

Counselling: how can it help?

Counselling, or 'talking therapy', gives people the chance to talk in confidence to a trained professional counsellor about problems or issues that are causing them concern. There are many different types of counselling available. This information sheet explains how counselling might help people with dementia, carers and former carers.

What is counselling?

Counselling consists of an agreed number of regular sessions between a counsellor or therapist and the person seeking support, often called the 'client'. Sessions usually last for an hour, but they can be shorter. Counselling can last for a few weeks, several months or even for years.

The counsellor listens to the person's concerns in a non-judgmental and supportive manner. Together, the counsellor and the client try to find ways for the client to cope and/or feel better about themselves and their situation. This may result in a more satisfying and manageable life.

Research shows that successful counselling is more about the trusting relationship that develops between the counsellor and the client than it is about the type of counselling used. It is the relationship between counsellor and client that can really help a person to feel better and deal more effectively with their problems. It is therefore important that people work with a counsellor whose approach and manner they are comfortable with. Everyone is different, and how people feel about the counselling sessions will depend largely on their relationship with the counsellor.

The counsellor will agree to a confidential relationship with their client, which means that what is discussed at the sessions will not be disclosed to anyone else.

Some of the issues that the client might bring to the session may be distressing; this is normal. Sharing these feelings and thoughts in a supportive, safe and confidential setting is often helpful and can be life changing.

Counselling can increase feelings of self-worth, well-being and capability, and help ease feelings of depression, anxiety, loss of control and sleeplessness.

Who can counselling help?

Counselling can help anyone who wants to explore issues that may be concerning them. People from all walks of life have counselling and for a wide range of concerns, issues and problems. Some people use counselling for personal growth and development and as an investment in their well-being. Others use it to help them cope with serious illness or mental health problems. Counselling can be beneficial in both cases.

How long will it take?

Some people get everything they need from one session or from just a few. Others prefer to work over a much longer period of time, for months or even years. There is no standard length of time for counselling; it depends on what the client needs and what they agree with their counsellor.

How can counselling help a person with dementia?

Living with dementia can raise many difficult feelings and thoughts as the person attempts to make sense of what is happening to them and how their life is changing. Some people with dementia feel angry, confused, frightened or anxious. Their family and friends may be tied up in how they themselves are feeling, and it may be difficult for the person with dementia to discuss their feelings with them frankly. Counselling might provide the person with dementia with the opportunity to speak honestly about their feelings and work out ways to live with their condition. Traditional counselling expects clients to have full use of their cognitive abilities. However, experience has shown that people with significant changes in their cognition (memory, speech, thought processes) still respond well to the emotional content of the counselling sessions.

How can counselling help the carer of a person with dementia?

Living with dementia as a carer or a concerned relative, friend, neighbour or careworker can feel overwhelming and lonely. Carers often have very little time to themselves and it is easy to get run down and exhausted. Many carers experience feelings of sadness, grief, guilt or anger; counselling may help them to explore these feelings, as well as providing extra support outside their network of friends and family.

How can counselling help somebody who used to care for a person with dementia?

A former carer or careworker may feel lost or sad when the person they have cared for moves away or dies. After the caring relationship ends it may be difficult to move on, to recover from the loss and to accept a new and different role. This is a normal reaction. Counselling may help a former carer to accept the past and look ahead to the future.

What should a person look for in a counsellor?

It is important to feel comfortable with the counsellor; this depends on the personalities of both people. A person seeking counselling may need to speak to several different counsellors before they find the right person. It is also important to check that the counsellor:

- has at least a diploma in counselling from an accredited program of counselling
- abides by a professional code of ethics
- has regular ongoing professional supervision to ensure safe and ethical practice
- discusses their approach, confidentiality, fees, length of sessions and responsibilities (client's and counsellor's) before committing to sessions.

What is the best way to find a counsellor?

There are many ways to find a counsellor. A recommendation from someone else who has had counselling can be very helpful. The GP should also be able to provide details of local counsellors and there may even be a counselling service run through the GP's clinic. The social services department or local citizens advice bureau may also have information - the number will be in the phone book. Most private counselling services operate a sliding scale for

fees. Counselling services accessed through NHS referrals are usually free of charge. The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) can provide more information about counselling and local counselling services. See Useful contacts, below.

Useful contacts

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

BACP House
35-37 Albert Street
Rugby, Warks
CV21 2SG

Telephone: 0870 443 5252
Email: bacp@bacp.co.uk
Website: www.bacp.co.uk

The Samaritans

Telephone: 08457 90 90 90 (24 hours, seven days a week)
Email: jo@samaritans.org

Age Concern England

Freepost SWB 30375
Ashburton
Devon
TQ13 7ZZ

Information line freephone: 0800 009966 (every day 7am-7pm)
Email: ace@ace.org.uk
Website: www.ageconcern.org.uk

Mind

15-19 Broadway

London
E15 4BQ

Telephone: 020 8519 2122
Mind infoline: 0845 766 0163 (Monday-Friday 9.15-5.15; calls charged at local rate)

Email: contact@mind.org.uk
Website: www.mind.org.uk

Depression Alliance

212 Spitfire Studios
63 - 71 Collier Street
London
N1 9BE

Telephone: 0845 123 23 20
Website: www.depressionalliance.org

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