standards.

People claiming to be Counsellors and who do not meet professional standards may try to convince you that there are no standards. Would you accept this argument from an accountant who was not registered or certified? Would you accept this argument from a builder who is building you home? Of course not!

RelationshipsMen answer to questions 7-14:

7. What are your hours of business and do I need an appointment?

Answer: Appointments are essential.

General hours of business are 9:00am – 5:00pm Monday to Friday.

Outside working hour appointments are available, including some weekends.

Telephone and On-Line counselling are available.

Please check when making an appointment.

8. What are your hourly rates and are there any other costs involved?

Answer: Hourly rates are dependent upon type of service delivered i.e. counselling, life coaching, telephone, on-line, email or follow up. Please confirm the type of service you have need of before arranging a consultation.

9. How long is a normal counselling session?

Answer: A normal counselling session will last typically one (1) hour.

10. What happens if the session goes over time?

Answer: Unless agreed beforehand, no extra fee is payable if a session goes beyond one (1) hour.

11. What are my rights of recourse?

Answer: You have the right to bring a matter before the Australian Counselling Association (ACA) or the Australian Society of Sex Education and Research Therapists (ASSERT) in the event of any dispute that cannot be resolved between us in the first instance.

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12. Do you take notes? If so, what happens to them? Can I read them and if not, why not?

Answer: Yes, notes are taken during a session for purposes of further counselling considerations and devising strategies to meet your counselling, coaching or professional goals. You have the right to read any notes taken in a counselling session unless prevented in doing so for legal reasons and if that were to occur you would be advised you that.

13. Do you use client/counsellor contracts that outline my rights and responsibilities?

YES. There is an implied contract with every counselling session that is bound by a code of conduct. At the first session you complete a Client Confidentiality Form that asks for name and contact details and general medical and psychological health information. This information is kept very confidential. A plain English Client Consent and Agreement Form (this is not a complex document) is also presented for your acknowledgement that outlines the provision of counselling services, access, confidentiality, fees, cancellation policy and acceptance.

14. Do you have clear and concise privacy and confidentiality policies and statements?

YES. Any notes taken are kept confidential. Confidentiality is taken seriously and, in-line with delivering a professional service a privacy statement is available on-line. Visit http://www.relationshipsmen.com/newsite/Privacy_Statement.htm for more information.

In closing

Before entrusting your emotional well being to a Counsellor, please take the time to make sure the Counsellor you are intending to see is a qualified Counsellor who meets professional standards.

If a Counsellor is not a member of a professional body it is important to note that they may have either failed to meet professional membership standards or may have been deregistered for disciplinary reasons.

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Non registered Counsellors may also be professionals who have been deregistered from other disciplines such as medicine, psychiatry or psychology.

You can depend on RelationshipsMen to help you untie the knots that bind you.

For more information, visit www.relationshipsmen.com or call 02 4567 7719 (within Australia) or +61 2 4567 7719 (International).

Yours sincerely,

Morgan Hayward