

HOLISTIC COUNSELLING PRACTICE



1

THIRTEEN MYTHS ABOUT COUNSELLING & PSYCHOTHERAPY For Those Who Don't Believe In It or Who Think It Doesn't Work!

1. **Counselling is just about talking ...**

If you've been led to believe that then no wonder you might think it's a pointless and expensive exercise! Of course, talking is involved (obviously) but it's also about being fully heard, received and understood at a much deeper level than normal conversation usually allows. It will take time for trust to build up between you and your Counsellor, but after a little while he or she may offer alternative ways of looking at things and, very gently, challenge your habitual thoughts and behaviours.

2. **Counselling is just like talking to a friend.**

Without doubt, many people have some naturally empathic friends whom we all value enormously ... but can involved friends really emulate an experienced Counsellor's expert level of focussed attention, or their intense listening, insight and appropriate, gentle challenge? Or are they more likely to get caught up emotionally in the drama, reacting and suffering themselves? Could this friend really continue to cope without having had the practice of thousands of hours honing their counselling skills with different people with a variety of challenges? Could the friend manage without some theoretical understanding to get clarity on what's happening to their friend?

3. **Counsellors don't say anything – they just let you talk ...**

That's dependent on the model of Counselling you've chosen. Some Counsellors are verbally responsive, and some are not – and either's OK. Counsellors will have been trained in a theoretical model, which makes sense to

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HOLISTIC COUNSELLING PRACTICE



2

them, about whether or when to respond - or not. I am one of the responsive and verbally interactive kind ...

4. Counsellors give advice

An old chestnut! Counsellors support and affirm clients' own choices and help them to arrive at decisions which are comfortable for them. Suggestions may be made, but never imposed.

5. "It" should be done to you or for you; something you get from the Counsellor!

If someone wants Counselling who holds that view, then sadly, they're highly likely to find it doesn't work for them. Unlike a doctor who might hand out a "prescription" in response to your list of "symptoms", the therapist will provide you with commitment, time and space. A counsellor does give you something of course, but it's in the form of careful listening, a willingness to try and understand you very deeply, offer insights, suggestions, some tools and techniques to help you change, plus support during those changes. But you have to make those things work for you, for yourself ... and yes, that responsibility is hard ... Much harder than taking a tablet! There is a similarity with going to the doctor however, and that is that you need to be open and honest with your counsellor as much as you can, if their feedback is going to have any chance of helping you.

6. Counsellors take too long to help their client.

What's 'long' for one person may be just enough for another. Counselling is an interactive process and for some of you, new needs may emerge as the process evolves. As long as Counsellors are regularly checking that help is taking place, help will take as long as it needs.

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3

7. Long term counselling is somehow wrong!

This may be an understandable reaction in these currently financially unstable times but ... some of you will benefit from or indeed have a clinical need to use the counselling relationship to restructure unhealthy relationship styles, learned as a result of early year's experiences. It can take some time for unconscious processes to show themselves in a room with a Counsellor, because we all have hidden resistances and defences busily trying to protect our "shadow" side from being really seen by the Counsellor (or anyone else for that matter) ...

8. There's something wrong with short term counselling!

It can be very useful for you to spotlight one issue in a short time frame – this focuses the mind and sharpens your resolve knowing that there's a finite time-limit on the process. It may then be possible to continue using tools learned in the Counselling sessions.

9. It's the Counsellor's job to fix you!

Many people hope for this but don't even realise that that is what they want; it stems, I believe, from an unconscious yearning to have our deepest wounds healed, from some of our earliest experiences, by the Perfect Mother. Of course, there is no such thing ... but counselling can help you to find your own symbolic Inner Mother with which to heal yourself.

10. All Counsellors and Psychotherapists do "it" the same!

Actually, it's probably true to say that, in practice, to you the client, there are as many styles of counselling and psychotherapy as there are counsellors and psychotherapists. Each individual brings his or her own personality to the relationship mix and creates something different each time.

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HOLISTIC COUNSELLING PRACTICE



4

11. **The model is irrelevant, only the relationship counts; the relationship is irrelevant, only the model counts.**

Research has shown that actively engaging in the process is essential for success, as well as feeling comfortable with the Counsellor. Therefore you need to feel comfortable with both. However, there is a fine balance between taking a risk and remaining in your comfort zone. Growth and change comes from taking a bit of a risk if you can and trying out a new technique or experiment ... At this point, it is the relationship with your Counsellor which will support you through any 'risky' or challenging processes. And a good Counsellor will respect the fact that you may not be 'ready' to try out anything too different for a while yet.

12. **All the very different Counsellor styles and personalities are each suitable for everyone all of the time.**

Possibly but unlikely! Clearly, a Counsellor's age, manner, sex, or cultural background will all impact on how well you respond to them and them to you. So I suggest you meet a couple (or more) of therapists first and then choose carefully.

13. **CBT is the only therapy which works!**

Of course it has its pros and cons like any other counselling modality. Its effectiveness is dependent both on how committed you are to practicing it at home and your relationship with the therapist. It is popular in the NHS because it has been subject to evidence-based scrutiny, but other models which have been around for even longer are known to work too (there is much written material to prove this with plenty of Case Studies to demonstrate the effectiveness of other models)~ they just haven't been tested in quite the same way.

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5

After reading the above you might, quite justifiably, ask:

“I understand that only I can know if I feel comfortable with a particular therapist. I recognise that I might even have unconscious **unhelpful** reasons which draw me to that therapist. But how can I, with no knowledge at all, find an expert, who has a wide knowledge of all the forms of counselling and psychotherapy, and has no investment, financial or emotional, in any particular method, who will help me to decide the method that will be most helpful to me?”

In reply, I will have to refer you to the following websites for some help towards finding an unbiased answer:

www.bacp.co.uk

www.psychotherapy.org.uk

www.counselling-directory-org.uk

www.ahpp.org

However, I suspect there is no definitive answer to that conundrum; certainly you have the potential to learn from any Counsellor or any Counselling experience – good or bad – and so with that, I wish you

Good luck in making a successful choice!

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