

How to Know When to Seek Counseling a
Or
Counseling Debunked
By Jean Landphair, MMFT

Struggle is part of living. So how can you know when a struggle becomes too big for you to handle alone? How do you know when to get professional help in the form of counseling?

You may encounter a problem that gets in the way of your normal functioning. It may absorb your thoughts to where it is difficult to focus on everyday tasks or duties at work. It may intrude into your mind when you need to be sleeping. It may make you lose your appetite or cause you to eat more to distract yourself from it. It may steal your joy from the activities you usually take pleasure in. And when everything you've tried to help overcome this problem hasn't worked, counseling is a good option to consider.

Once you decide to get counseling, finding the right therapist can be confusing. There are different types of psychotherapists with different training and licensing requirements. Seeking a counselor who has been licensed by the State ensures that the counselor will have at least a Master's degree, have passed the State licensure exam, and has a certain amount of experience gained under the supervision of a much more experienced counselor. This cannot guarantee a competent professional, but is the State's way to attempt to hold therapists to a high standard of education and training.

Licensed Psychologists are qualified to deal with a wide variety of personal and relational problems, as are Licensed Professional Counselors and Licensed Clinical Social Workers. One thing that makes Psychologists and Psychological Examiners different, is that they can do psychological testing to diagnose mental disorders. Psychiatrists and Psychiatric Nurse Practitioners are, as well. The last 2 groups can also prescribe medications that can help one feel better while going through the process of counseling. However, Psychiatrists and Psychiatric Nurse Practitioners typically don't do long-term counseling.

There are also Licensed Pastoral Counselors who merge spirituality with psychological counseling. These practitioners are trained in both theology and counseling. Finally, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists tend to focus on relational problems. They often see couples or families together to help clients improve their relationships. They also see individuals but view emotional or mental problems in the context of the important relationships in a person's life.

With the help of the Internet, it is not difficult to find a counselor to fit one's needs. One can search the Internet for a state or national organization for any of the types of therapists mentioned above. These organizations often have websites that list practitioners in each state or major city. Another great resource for local counselors is the website of the Rutherford County Psychotherapy Association. Using the web address rcpa.co one can search by such criteria as the type of problem needed to be addressed or

the type of health insurance a counselor accepts. Over 30 therapists in the Murfreesboro area are included in the rcpa.co website directory

Other good sources for finding a quality counselor are one's doctor, pastor, friends, or family members. In addition, a potential counselee may want to check to see which counselors accept one's health insurance for payment. Many health insurance policies today cover some limited counseling. One disadvantage of using health insurance to cover the cost is that they generally want a client to have a mental health diagnosis in order to cover the cost of the sessions. This diagnosis becomes part of a person's permanent medical record. Not everyone wants that label to follow them for the rest of their lives. Plus any health insurance claim passes through many hands before it is completed. Some patients are more comfortable with the privacy that comes with paying for their counseling themselves.

Once a counselor has been chosen, a client can expect to take several sessions to share information about themselves and their problem. The counselor needs time to thoroughly get to know the client and what is going on with them. Then the therapist can tailor his or her approach to the client and the client's specific needs. A client should feel a sense of safety and trust with a counselor. If that does not happen within a few sessions, a client may want to try a different therapist. Not every counselor is a good 'fit' for every client. Research shows that having a strong bond with a counselor is the most important factor that leads to a positive result from counseling. So a client needs to pay attention to this.

What can an individual expect from a counseling experience? Any good counselor will treat a client with respect and compassion. A client can expect to be truly heard and feel understood and supported. Sometimes, though, the process can be upsetting. To experience healing from hurting emotions and confusing thoughts requires bringing them up and processing them. This work is not always fun! And there are no guarantees that a client will get the results that are wanted. But if a client has confidence in the counselor, has the desire to change, and can be patient with the process, chances are good that that client will experience success. This could take a few months or longer, depending on the problems addressed.

If a person is in severe crisis, such as attempting to commit suicide or being totally unable to function, in-patient treatment is an option to consider. Murfreesboro now has an in-patient treatment facility – Trustpoint Hospital, located at 1009 N. Thompson Lane. This facility has two mental health units – one for seniors and one for adults. Short-term, intensive treatment is offered for a variety of mental health issues. Trustpoint's intake specialist will come to a person's home or work to evaluate the client and determine whether in-patient treatment is appropriate. Clients can admit themselves and do not need to be referred by a doctor or counselor. Trustpoint Hospital will accept most insurance plans for payment and can be contacted at 615-848-5850.

Many people experience bumps along the road of life that they can't seem to get over on their own. Counseling is a great resource to help people navigate those obstacles to health and happiness.

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