

## Some Questions Answered

1. Am I "bad" or "mad" or a failure if I seek counselling?

### Reply

It would be unusual for anyone to go through life without facing any problems or crises. Choosing to have counselling may, in fact, mean that you are already on your way to coping with your difficulty.

2. How long should I need counselling?

### Reply

If you don't feel that you are getting anywhere, it may mean that you need someone else.

2. Can I get financial assistance to see a counsellor?

### Reply

You can contact NZ Income Support Service for financial assistance (it's what they call a Disability Allowance). If you have been sexually abused, ACC funding is available through your doctor.

4. Do counsellors know all there is to know about people, problems and relationships?

### Reply

Some counsellors have had a lot of experience and may possess a wide range of skills. However, you should keep in mind that nobody knows it all and not every counsellor will have the skills to help you.

5. Do counsellors tell me what to do and "solve" my problems for me?

### Reply

In a good counselling relationship both counsellor and client work together actively in partnership. The best practitioners will see themselves as working with you to increase your ability to solve your own difficulties.

6. Do counsellors have my best interests at heart?

### Reply

Some counsellors may be more concerned with their reputations than your well-being. Let your own experience be your guide.

7. Are counsellors who have more qualifications better?

### Reply

Qualifications are no guarantee of what values, attitudes or skills the counsellor holds. Again, let your experience be your guide. If you feel you are getting nowhere, let the counsellor know and discuss other options.

8. Do all counsellors understand a woman's/man's experience?

### Reply

Every person is unique. Some do share similar experiences, however some experiences are unique. Male counsellors can never know what it is like to be a woman and female counsellors can never know what it is like to be a man.

9. Are feminist counsellors anti-male?

### Reply

Counsellors with a feminist approach are not anti-men, anti-motherhood or anti-homemaking. However, they do encourage people not to be "door mats".

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**Te Whatu Ora**

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# CHOOSING A COUNSELLOR

## A Consumer Guide

Wanting counselling simply means you are seeking help from someone to sort through a problem you may (or may not) have.

It doesn't mean you are "bad" or "mad" or have failed in any way.

Choosing a counsellor who is right for you and with whom you feel comfortable is important.

This will influence how successful the counselling is.

## **When choosing a counsellor ...**

It is worth taking the time to find someone whose training, style and personality are suited to what you need.

You have the right to shop around.

Ask others who have had positive counselling experiences.

## **These are some of the things you may want to ask about ...**

- how many sessions may be required
- the length of visit
- qualifications
- cultural beliefs and values
- agency or personal orientation and philosophy
- cost: you may want a counsellor who offers sliding fee scales, who is willing to barter services or is able to advise and help in obtaining financial assistance (such as ACC, Work and Income New Zealand)
- attitudes towards men, women and children
- counsellor's goals
- the way in which the counsellor works - such as the "model" they use (long-term short-term, psychoanalytic, psychodramatic or eclectic etc.)

## **You are entitled to a counsellor who will be ...**

- Someone you can trust and with whom you will feel comfortable talking about the most intimate details of your life.
- Non-judgemental - who will not blame you directly or indirectly for the problem.
- Respectful and considerate.
- Sensitive and warm.
- Compassionate, genuine and honest.
- Someone who will try to see things from your point of view.
- Someone whose ideas make sense to you and who works in a partnership with you.
- Someone you like.
- You have the right to choose whether you go alone, with your partner, or with other family members.

## **Two important issues for you to think over ...**

To sort out your problems you sometimes have to consider what choices you have in order to make changes.

- what choices do you have?
- changes can often mean painful decisions
- change does not occur automatically and it will affect other people in your life.

You and your counsellor will need to sort out how long you will work together.

## **Why choose a woman/man counsellor?**

Women and men have different lives, different psychological and physical development, different realities and different ways of seeing the world. Women counsellors should therefore be more able to relate to another woman's experience and men counsellors to another man's experience.

Counsellors with a balanced approach should recognise the imbalance of power in the client-counsellor relationship and seek to redress this imbalance. They should also try to use respectfully the power they do have.

Counsellors with a holistic approach should recognise the effect that different influences have upon our emotional wellbeing, such as finances, abuse and sexual violence, work (or lack of it), social conditioning and physical health problems.

## **REMEMBER - you are entitled to ...**

- refuse any treatment
- change your mind about anything
- seek a second opinion
- ask about other counselling options

A good counsellor should not feel threatened by such a request.

Adapted from a pamphlet prepared by Feminist Social Workers Committee on Counselling with alterations by The Health Alternatives for Women, PO Box 884, Christchurch, and the Family Health Counselling Service of Healthlink South.