

# Frequently Asked Questions

## When should you seek counseling?

From childhood through late adulthood, there are certain times we may need help addressing problems and issues that cause us emotional distress or make us feel overwhelmed.

*When you are experiencing these types of difficulties, you may benefit from the assistance of an experienced, trained professional.* Professional counselors offer the caring, expert assistance that we often need during these stressful times. A counselor can help you identify your problems and assist you in finding the best ways to cope with the situation by changing behaviors that contribute to the problem or by finding constructive ways to deal with a situation that is beyond your personal control.

*Professional counselors offer help in addressing many situations that cause emotional stress, including, but not limited to:*

anxiety, depression	family and relationship issues
substance abuse and other addictions	sexual abuse and domestic violence
eating disorders	career change and job stress
adopting to life transitions	the death of a loved one
social and emotional difficulties related to disability and illness	

*"Good indicators of when you should seek counseling are when you're having difficulties at work, your ability to concentrate is diminished or when your level of pain becomes uncomfortable," says Dr. Gail Robinson, past president of the American Counseling Association. "However, you don't want to wait until the pain becomes unbearable or you're at the end of your rope."*

*"If someone is questioning if they should go into counseling that is probably the best indicator that they should," says Dr. William King, a mental health counselor in private practice in Indianapolis, Indiana. "You should trust your instincts."*

Joyce Breasure, past president of the American Counseling Association and a professional counselor who has been in private practice for more than 20 years, recommends counseling when you:

- Spend 5 out of 7 days feeling unhappy
- Regularly cannot sleep at night
- Are caring for a parent/child and you think about hitting that person
- Place an elder in a nursing home or in alternative care
- Have lost someone or something (such as a job)
- Have a chronic or acute medical illness
- Can no longer prioritize what is most important in your life
- Feel that you can no longer manage your stress

*"If you're not playing some, working some, and learning some, then you're out of balance. There's a potential for some problems," Breasure says.*

*Robinson points out you don't have to be "sick" to benefit from counseling. "Counseling is more than a treatment of mental illness," she says. "Some difficult issues we face in life are part of normal development. Sometimes it's helpful to see what you're going through is quite normal."*

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*This is public information found on the website of the American Counseling Association [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org)*

*This handout is provided by the Alabama Mental Health Counselors Association [www.almhca.com](http://www.almhca.com)*

## **What is professional counseling?**

Professional counselors work with individuals, families, groups and organizations. Counseling is a collaborative effort between the counselor and client. Professional counselors help clients identify goals and potential solutions to problems which cause emotional turmoil; seek to improve communication and coping skills; strengthen self-esteem; and promote behavior change and optimal mental health. Through counseling you examine the behaviors, thoughts and feelings that are causing difficulties in your life. You learn effective ways to deal with your problems by building upon personal strengths. A professional counselor will encourage your personal growth and development in ways that foster your interest and welfare.

## **Will my health insurance cover counseling?**

Many insurance and coverage plans cover mental health services by a licensed professional counselor including some Medicaid programs, CHAMPUS, and other government-sponsored health coverage programs. If you do not have health insurance, or if your coverage does not include mental health care or the services of a professional counselor, many professional counselors will work with clients on a sliding-fee scale or will offer a payment plan. Talk to your counselor about your options.

## **How long does counseling take?**

Ideally, counseling is terminated when the problem that you pursued counseling for becomes more manageable or is resolved. However, some insurance companies and managed care plans may limit the number of sessions for which they pay. You should check with your health plan to find out more about any limitations in your coverage. During the first few counseling sessions your counselor should also discuss the length of treatment that may be needed to achieve your goals.

## **Is everything I say confidential?**

All members of the American Counseling Association subscribe to the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice which require counselors to protect the confidentiality of their communications with clients. Most state licensure laws also protect client confidentiality. As a client, you are guaranteed the protection of confidentiality within the boundaries of the client/counselor relationship. Any disclosure will be made with your full written, informed consent and will be limited to a specific period of time. The only limitations to confidentiality occur when a counselor feels that there is clear and imminent danger to you or to others, or when legal requirements demand that confidential information be disclosed such as a court case. Whenever possible, you will be informed before confidential information is revealed.

Together you and your counselor will set goals, work toward achieving them, and assess how well you are actually meeting them. Counseling can help you maximize your potential and make positive changes in your life. Finally, remember that counseling may be hard work at times but change and progress do happen. A professional counselor can provide the help and support to help you master the challenges of life.

## **How do I find a counselor?**

There are many different ways to locate a professional counselor. Some common ways include:

The National Board for Certified Counselors referral service (phone NBCC at 336-547-0607 between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, Monday through Friday to find a certified counselor in your area)

The yellow pages listed under counselor, marriage and family counselors, therapist or mental health	Recommendations from trusted friends
Referral from your physician	Community mental health agencies
Crisis hotlines	Hospitals
Local United Way information & referral service	Referral from clergy
Child protective services	
Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)	