



The University of Sheffield Counselling Service

How can counselling help?

Most of us find it helpful to talk to somebody who listens and accepts us, especially when we are going through a bad time. Sometimes it is easier to talk to a stranger than to relatives or friends. Through the particular kind of conversation that takes place between the client and the counsellor it becomes possible to put into words thoughts and feelings that may previously have been confusing, difficult or frightening. This may be helpful for a number of reasons:

- Through helping to clarify problems or difficulties.
- As a way of externalising experience so that it becomes possible to stand apart from and reflect upon it.
- Talking about how we feel, rather than simply feeling it, may enable a person to regain control of their life.

Because counsellors have different types of training, their approach and way of working will vary. Research has shown that how you get on with your counsellor is the most important factor influencing the effectiveness of counselling. If you and the counsellor can work well together, trust and respect each other, it is more likely to work for you.

Counsellors will:

- Listen attentively without judging you.
- Accept who you are.
- Help you find your own answers.
- Maintain confidentiality.

Counsellors won't:

- Give advice

- Make decisions for you.
- Tell you what do.
- Meet with you socially.
- Refer to the counselling undertaken in other contexts e.g. if you and the counsellor happen to be in the same meeting or coincide socially or professionally

Some basic 'ground rules' for counselling

For counselling to be helpful it is necessary for clients to attend all scheduled appointments and respect the following 'ground rules'. These include:

- Start and finishing appointments on time.
- Respecting all persons and property.
- Respecting the privacy of others.
- Notifying the Service as soon as possible if, for any reason, you are unable to attend an appointment.

Myths about Counselling

There is a myth that seeing a counsellor is a sign of weakness, that strong people maintain a "stiff upper lip" and have no need for counselling. Exploring one's feelings and emotions with a view to leading a more positive way of life is a sign of courage rather than of weakness. Problems and difficulties that are not dealt with do not simply go away, they can mount up and in time cause a major crisis.

Another myth is that counselling is only for people who are in a crisis or have serious mental health problems; that you have to be completely unable to cope to consider counselling. This is untrue. Many people find counselling enables them to deal with specific problems such as relationship breakdown or bereavement. Those who attend counselling are ordinary people who wish to find ways of resolving their difficulties and working towards living a more healthy and positive lifestyle.

Counselling is:

- Confidential. What you discuss with the counsellor will be kept private
- About exploring any anxiety, dilemmas, problem, feelings concerning you now or in the past

- Purposeful
- A voluntary activity. No-one can be 'forced' to undertake counselling

Counselling isn't:

- Compulsory
- A social chat
- An emergency service

Who is counselling for?

Counselling can be helpful for all sorts of difficulty and for all sorts of people. It can help if you are working class or middle class, old or young, heterosexual, gay or lesbian, black or white or from an ethnic minority community. However, counselling seems to be most helpful for individuals who:

- Wish to make changes in their lives.
- Are prepared to talk about their problems, even though doing so may sometimes be upsetting.
- Are open to thinking about their problems and difficulties differently.
- Are willing to participate actively in the resolution of their problems.

Counselling does not offer instant solutions. It can be hard work and progress can be slow or painful. It may not be the right time for you to talk, or talking about things may make you feel worse at first. What you feel able to cope with is the most important thing, and this can change over time.

Possible risks of associated with counselling.

Focusing on your problems can make you feel worse, and counselling can sometimes affect your relationships with your friends and family in a negative as well as a positive way. Strong feelings may come up in counselling and you may feel vulnerable or angry. You may also feel you are becoming over dependent on your counsellor or have strong feelings of attachment to him or her. It is the counsellor's job to understand these feelings and help you to deal with them as they arise.

Confidentiality

Respecting client confidentiality is a fundamental requirement for establishing and maintaining trust. The professional management of confidentiality

concerns the protection of personally identifiable and sensitive information from unauthorised disclosure. This means that staff in the service will not pass on personal information about clients (including information about attendance) to anyone outside the service except in the following, extremely rare, situations:

- Where the counsellor has your express permission to disclose information.
- Where the counsellor would be liable to civil or criminal court procedure if the information were not disclosed.
- Where the counsellor believes the client or a third party is in serious danger

Any decision to break confidentiality will normally be discussed with you first.

The University Counselling Service is available, free of charge, to all members of the University community.

The University Counselling Service is located at:

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Sheffield S10 2GB

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Email: ucs@sheffield.ac.uk

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