

# Information about Counselling

We hear about counselling all the time in the media but what actually happens in a counselling session? To some people the word 'counselling' suggests that this is a process in which you are given advice that helps you to resolve your problems. In reality, advice giving is only rarely a part of counselling. Counselling is about encouraging the client to feel that they will be able to tackle current and future difficulties. This article is designed to give someone considering counselling an idea of what to expect.

## What is counselling?

Any issues that are causing a person emotional distress can usually be helped with counselling. Typical problems that people bring to counselling are depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, stress and relationship difficulties. Generally the starting point of a piece of counselling work will involve the client describing what is causing them distress. People who seek counselling often have issues which make them feel embarrassed or guilty. It can be very tough to talk about these difficulties if you feel you are being judged. Counsellors are non-judgmental and accepting with all clients. It is not their counsellor's role to pass moral judgments. The counsellor's job is to help the client explore their difficulties.

Counselling is focused entirely on the difficulties that the client brings which the counsellor then responds to, it is not a process where the counsellor works systematically through a set plan decided in advance.

Above all else counsellors are skilled at listening - whereas a friend might try to talk a client out of, say depression, by reminding them of all the good things in their life, a counsellor will focus on what the client is actually feeling. Many people have never had the experience of being properly listened to and this aspect of counselling can be powerfully supportive.



## Confidentiality

Another important aspect of counselling is that it is confidential. The client is unlikely to feel that it is safe to talk openly about their problems unless they are confident that the counsellor will not discuss them with other people. In counselling, where the employer is funding the counselling, the confidentiality rule is also strictly followed except in the extremely unlikely event of a client describing doing things that will damage the company.

Counsellors abide by a strict code of ethics, this means that if you tell us you are likely to be of harm to yourself or others we may contact your GP, or another relevant support person, in order to ensure your safety. In this instance we would discuss our concerns with you before contacting anyone and you will be made aware of any information we are going to pass on. In situations where a client describes committing terrorist acts, drug trafficking, abuse of a child/vulnerable adult or hit and run motoring offences, counsellors are required to disclose information to a third party. However you may not be informed of this in order to protect public safety.

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## Ethical rules

Counsellors have to follow strict ethical rules which forbid taking advantage of the client in any way. This includes a strict prohibition of a counsellor having a personal relationship with a client. Counsellors who breach these ethical rules will be subject to investigation by their professional bodies.

## Counselling at Validium

Now that you know a little about counselling, it is important to understand what counselling involves. Here at Validium we use a **'Brief Therapy'** model and this means that there are a maximum number of sessions available when you engage in counselling. Our vast experience in working this way has taught us that this is a powerful way of engaging in counselling. It often involves focusing on the present and, perhaps even more, looking to the future. You might hear your counsellor asking you questions like;

*'what troubles you at the moment...and how do you want this to be in the future?'*  
Or *'...how will you know that this problem is fixed?'*

These exploratory questions enable people to begin to look to the future and see beyond their present worries. Your counsellor will help you to do this in a supportive and empathic way. It's not necessarily about knowing the answers to these questions but about beginning to take that journey together so that you may make changes in your life. As each person is unique so each session and each situation will also be unique. There may be times when difficult memories or experiences from the past are discussed during the session. This is perfectly natural and your counsellor will help you begin to explore the role that these memories and experiences currently play in your life.



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## Assessment

The assessment is an extremely important step in the counselling process and is conducted with each person that wishes to be referred. The purpose of the assessment is to firstly establish if Brief Therapy is the most appropriate intervention, and subsequently to work out with the caller what the aim of the counselling will be. For example, a person with problems in a relationship as well as struggling with a difficult manager at work and an elderly mother who requires a lot of care may call in to our counselling line. As the assessment unfolds this person is soon able to see that, if they could better manage one part of their situation, then the other stressors would actually feel more manageable in themselves.

So, during the assessment, you may hear your counsellor say,

*'I can hear how much you have going on for you just now,  
do you have a sense of what is causing the most difficulty?'*

If you don't know the answer to this, and many people don't at first, then you would simply take a couple of days to reflect on that. Many people find these periods of reflection very helpful in making sense of their thoughts. After all, throughout the counselling process the most important time is the reflection between the sessions.

## Next Steps

Assessment calls generally take between 30 and 45 minutes. On completion of the assessment the counsellor might refer you for sessions. Sessions usually take place on a weekly basis and it can be helpful to have an idea of your availability prior to making the call to us. In counselling the relationship between client and counsellor is of paramount importance. For this reason sessions will take place at the same time each week to allow continuity of the same counsellor throughout your sessions. Counselling sessions usually last approximately 50 minutes in total.