

What Is Counseling, And How Can It Help Me?

Life has many ups and downs—good times and hard times. During the hard times, it can help to reach out to a professional counselor. This flyer is to help you understand more about what counseling is, and how it could help you.

What is counseling?

In general, counseling is a process that helps when you want to change something in your life or explore your thoughts and feelings in more depth. It is an opportunity to receive support and experience growth during challenging times. Counseling can help people deal with many personal topics such as anxiety, anger, depression, relationship and parenting challenges, school or work difficulties, managing change, and more.

How could counseling help me?

It is not a counselor's job to "tell you what to do". Ultimately, you are responsible for any decisions you make, and for taking steps to identify desired changes and work towards them. However, a counselor can listen carefully, ask good questions, and offer suggestions that help you:

- ✓ Explain and explore your thoughts and feelings
- ✓ Better understand your challenges and concerns
- ✓ Brainstorm ideas and evaluate options
- ✓ Identify different perspectives or ways of thinking, and research-based suggestions for things you may try to address your challenges and improve your life
- ✓ Figure out changes you wish to make

What sort of issues might lead me to seek counseling?

Counseling can help:

- ✓ When you are anxious, worried, stressed, overwhelmed, or feeling stuck about something
- ✓ When you want to gain new strategies for coping with stress and building resilience
- ✓ When you want to gain more clarity about your thoughts, feelings, and options
- ✓ When experiences are holding you back from leading the life you want to lead

Myths About Counseling

MYTH: *Counseling is for weak people.*

FACT: Counseling is for anyone experiencing distress. Anyone dealing with stress, anxiety or despair may benefit from counseling. People who reach out for counseling are strong, mature, and help-seeking. They are likely to be more resilient over time.

MYTH: *The counselor will tell others what I say or gossip about my private information.*

FACT: Counselors are bound by their professional code of ethics to protect your personal information and story. What you share is strictly confidential and will not be shared with anyone unless you are an imminent threat to yourself or someone else.

MYTH: *Counseling is for crazy people.*

FACT: Counseling is about more than mental illness. Anxiety, depression, and many other reactions are normal and appropriate when experiencing civil conflict, war, and the threat of violence! Everyone can benefit from good counseling at different points in their life.

When is counseling strongly recommended?

Counseling is strongly recommended:

- > **When you are acting in ways you know are harmful and you want to stop** (e.g., when you are chronically overworking, using substances such as alcohol to help you cope, or taking your anger and frustration out on others).
- > **If you experience intense anxiety or depression over time, or other intense thoughts or feelings** (e.g., feeling completely overwhelmed or numb, thoughts of harming yourself or others).
- > **If you experience a very challenging or disruptive event** (e.g., a threatening or violent incident). After these sorts of events, counseling can help you:
 - ✓ Learn more about stress and trauma and how it affects us
 - ✓ Figure out whether the reactions you are experiencing are normal and likely to subside over time or whether you could benefit from some additional support for a while, and
 - ✓ Identify things you can do to take care of yourself during this time and help yourself recover.

What will happen during my first counseling session?

Different counselors handle their first session differently. In general, however, here are some of the things you can expect to happen during your first session (whether in person or via the phone):

- ✓ You will spend some time getting to know one another. The counselor will tell you a bit about themselves and may encourage you to ask any questions you have about their lives, training, or experiences.
- ✓ They will likely ask you:
 - Why you are seeking counseling
 - What sorts of needs and issues you would like to discuss
 - What you have done to manage these sorts of questions or challenges in the past (what worked, and what did not)
 - What you hope to get from counseling

***If you are thinking about seeking counseling, try it. Humans are relational and thrive best in the company of others and when they are receiving support from other people.
Reaching out for help when you are struggling is an advanced coping skill.***