

PRIYA SENROY

Certified Counsellor, CCPA # 8680

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Counselling and You: Frequently Asked Questions

What is counselling?

Simply stated, counselling is any relationship in which one person is helping another person to better understand and solve some problem. Friends and relatives provide a type of counselling, as do clergy, academic advisors, teachers, and many others. Counsellors have a broad range of experience in developing "helping relationships" and working with many different situations.

In counselling we look for what we find good in ourselves. The good can be used as a model for the things we would like to change.

Counselling is a change (growth: healing) process in which people (individuals, groups, couples, and families) are helped to:

- express themselves (catharsis) in a safe, supportive, collaborative, non-judgmental climate;
- identify, sort-out, clarify their problem laden "stories" (deepened awareness of past & present story and alternative future stories)
- identify non-helpful patterns (e.g. "crisis" pattern);
- learn, where appropriate, more helpful coping skills (e.g. "assertive skills")
- Identify and achieve goals that are important to them.

For those with a humanistic bent, the ultimate goal for counselling is to help people to recognize and accept their own internal worth, i.e., to integrate their learned habits of thinking about themselves (their internal messages and images) and their learned behaviours (feelings, physical responses, & actions) to be congruent with who they really are in their essence (beautiful, loving people).

What is the difference between Counselling and Psychotherapy?

"Psychotherapy" and "counselling" are terms that are often used interchangeably. Although they are very similar, there are some subtle differences as well. Technically speaking, "counsellor" means "advisor". It involves two people working together to solve a problem. It is a term that is used in conjunction with many types of advice giving. For example, financial planning and spiritual guidance are both types of counselling. Just about anyone at all may claim to be a counsellor if they are in the role of giving advice. The term counselling may also properly be used to refer to what occurs in a relationship with a psychotherapist.

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In the context of **mental health**, "**counselling**" is generally used to denote a relatively brief treatment that is focused most upon behaviour. It often targets a particular symptom or problematic situation and offers suggestions and advice for dealing with it.

"**Psychotherapy**" on the other hand is generally a longer term treatment which focuses more on gaining insight into chronic physical and emotional problems. Its focus is on the patient's thought processes and way of being in the world rather than specific problems. **Ways Psychotherapy may help.** Increasing your ability to trust yourself, learning some skills that may improve your relationships, resolving old injuries that keep interfering with your life, moving through your issues of depression, anger, grief, apathy, etc. Increasing your awareness expressing your creativity, expanding your spiritual center

In actual practice there may be quite a bit of overlap between the two. A therapist may provide counselling with specific situations and a counsellor may function in a psychotherapeutic manner. Generally speaking, however, psychotherapy requires more skill than simple counselling. It is conducted by professionals trained to practice psychotherapy such as a psychiatrist, a trained counsellor, social worker or psychologist. While a psychotherapist is qualified to provide counselling, a counsellor may or may not possess the necessary training and skills to provide psychotherapy.

What you can expect from your counsellor?

You can expect someone who is interested in listening to your concerns and in helping you develop a better understanding of them so that you may deal with them more easily and effectively. Your counsellor will take you seriously and be willing to openly discuss anything you wish to discuss. Expect your counsellor to focus the session on you, and not on others. Because counsellors have different beliefs about how people change, they differ on how much talking they do in sessions, whether they ask you to do "homework," and their focus of discussion. If you have any questions about what is going on, by all means ask. Counsellors have no "magical" skills or knowledge, and will be unable to solve your problems directly for you. Your counsellor will want to work with you, but won't do for you what you are capable of doing for yourself. Except under unusual circumstances, your counsellor will maintain strict confidentiality about you, and will openly discuss this with you.

What are your responsibilities in counselling?

Your main responsibilities in counselling are to attend your regularly scheduled sessions, talk about what is bothering you as openly and honestly as you can, and complete any tasks or "homework" assignments you may be asked to do.

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You are expected to let your counsellor know if you are unable to make it to a session. Most counselling will require you to try something new or a "different approach." Another thing your counsellor will expect is for you to be willing to experiment and try things without jumping to conclusions.

You are also expected to let your counsellor know when your problems have been solved as well as let your counsellor know if you don't feel like you're making any progress.

This latter point is most important: your counsellor is most interested in your benefiting from counselling.

Some common difficulties in counselling?

One of the most difficult steps in counselling occurs before you even see a counsellor for the first time. Deciding to seek counselling is the first step in change. Once this decision has been made, the mechanics for change have been set in motion. In the process of changing the way you think, feel, or behave, you usually must try out new ways of doing things. This can make you anxious or frustrated. Also, in the course of counselling you may come to realize that things you once thought of only in a positive or negative way you may see a bit differently. The challenges of pushing on your limitations may also cause your frustrations, but with commitment and practice, you will find that you can stretch your limits and find new and exciting aspects of yourself.

How many sessions will I need to solve my issue?

The number of sessions it will take to complete the counselling process will depend on several factors:

- The intensity and severity of your symptoms
- The duration and frequency of symptoms
- The frequency of counselling sessions (i. e. once a week versus once a month)
- Your willingness to address issues and work on those issues both inside and outside of the counselling session

Tips on how to benefit from counselling

Be ready to focus on a specific problem or issue. Be prepared for your sessions. Attend your sessions and take an active part in them. Complete (or at least attempt) any "homework." Tell your counsellor if you don't think you're being helped.

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How can Creative Arts Therapy be used as a Counselling technique?

Counselling at its best employs an artistic quality that enables individuals to express themselves in a creative and unique manner.

It is an activity that may be enhanced through encouraging some clients to participate in creative experiences, especially artistic expressions such as painting, writing, dancing, drumming, drama, or playing. These activities, if carried out in a non-mechanical manner, help persons become more in tune with their emotions and form new relationships with themselves and others.

The arts sensitize clients to untapped aspects of themselves and thus promote an awareness of uniqueness and universality. Ancient and modern civilizations have recognized this quality about the arts.

Do I have to do art in my session?

Not at all. Not everyone wants to make art, and that's fine with me. If this sounds like you, we would probably pursue counselling based on talking. I truly believe everyone has some creative talent, but I realize that some people's art lies in their cooking. Or how they take care of their family. You don't have to paint to be artistic. Many people come to me *because* of my training in the arts. I believe this work has made me more accepting of all people and their situations, whether they "do" art or not.

What happens in the first session?

The following areas are discussed in the first session

Your presenting issue

"What brought you to counselling?"

"Tell me why you are here."

"What are you hoping to accomplish?"

Whether you come as an individual, a couple, a family, or a group, each person in the room will have an opportunity to share his/her perspective of the issues.

You will be invited to determine a goal for treatment

History taking

You will be asked a series of questions to help us facilitate your counselling

Medical History

Medical conditions that might affect the therapy or your ability to attend sessions, such as epilepsy, diabetes, back pain, recent or pending surgery, etc.

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Abuse History

Current or past substance use/abuse which might impact the counselling. Treatment?
Past or present physical, sexual, or emotional abuse.

Psychological History

Any previous therapeutic treatment that would be relevant or interruptive to the counselling.
Any treatment with other providers. We will probably wonder why you are not continuing with that/those persons(s).
Any hospitalizations? What for, where and for how long.
Any suicide attempts? When and how?
Any current medications? Prescribing physician?

Referrals

You may be given some referrals to adjunctive programs or professionals that might supplement your psychotherapeutic work, such as: an attorney, "anonymous" meetings (alcoholics, over-eaters, etc.), classes, out-patient drug programs, physician, psychiatrist, support groups, therapy groups, vocational counselling, hotlines, crisis lines, hospital, inpatient drug treatment programs.

Any questions?

You will be asked for any further questions you have about the counsellor, the counselling. You will be invited to share anything more you want to share about yourself before ending this assessment session.

The closing

You will be asked to pay for the session in cash or check. Priya Senroy counselling sessions are covered by Green Shield Canada. So please let me know if they are your providers.

You will be asked to make a determination if you wish to continue therapy sessions together. If you do not want to decide at that time, let your therapist know how you will proceed. Receipt will be issued either at the end of the assessment/ all the sessions.