

Factsheet: **Counselling**

Research has shown that counselling can be effective at combating stress and depression. There are many types of counselling, and it can fit easily into most lifestyles: some counselling can even be done over the phone or by Skype. Counselling alone can be effective in some cases of mild to moderate depression, especially for those who may be wary of taking medication.

Does Counselling work?

Counselling is not a magic wand which can make problems go away, but talking with someone who listens non-judgementally can often be helpful in discovering new solutions and finding the self-confidence to apply them. Much of the effectiveness of counselling is because talking about a problem can help to put it into perspective and be cathartic.

Counselling isn't recommended in all situations. Your doctor can advise you on whether it's appropriate for you.

Different approaches

There are various approaches and philosophies in counselling, and it can seem difficult to understand the differences or to choose between them. However, a good counsellor will always be happy to explain their approach.

Counselling

Person-centred counselling is really about helping the client to explore the problem, think it through logically, address the issues that lie behind it and make their own plan to overcome it. It's not an easy cure: it can be painful to examine perceived flaws, fears and issues, often examining problems which go back many years.

Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy is a more intensive treatment which focuses on unconscious processes, aiming to bring them into consciousness where they can be interpreted by the psychotherapist. Dreams are one way to access the unconscious. It is usually undertaken on an open-ended basis and treatment can go on for up to two years. Psychotherapy can be done individually or in a group.

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy

This has become very popular in recent years, and has been shown to be very effective. It works by looking at how the client thinks, and how they behave and react according to these thoughts. It addresses in particular negative thoughts and reactions, often by breaking an overwhelming problem down into smaller components and looking at how the client responds to each one individually. CBT takes less time than traditional psychotherapy (about six months in weekly hour-long sessions), and focuses more on the here and now, although past events may occasionally be relevant. CBT can be done individually or in a group.

Life Coaching

Coaching is usually for generally mentally healthy individuals, and it helps them to set and reach goals. Therapists and counsellors rarely give advice, whereas coaches advise, make requests, and challenge the individual. Coaching is a relationship where the coach supports, collaborates, and facilitates client learning and action through assessment, discovery, reflection, goal-setting, and strategic action.

Hypnotherapy

Hypnotherapy is for those who want to make changes to a specific behaviour in a short space of time. It works by getting the client to take on suggestions at a deeper level and helping them break free from past experiences and behaviours.

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How do I choose a Counsellor?

At present anyone can call themselves a counsellor or psychotherapist. However a counsellor accredited by the **British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)** www.bacp.co.uk will have had professional training, will be under ongoing supervision, and will practise within BACP's Ethical Framework for Good Practice. Other similar organisations include the **UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP)** www.psychotherapy.org.uk.

There are many websites listing counsellors which will include their qualifications, and sometimes comments from former clients. When choosing a counsellor, bear in mind that as well as specialising in different types of counselling, most also focus on helping with certain issues, so look for one which has experience in the area with which you need help.

However you select your counsellor, it is important that you feel comfortable with him or her and that you react positively to the sound of their voice. Many counsellors will be happy to have a free initial chat. In order for any course of counselling to be successful there needs to be a good relationship between the client and the therapist.

How much will it cost?

Outside London costs range from about £30 to £80 per hourly session and £55 is about average. For most issues, six sessions or fewer may be adequate. Sessions outside normal working hours are likely to be more expensive, and very few counsellors will offer weekend appointments. If finances are a problem then counselling is available on the NHS through your GP, but there may be a waiting list and you may not be able to choose which counsellor you see.

You might also check to see whether your private health insurance will cover it. Specialist organisations such as **Relate** (for relationship counselling) or **Cruse** (for bereavement counselling) may also be more affordable options. Cruse does not charge for its services but will always welcome donations from clients who are able to make them.

Your firm may have an **EAP** (Employment Assistance Programme) that offers free, quickly accessible counselling to employees.