Insights on Counseling

The decision to begin counseling is one which may have important consequences for the rest of your life. Research has shown that when individuals enter this type of treatment with a good understanding of what they are about to undertake, they are likely to achieve more favorable results.

The effectiveness of your counseling depends on a large variety of factors including the nature of the problem, the effort you put into the process, the type and length of treatment, and the Counselor's skill. Nevertheless, on the average, ninety percent of all counselees who continue through with their counseling sessions show significant change and improvement.

COUNSELEE'S RESPONSIBILITIES

As a counselee in counseling, you will have certain responsibilities. It is important for you to attend all of your scheduled appointments on time. If you are late, you will not have the benefit of a full session. Equally important are the responsibilities you have to be as active, open, and honest as possible with your Counselor. Your most important responsibility, however, is to work toward the goals you and the Counselor have agreed on. Seeing a Counselor for 50 minutes a week will be of little benefit without additional effort outside the counseling office. This work can include thinking about the material covered in the sessions, making yourself aware of your thinking and behavior, or working on specific assignments made by your counselor.

COUNSELOR'S RESPONSIBILITIES

The Counselor will usually devote the first few sessions to assessing the types and extent of problems or concerns you have. This process requires the Counselor to ask detailed questions about your history, life situations, and present distress. At times this process will involve stirring up painful or uncomfortable thoughts and feelings. Once the Counselor has identified the specific problem areas, the two of you will agree upon a plan including goals, and methods to accomplish these goals.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The counselee has the right to privacy concerning his or her counseling. This means that the Counselor may not reveal any information about you to another person without your explicit permission. All communications and records of your treatment will be treated as private and confidential. There are some very special circumstances which are exceptions to this rule. The Counselor may discuss your case with a supervisor or with other professionals clearly concerned with the case. Confidentiality will be discarded when you reveal information that indicates a clear danger of injury to yourself or others and the knowledge of abuse or neglect of a child.

HANDLING DISSATISFACTION WITH TREATMENT

It is not unusual to feel angry and upset at times about what happens in counseling. Questions or concerns about the treatment you receive should first be raised with your Counselor. Explaining your thoughts and feelings, even when they are negative, is an important part of the counseling process. If, after discussing the issues with your Counselor, you are still not satisfied, you have several options.

You may seek a second opinion concerning your treatment. Another approach would be to switch to a new counselor. Competent counselors recognize and accept that they will be able to serve the needs of some counselees better than others.

If you believe your Counselor's behavior is either unethical or does not adhere to professional standards, you again have several alternatives. You could bring the behavior to the attention of the counselor's partners, if any. Another option you may choose is to contact the organization by which he has professional liability insurance.

TERMINATION

Termination should be a joint decision between you and your Counselor. Too many counselees terminate before all the sessions are completed. Generally, this leaves the counselees with unresolved issues and problems. Before terminating, speak openly and honestly with your Counselor.

When all the sessions are concluded and termination is about to occur, there may be sadness, separation anxiety, or an unwillingness to give up the relationship. This is normal. Termination, to be successful, will focus on the accomplishments and success of counseling.

FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES

We think our services are God honoring. We, further, think our fees are reasonable. If you are having financial hardships and having temptations to discontinue your counseling, please discuss the situation with your counselor because no one has or ever will be turned down from our services.

Couples Therapy

Successful marriages are based on trust. Therefore openness and honesty is the best policy. For successful therapy there can be no secrets within couples counseling. However, sometimes there are issues that are disclosed during individual sessions that may be difficult for one spouse to disclose to the other. When that is the situation, you and your counselor will work together on the best way to share that information with your spouse.

Records and Confidentiality

The code of ethics for counselors and the state laws regulating most kinds of counseling consider personal information you discuss to be confidential. Except in a small number of situations, the helping professional may not reveal any information about you to another person without your explicit permission. Records of your treatment will be kept for seven years after your final session.

One exception to this rule occurs if your fees are paid by a third party such as an insurance company, Certain details of your treatment (e.g. dates of treatment, diagnosis, symptoms, progress) may be required to be revealed in order to obtain reimbursement. Most insurance companies allow you to file claims directly with them so that your employer will not see the information.

In cases where a court order has been issued and records have been subpoenaed the counselor has a legal responsibility to comply.

Suicide and Abuse

Another exception where counselors are legally required to disregard confidentiality involves situations where there is a potential for suicide or homicide. For example, if you reveal information that indicates a clear danger of injury to yourself or others the counselor will need to contact the appropriate authorities or family members.

Another exception to confidentiality is that all helping professionals are required by law to report any knowledge of abuse or neglect of a child or an incompetent or disabled person including suspected abuse.

Your counselor will be happy to discuss any concerns you have about the protection of the information you provide.

Fees and insurance reimbursement:

Your insurance company may reimburse you for part of your fee; however it is your responsibility to pay your fee when services are rendered unless other arrangements are made. If you cannot pay the full fee, please ask for a sliding scale fee evaluation form and submit it to your therapist. Your fee will not be changed until the form is fully filled out and returned to your therapist for evaluation. Your fee reduction is based on the information you have provided. If you are having difficulty keeping up with the charges please notify your counselor, and he will be glad to reevaluate at any time.

Fees for court appearances, phone sessions, copies of records etc. will be discussed with you by your therapist as the need arises.

Your fee will be collected at the beginning of each session. Credit/Debit cards and cash are accepted. If you are going to use a check please have it ready when you come in to save time. If you pay with cash you will be given a receipt. You may also use your credit or debit card or pay through PayPal.

IF YOU ARE WILLING, TRUST GOD TO BE ABLE

The basic issue of change has to be your willingness, not your ability. Few of us have the power to change our lives. We do, however, gain the ability to choose change by facing our fears and hurts. God has the power to change us if we are willing to ask and seek diligently. It is usually our fear and self-love that keep us from changing. We are afraid of what will happen to us if we stop doing it our way and let God do it His way. My old ways of relating may not work, but they are still comfortable and familiar. The unknown is frightening. But if we are willing to trust, then we will change. Prayer and the surrender of our will to God are the essential beginning ingredients of change.

- Alfred Ellis