

## How do I choose the best counsellor for me?

### **Finding a counsellor who is a good fit**

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy in the UK, emphasise the importance of the relationship between the client and therapist in counselling, allowing the client to meet with someone they feel comfortable enough to talk to about their problems, difficulties or distress. They have a couple of lovely, short videos on their home page, 'what is therapy?' and 'what to expect' which you may want to check out <http://www.bacp.co.uk>

Notice the language used by the counsellor you talk with. Some counsellors will be trained in a more traditional medical model, with emphasis on diagnosis and using evidence-based strategies. Others will be trained to focus more on a person-centred approach, whereby the client is seen as already having the answers within them, with the counsellor's role as helping the client access those answers through focussed discussion and therapeutic activities, and supporting them to create change in their own way.

Some counsellors will focus on helping you change limiting thought patterns (cognitive), others will support you to understand and change your patterns of behaviour (behavioural), and others will help you develop an understanding of your emotional reactions (affective).

Counsellors also work to support challenges in relationships (relational), or existential or spiritual distress. Many counsellors will use a combination of these approaches, depending on your individual needs (integrative). Different counselling styles are important, however the relationship you develop with your counsellor is likely to have the most impact on your wellness journey, so it is important that you feel non-judged, supported and connected with your counsellor.

A guide for clients is to check a counsellor's membership, certification or registration with their Professional Association or College to ensure the counsellor is bound by a Code of Ethics and recourse for a client if they have a relevant complaint.

### **Different types of counselling strategies**

The different types of counselling strategies that counsellors use come from different schools of thought, and different historical perspectives but all are focused on relieving a client's distress and supporting healthy change. A very brief summary of some of the counselling I use as well as some of my peers is outlined below.

**Art Therapies:** Traditionally counselling has focused on exploring and changing distress through talk therapies. Other modalities, such as art or music therapy provide a different kind of language to support clients to access, understand and work with their emotions and distress.

**Body-Focused Therapies:** Body-focused therapies believe in the importance of bringing awareness to the pain and distress we hold in our bodies, as well as our minds. There are a number of different body-focused therapies. Body Psychotherapy uses various techniques to facilitate recovery, including talk therapy. It guides people into a deeper awareness of their emotional and behavioral states while at the same time encouraging them to tune in to the body's physical responses. Body psychotherapy utilizes various techniques and relies on breath, physical touch, and movement as its primary tools.

<http://www.goodtherapy.org/body-psychotherapy.html#>

**Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT):** Supports clients to become aware of their automatic belief system and works on shifting a person's perspective when automatic or reactive thoughts have become negative or self-limiting.

**Narrative:** Our lives play out as a series of stories that we create to interpret our life events and relationships. Sometimes we feel we are living many stories simultaneously. When our stories are not working for us, or keeping us from living authentically, narrative therapists help clients to understand the stories we live in and if appropriate to edit our storyline. Clients are encouraged to become the authors of their own stories. Narrative therapy focuses on a cognitive approach.

**Person-centred/client-centred:** Also referred to a Rogerian therapy after Carl Rogers who shifted psychotherapy from an expert-led approach to a belief that the client knew what was in their best interest and what they needed to live a more meaningful life. This therapy prioritises a caring, safe, non-judgemental relationship that allows the client do their personal work.

**Psycho-analytical:** The image of Freud jumps to mind for many people when we think of therapy. Psychoanalysis is both a theory of how the mind works, and a treatment modality. Psychoanalysts believe that our distress has its roots in the emotions that we have suppressed due to trauma and challenges in our past, particularly our early years. By making conscious the unconscious emotions that we have repressed, we are then able to work with them and find cathartic relief. Psychoanalysts have additional training. Their work with clients is long-term and frequent to allow for extended self-exploration. Psychoanalysts may work in private-practice, and some hospitals or correctional institutions.

**Psycho-dynamic:** Psychodynamic therapy encourages exploration and discussion of the full range of a patient's emotions. The therapist helps the patient describe and put words to feelings, including contradictory feelings, feelings that are troubling or threatening, and feelings that the patient may not initially be able to recognise or

acknowledge (this stands in contrast to a cognitive focus, where the greater emphasis is on thoughts and beliefs). There is also a recognition that intellectual insight is not the same as emotional insight, which resonates at a deep level and leads to change (this is seen as one reason why many intelligent and psychologically minded people can explain the reasons for their difficulties, yet their understanding does not help them overcome those difficulties).

<http://www.psychodynamiccanada.org/learn/what-is-psychodynamic-psychotherapy>

**Solution-focused Brief Therapy:** Solution-focused therapy is a short term therapy model (in contrast to the long-term analytical models). Therapy is seen as a specialised conversation directed toward developing and achieving the client's vision of solutions. SFBT is future-focused, goal-directed, and focuses on solutions, rather than on the problems that brought clients to seek therapy. The SFBT approach assumes that all clients have some knowledge of what would make their life better, even though they may need some (at times, considerable) help describing the details of their better life and that everyone who seeks help already possesses at least the minimal skills necessary to create solutions

**Transactional Analysis:** Transactional Analysis identifies that as social creatures our relationships influence how we act and behave. TA explores the thoughts and feelings attached to events that happened primarily in our early years, and how we now interpret and manage those thoughts and feelings, many of which may not be remembered memories (in other words below the surface of our memory).

Emotional distress is reinforced through our transactions (patterns of behaviour) with certain others (often those close to us), which trigger difficult emotions which we still hold. TA helps us unpack our behaviours, thoughts and emotions to allow understanding of our actions and create healthy changes.

<http://www.ericberne.com/transactional-analysis/>

## **Cost**

If you are looking for individual, couples or family counselling in private practice, fees may vary depending on a wide variety of factors, including location, time of a session (evening and weekend appointments may be more expensive), and whether the counsellor is covered by your insurance plan. Psychologists' fees are often higher than other counsellors as clients may be able to cover a percentage of cost through their benefits plan. Insurance plans differ and you will need to check the designation of your counsellor if you are in doubt.

Psychotherapists trained and educated through other routes, including education, social work, nursing or occupational health often have lower fees.

Ask the therapist whether they have a sliding scale, and find out about their payment methods.

Depending on where you live, where you work, how much you earn, or your individual need, limited or longer-term individual or group therapy may be available for you at no fee through:

a referral from your family doctor to a psychiatrist, psychologist or psychotherapist employed through a government programme;

an Employment Assistance Programme (EAP), through your work;

not-for-profit agencies in your community working with people with particular distress, for example, women and children escaping domestic violence, LGBTQ youth, people who are bereaved.

You can also gather more information using [\[link\]](#) Questions to ask a Therapist.

In summary, ideally you need to have a relationship with your counsellor that allows you to feel safe to discuss the challenges in your life that are causing you distress. You need to know you are protected if there is a problem with your counsellor through recourse to their Professional Association or Registered College. You need to be given clear and transparent information about costs, and feel your counsellor is ethical and open to ongoing, transparent conversations if you have any questions or need further information.