

What is counselling?

Counselling offers people an opportunity to explore, clarify and address any problems or difficulties they may be experiencing. It involves a professional and confidential relationship between a trained specialist and the client. For some counsellors an important part of this relationship is a counselling contract or an explicit agreement between the counsellor and client regarding what the client wishes to achieve and what the counsellor can offer. Counselling can help by enabling clients to look at aspects of their lives that are proving troublesome and to examine the options available. The aim is for the client to make their own choices and to discover their own solutions. The counsellor facilitates this process by providing a supportive, respectful and non-judgmental environment.

Choosing the right counsellor

The final judge of whether a counsellor is right for you can only be yourself; trust your own instincts. Talk to the counsellor first and then ask yourself if you would feel comfortable telling this person intimate details of your life. Do you feel safe with them? Do you like their manner towards you? Could you be completely open with them?

Another factor you might like to consider when choosing a counsellor is their theoretical approach or the counselling model that guides their practice. The three main theoretical approaches to counselling are psychodynamic, behavioural and humanistic.

The psychodynamic approach: this tends to focus on the influence of the past on our present day lives and the ways in which we use defence mechanisms. The counsellor helps the client to gain more understanding of their difficulties by identifying the hidden, or unconscious, factors that are influencing their behaviour. Psychodynamic counselling is of particular benefit to clients who have suffered past trauma or those caught up in a cycle of destructive patterns of behaviour.

The behavioural approach and CBT: this is based on the idea that our difficulties and distress can be overcome by learning more productive ways of thinking, feeling and behaving. A well-known model within this tradition is cognitive behaviour therapy or CBT which regards our emotional problems as the result of unhelpful thinking or 'cognition'. A CBT counsellor helps the client to identify these unhelpful or irrational thought patterns by exploring and challenging them and then, by means of logical argument, shows the client how to change. CBT is a more directive, structured and problem-focused approach than either psychodynamic or humanistic models. It is the model of choice for clients with eating disorders, phobias, addictions or repetitive thoughts and obsessions.

The humanistic approach and person-centred counselling: this focuses on a belief in the in-built capacity of all human beings to grow and fulfil their potential. Person-centred counselling is a well-known approach that comes under the humanistic umbrella. The person-centred counsellor's role is to provide the basic or 'core' helping conditions that will activate the client's self-healing process. The clients are encouraged to consider and identify their own needs and feelings. Person-centred counselling is a non-directive method and its focus on the needs of the client will particularly benefit those who have tended to put the needs of others before their own.

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E: info@b-eat.co.uk W: www.b-eat.co.uk

Helpline: 0845 634 1414 Youthline: 0845 634 7650

beat is the working title of Eating Disorders Association

Company number: 2368495 Registered Charity Number: 801343
Scottish Charity Number: SCO39309

Finding a counsellor

It is important for anyone wishing to consult a private counsellor or psychotherapist to check their training, qualifications, experience and membership of a professional body. Two of the main professional bodies providing registration and accreditation of counsellors and psychotherapists are: British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP); and United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP). Members of these bodies are required to complete an accredited training and a specified number of hours of supervised clinical practice, adhere to a code of ethics and be subject to the complaints procedure of their professional body. These bodies can provide a list of counsellors or psychotherapists working in your local area and details of the theoretical approach practised by individual members are usually included. Both organisations have a 'Find a therapist' function on their website.

Contact details:

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

Mailing address: BACP House, 15 St John's Business Park, Lutterworth, Leicestershire LE17 4HB
Tel: 0870 443 5252
Website: www.bacp.co.uk

UK Council for Psychotherapy

Mailing address: 2nd Floor Edward House, 2 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7LT
Tel: 020 7014 9955
Website: www.psychotherapy.org.uk

If you are looking for a CBT therapist, a useful organisation to contact is the *British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies* (a member organisation of UKCP).

BABCP

The Globe Centre, PO Box 9, Accrington BB5 0XB
Tel: 01254 875 277
Website: www.babcp.org.uk

What are the alternatives to private counselling?

Your GP may be able to refer you to counselling on the NHS. Some employers have an arrangement with an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and may pay for an employee to have a limited number of sessions. There are also a number of voluntary or charitable organisations which offer free counselling or ask only for a donation towards costs.

National bodies such as RELATE (relationship counselling for couples, families and individuals) www.relate.org.uk and Cruse (bereavement) www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk offer specialist counselling services. For young people still studying, most universities and colleges have a student counselling service and some schools have counsellors available. ChildLine (0800 1111; www.childline.org.uk) is a 24-hour helpline for children and young people where they may make just a single call or have regular counselling with a named ChildLine counsellor. Youth Access is the national membership organisation for young people's information, advice, counselling and support services www.youthaccess.org.uk

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beat helplines can also help you to find counsellors in your area or you can access our online Help Finder at www.b-eat.co.uk/HelpFinder

How long will it take?

This depends on you, the counsellor and the issues you are working on. While deep-rooted problems like eating disorders may need longer (one hour a week for several months) short term counselling for a specific problem may take only a few weekly sessions.

Books giving an introduction to counselling

- Best Counselling Guide by Susan Quilliam and Ian Grove-Stephenson - HarperCollins (1991)
- Counselling and Psychotherapy - Is It for Me?: A Client's Guide by Hetty Einzig - BACP (1989)
- Making Sense of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy by Ruth Williams - (2001) Available from Mind
- Making Sense of Counselling by Jocelyn Catty - (2004) Available from Mind
- Room to Listen, Room to Talk by Tony Lake and Fran Acheson - Bedford Sq. Press (1988)

beat is the leading UK wide charity providing information, help and support for people affected by eating disorders- anorexia, bulimia nervosa and binge eating disorder.

beat services and support include:

- **Helplines:** national telephone, e-mail and text help-lines
- **Self Help:** UK wide network of groups run by volunteers
- **Information:** a website at www.b-eat.co.uk leaflets and literature for individuals and organisations details and contacts for treatment services in the UK

Eating disorders will be beaten

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