

Introduction to Counselling

What is counselling or psychotherapy?

- Counselling is providing advice, ideas, or opinions on the behaviours and thinking (decisions) of another. It doesn't require formal training, though the term is often used to describe the same process known as psychotherapy. Counselling could take place in a single session.
- Psychotherapy, or simply therapy (relating to mental health), is considered a form of talking cure. Saying someone is a therapist carries the idea that the individual has received formal training; there are many different schools and strategies which affect *how* therapy is done. Therapy is viewed as an intentional process.

How does therapy work?

- First of all, it doesn't always. Clients need to know this going in, though trained therapists can give realistic feedback about their own abilities. While psychology, upon which psychotherapy is much based, is a science, it is a *human* science. Like humans themselves, it has much to say generally but how it applies to individuals requires investigation, adaptation, and creativity – perhaps it is best thought of as a science *and* as an art.
- “Our [psychology’s] approach to the problems of the mind? Not a science. Not yet, at least. We haven’t arrived at two plus two. If we had, I would solve every case that walked in that door. I would know, in case of depression, do A, B, C, and it would always work. There would be laws that never changed, and that would be science. ... It’s not a science. It’s a collection of things you can try, most of which have worked before more than once, and, having worked in more than one case, are worth trying again.” (Cody McFadyen, *Shadow Man*)
- In “The Great Psychotherapy Debate” (2001) by Bruce Wampold, he apparently notes:
 1. “psychotherapy is indeed effective,
 2. the type of treatment is *not* a factor,
 3. the theoretical bases of the techniques used, and the strictness of adherence to those techniques are both *not* factors,
 4. the therapist's strength of belief in the efficacy of the technique *is* a factor,
 5. the personality of the therapist is a *significant* factor,
 6. the alliance between the patient(s) and the therapist (meaning affectionate and trusting feelings toward the therapist, motivation and collaboration of the client, and empathic response of the therapist) is a *key* factor.”

What type of counsellor are you seeking?

This column differs in its focus on how to deal with more serious mental health issues.

Psychiatrist: This is a medical doctor who is trained to deal with mental disorders/illness. They typically provide medical and/or psychopharmacological interventions for dealing with problems. There are differing areas of specialization.

Those in this column generally differ in terms of their training level and focus. This affects how they approach mental health, emotional, and other issues.

Psychologist: In Alberta, this requires at least a master degree. Psychologists have been trained to administer and interpret certain types of standardized tests.

Therapist: There are many areas of specialty, each requiring specific education, often meaning an advanced degree in how to provide counselling.

Social Worker: As the name indicates, this area of focus is concerned with improving society. To do so however, many deal with people in ways difficult to see as different from counsellors' work.

(Life) Coach: Such coaches have taken courses/ programmes to help clients make and reach personal goals. They are not therapists and do not receive training in human psychology. No advanced education is required.

Spiritual Director: A spiritual director assists with one's relationship to God and growth in holiness.

How much does counselling cost?

- The darker the shading above, the more expensive sessions will be. Some spiritual direction is provided for free. Psychiatrists can charge hundreds of dollars.

Marriage & family therapists, like most counsellors, can deal with commonly presented issues (*e.g.*, depression), but are especially trained to understand the dynamics of human relationships.