

What is counselling?

Counselling is easier defined by what it is NOT than what it IS! Counselling is the bounded time for people to explore and solve their own problems. Counselling raises people's self-esteem and helps them develop the skills to resolve their own past and present problems.

Counselling is NOT:

Giving advice

Giving support

Offering solutions or ideas

The BACP (British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy) definition of counselling

Counselling takes place when a **counsellor** sees a **client** in a private and confidential setting to explore a difficulty the client is having, distress they may be experiencing or perhaps their dissatisfaction with life, or loss of a sense of direction and purpose. It is always at the request of the client as no one can properly be 'sent' for counselling.

By listening attentively and patiently the counsellor can begin to perceive the difficulties from the client's point of view and can help them to see things more clearly, possibly from a different perspective. Counselling is a way of enabling choice or change or of reducing confusion. It does not involve giving advice or directing a client to take a particular course of action. Counsellors **do not judge or exploit** their clients in any way.

In the counselling sessions the client can explore various aspects of their life and feelings, talking about them freely and openly in a way that is rarely possible with friends or family. Bottled up feelings such as anger, anxiety, grief and embarrassment can become very intense and counselling offers an opportunity to explore them, with the possibility of making them easier to understand. The counsellor will encourage the expression of feelings and as a result of their training will be able to accept and reflect the client's problems without becoming burdened by them. To keep the client safe we use strict **boundaries** for both the counsellor and the clients benefit. Boundaries include **confidentiality, restrictions on behaviour** and **limits of time**. Counsellors have to sign up to a strict **code of ethics**.

Acceptance, genuineness and **respect** for the client are essentials for a counsellor and, as the relationship develops, so too does trust between the counsellor and client, enabling the client to look at many aspects of their life, their relationships and themselves which they may not have considered or been able to face before. The counsellor may help the client to examine in detail the behaviour or situations which are proving troublesome and to find an area where it would be possible to initiate some change as a start. The counsellor may help the client to look at the options open to them and help them to decide the best for them. Counsellors use a range of theories that help them understand and feedback to clients what is going on in the client's story. They might, for example, feedback conflicting beliefs that the client holds.

Counselling skills are useful in many helping settings.

Training to become a **professional counsellor** however takes 2-3 years.