



## **Sea Change**

# **Preparing for Counselling**



## What is counselling is all about?

It is not necessary for you to fully understand what counselling is in order to benefit from it. However, having some ideas can help you to prepare. Here are some ways of looking at the process that may help you gain an insight into what you might expect.

Counselling is a safe space and time that is just for you, allowing you to gain a different perspective. Counselling can help you gain control over your thoughts mindfully:



### **Helicopter:**

Seeing the bigger picture is useful. When something is distressing us we are often so close to it, involved in it, part of it– it's very hard to stand back from it to see what else is happening. Counselling provides an opportunity to zoom out, breathe, and take stock of what is really happening.

Counselling can help us to recognise our inner-voice(s) and notice the messages that we are giving ourselves. We could characterise these voices, such as:

### **The Poisoned Parrot:**

Constantly criticising and saying hurtful and unhelpful things. The Poisoned Parrot is the critical voice which tells you that you are “stupid”, “useless”, “pathetic”. The parrot doesn't have any knowledge or wisdom it merely repeats insults on auto-pilot without thinking.





## What do counsellors do?

The British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapy (BACP) is a professional body representing counselling. They describe therapy and all forms of counselling as a *safe, confidential place to talk about your life and anything that may be confusing, painful or uncomfortable*.

At [www.bacp.org](http://www.bacp.org) there is a range of information and factsheets which can be helpful for you to look at in preparing for your therapy. In order to get the most out of therapy they advise the following:

- Being open
- Saying how you are really feeling
- Giving your therapist honest feedback on how you experience the therapy

### **Confidentiality in counselling:**

A key aspect of counselling and helping you develop trust is confidentiality. Your counsellor should discuss this with you at your first meeting so that you both agree to the terms and conditions of your time together. Generally counselling is confidential meaning that your therapist will not discuss the things you have talked about to anyone. However, a good therapist will have regular supervision with a professionally trained supervisor who oversees their work. They may talk about some of the things that you have communicated but they will do so in a discreet manner that does not compromise your identity.

There may be some circumstances that may prompt your therapist to talk to another professional. For example, if there appears to be a serious risk of harm to you or others. This is usually done with your permission.



## **What is a counselling Contact/Agreement and why do we need them?**

A counselling contract or agreement is an agreement between you and your counsellor, in order that you both understand how the organisation and therapist can help you. It is also an opportunity for the counsellor to explain the procedures they will follow and their reasons for those procedures.

### **Confidentiality**

Everything you tell the counsellor will be kept strictly confidential between you and your counsellor and his//her supervisor/manager, except in the following circumstances:

- Where the client gives his or her consent for information to be share
- Where the counsellor is ordered to so by a Court of Law
- Where a child or young person under 18 is at risk
- Where you or someone else are at risk of serious harm
- Where there is a threat of terrorism or trafficking or serious crime

You will usually have a weekly appointment with your counsellor and you will agree on times and appointments with them. Sessions will usually last for up to an hour with 50 minutes being the therapeutic hour. New Pathways offers 18 sessions.

You will usually sign an agreement similar to this with your counsellor, where both parties, you and the counsellor agree to the specific terms or agreement.



### 3 Questions to ask as You Start Therapy

GetSelfHelp.com suggest asking yourself the following questions to prepare for your therapy:

**1. How much of a negative effect has my problem had on my life?**

0 \_\_\_\_\_ 50 \_\_\_\_\_ 100  
No Effect Extremely negative

**2. How important is it to me to feel better?**

0 \_\_\_\_\_ 50 \_\_\_\_\_ 100  
Not at all Very Important

**3. How willing am I to make getting better a priority in my life?**

0 \_\_\_\_\_ 50 \_\_\_\_\_ 100  
Not a priority Extremely High Priority



Scoring less than 50 on two or three scales suggests that while you may be considering change you are still uncertain. If so, you may need to reconsider counselling at the moment and work on other areas of your life. Maybe look at what you need in your life as motivation to address your issues and to put you in a better place for therapy.

Scoring 50 or more on two or three scales indicates that you are prepared to change. Now is the right time and you are dedicated to making positive steps to address your issues.

Now ask yourself three more questions:

Where am I now?

Where do I want to be?

How will I get there?



Having clear goals for your therapy will help you to feel a sense of direction and progression. Your counsellor can help you to stay on track, work with you when you experience difficulties and support you to achieve your goals.



## Finding the right approach for you



There is a ton of different therapeutic approaches. Some such as the Humanistic or Psychodynamic approaches are direct Talking Therapies, then Cognitive Behaviour Therapy or CBT uses lots of practical resources such as diaries, mood charting etc. There are also more creative therapies such as Art Psychotherapy, Creative Therapies or Music and or Drama Therapies which help us process or connect with our unconscious and can be non-verbal ways of communicating feelings.

Having such a varied chocolate box from which to choose this can be confusing and how do you know which one is the right one for you. The honest answer is that you won't know until you try. However, As varied as the different approaches may be they are all dependent on developing a therapeutic relationship that fits with you and your needs. So really, although the different approaches are different the essence of them all is the therapeutic relationship and this forms the basis of every single therapeutic approach.

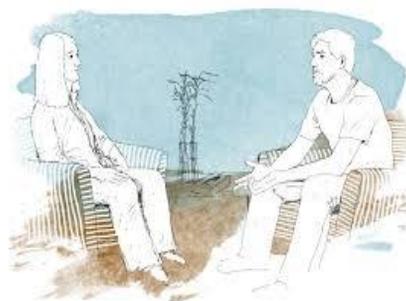


## Approaches in therapy

There are many approaches in therapy which can be overwhelming at first to think about which one is right for you. Some counselling approaches work with looking at thinking patterns first, others work more on how things feel within the body. The counsellor will work with the client to find the right fit for them .

Therapists may describe themselves as Cognitive-Behaviour-Therapist (CBT), Person-Centred or Art/Creative Therapists. Also different therapists have different expertise and experiences. It may be worth clarifying with your counsellor what their approach and expertise is but ultimately the right *fit* depends on you both developing a good therapeutic relationship.

It is important to remember that finding the right therapist for you is important, if the therapist does not feel like the right fit for you, if you are not happy with the therapeutic approach you have choice. You need to consider what you want from your sessions and if this can be achieved through your sessions.





## **Do I need to talk about everything?**

It is important to note that you do **not** have to talk about anything until or unless you feel stable and safe to do so. There should be no expectation from your counsellor to speak about anything until you have gained control over the feelings or symptoms you are having. Some therapists would say that it would not be right to do dive into discussing anything until you feel completely stable and able to function daily in your life.

This might actually feel frustrating to begin with, you might feel like you want to talk about everything straight away and therefore this idea of putting the brakes on and going at a pace might feel frustrating but your counsellor will work with you to ensure safety comes first.

**“Remembering is not required” (Rothschild, 2000) – you don’t have to talk/ remember the details to feel better**



**SAFETY FIRST!**



## The process of therapy

It's also important to acknowledge that **counselling is a process**. It takes time. Despite fears many seek counselling eager to quickly talk about what has happened to them. Like a bottle of fizzy drink that has been shaken to the point where it feels fit to burst. Counsellors are advised to take a more controlled approach; letting out a bit of gas from the bottle in stages, safely and measured. **There is no rush.**



Once engaged in counselling many start to feel the benefits immediately. Most people experience a relief in confidentially sharing with someone who is independent, that they do not know outside of the counselling and with whom they can build trust. It is useful to know that the process can also be challenging. Many report *feeling worse before feeling better*. Your counsellor will be on the look out for signs that you may be struggling, such as feelings of hopelessness, fears around change, increased feelings of dependence (on people, habits or substances etc.).

It could even be not feeling comfortable with your counsellor— exploring this with your therapist will help you both to move forward and make your time together meaningful and productive.



### **Applying the brakes (or breaks)**

Trauma expert Babette Rothschild uses the analogy of the coke bottle– to describe the importance of safety, containment and pacing within the counselling process.

She explains we don't want to rush taking the lid off when all the bubbles are fizzy underneath with the trauma, however if – as we do with a coke bottle we let a little bit of gas out and put the lid back on- containing each session eventually the lid could be taken off safely and without mess or explosion.

It is also important to explain that this is why we need to find in therapy a way of putting the brakes on- because as we have already identified through trauma knowledge; if the hippocampus (LIBRARIAN) feels overwhelmed it will not process the memories. Therefore if client and therapist can work on building the clients ability and knowledge of how to apply these brakes the sessions and the clients general ability to tolerate emotions might be enhanced.

When we say the brakes (or maybe breaks!) we mean being able to take a moment, and bring the ANS automatic nervous system back down to a calm state; using breathing, anchor memories, room spotting or many other techniques which will help to calm the system back down.

We are not looking to 'dive in' with trauma- we are not going to make a mess with this fizzy pop, what we want to do is work safely in a phased approach way, not to push through or rush instead to look at stabilisation, using safety and enhancing the persons ability to gain control over the trauma reactions and impact.



## Think about what you want to make in counselling

Thinking about baking as a metaphor for the therapeutic process; we have all our basic ingredients but in order to make our desired final product we need to know the specific method, measurements, timings and equipment that we need to achieve this specific goal. Having clear therapeutic goals will help you enormously and provide a focus for you and your counsellor. With this in mind, if you are looking to engage in counselling try to consider what you would like to achieve from your sessions. In order to clarify these goals it may be helpful to consider the following; How much time do you have? Do you or your counsellor have the right tools and techniques? Is this the right time for you to engage in counselling? What would you like to be different in your life as a result of the counselling, and how would you know that you have achieved your goal?

Working within known parameters will limit potential disappointment and help the success of your therapeutic journey.

- Ingredients
- Method
- Product



**Good counselling includes planning, clear goals (both long and short), structure and safety throughout.**



## **Counselling...**

It's not a magic wand  
It's a commitment  
An investment in yourself  
It can't change the past, but it can change how the past  
effects you now.





## First Assessment & Reviews

The initial meeting will be a first assessment where you will get to meet your counsellor, review and sign the contract and check we have your correct details .

During this session the counsellor will ask questions on your current well being and ask you to complete an outcome measure, which consists of 35 statements on how you have felt over the last week. These statements give a score at the end which are reviewed every 6 weeks to monitor the changes through counselling.

There is also a goal setting form which will give you the opportunity to tell your counsellor what you would like to be different as a result of counselling. Try to make these goals achievable and measurable . E.g. I would like to be confident enough to go out with my friends again. At least once a week.

Every 6 sessions there is a review. In this review you and your counsellor can remind yourselves of these goals and check your progress. You may even have formulated some new goals to achieve. The Outcome measures are completed again on each review, which gives you a chance to review your progress via a score. *Remember* the score may go up . Sometimes it can feel worse before it gets better, don't be disheartened by this.

At New Pathways we offer up to 18 weeks of counselling, at this point you may feel that you have achieved your goals you set in your initial assessment session. You may feel as if you are starting to achieve these goals. Sessions will work carefully towards a planned ending. At the ending session you may wish to look back over your outcome measures, review forms, artworks or thoughts and feelings through your journey in counselling.

We ask if you could complete an evaluation form so we can see if any of our services can be improved on to provide the best service possible for future clients.



## Depression– The Black Dog

Winston Churchill even characterised his depression as a *black dog* . The black dog can hold you back from living the life you want to live, it can fill your days with fear or despondency. “Doing anything or going anywhere with Black Dog required superhuman strength”.

See: ‘I Had a Black Dog, His Name Was Depression’ (WHO video 2012—available on YouTube)



One of the aims of therapy could be developing a better internal dialogue, one which is healthy and balanced. We could characterise this as your *best friend*

**My Best Friend:**



A best friend has your best interests at heart, they protect you, they want the best for you and they comfort you.



## **Top tips for preparing for counselling**

- **Think about what you want to 'make'- what do you want out of the counselling process– how could things be different and what would this look like for you?**
- **Have a clear set of goal (s) something that is measurable.**
- **Thinking about your own self care and resources (activities, enjoyable things, friends, pets, other supports).**
- **Don't be afraid to say if the counsellor is not the right person for you.**
- **Pace yourself– safety is key and stabilisation , therefore take your time, take care of yourself.**
- **Your therapist/counsellor will never expect you to talk about the detail of the event/events unless you are ready or want to do so.**
- **Be prepared to work with your therapist at putting on the brakes as its crucial that you feel reliably safe and stable.**
- **Give yourself some space after your session to process.**
- **Be kind to yourself, little steps can turn into big achievements.**





**NOTES:**



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**Never suffer in silence, please contact us...**

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New Pathways is a registered charitable company that provides a range of specialist counselling and advocacy services for women, men, children and young people who have been affected by rape or sexual abuse.

We have many years of experience and are widely regarded throughout the UK as a leading organisation in our field.

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