



Counselling for children and young people - what parents need to know

What is counselling?

Counselling is a way of helping people with different kinds of personal problems. Counsellors work with a wide range of concerns including anxiety, depression, bereavement, loneliness, self-esteem, difficulties in relationships, self-injury and eating problems.

It is based on the building of a trusting relationship between the counsellor and their client and it can enable people to talk about their experiences and to make sense of them. Counselling can also allow people to express difficult feelings and to learn how to manage them in a helpful way. Counsellors are trained to listen thoughtfully and carefully to people's problems without judging or criticising them. They do not give advice, but support their clients to make positive decisions for themselves.

What is the difference between counselling and psychotherapy?

There is considerable overlap between the two and many similar skills are used in both approaches. A great deal depends on the training of different counsellors and psychotherapists, on their experience and what they hope to achieve. In general, psychotherapy may take longer and involve greater exploration of someone's past experiences in order to make sense of their present life.

Is my child seeing someone who is properly trained?

The main accrediting body for counsellors is the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), and it is advisable to check that your child's counsellor has either

completed a training course accredited by the BACP or that they have personal BACP accreditation. In order to achieve personal accreditation, a counsellor will have been thoroughly assessed and will have had considerable experience of providing counselling, under close supervision.

The main registering body for psychotherapists, that is the organisation which approves the qualifications of practitioners, is the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP). All accredited and registered counsellors and psychotherapists adhere to a strict code of professional ethics.

What if my child says private things about my family?

It is important that your child feels free to talk about experiences in the family that may be troubling or confusing. It matters that you give approval to your child to talk to the counsellor. It is understandable that you might feel worried about what your child may wish to talk about in their counselling. However, you should bear in mind that the strict code of ethics that counsellors follow includes clauses about confidentiality. The counsellor is not there to judge you or anyone else in your family, their sole purpose is to help your child to manage their problems and to try to resolve them in a positive way.

Can I ask my child about the counselling sessions?

The counselling relationship is very private and personal, and each child will respond differently to it. Some children may wish to talk to their parents about the sessions, while others,

especially teenagers, may wish to keep the content of the sessions to themselves. It is important to be guided by your child and to respect these individual differences. There may be times when your child seems more upset following a counselling session, and this may be because they have been talking about painful feelings. Showing sensitivity to their distress, while also respecting their right to privacy, is a difficult but important balance for parents to achieve.

Can I ask my child's counsellor how the sessions are going?

It is natural that you will want to know how your child is getting on in their counselling. Some counsellors may arrange to meet with you periodically to review progress. They will only do this with your child's consent and knowledge of what is to be discussed. It is important to remember that the counsellor will have agreed to a confidential relationship with your child and has a duty to safeguard confidentiality. The only very rare exception to this would be if the counsellor thought that your child was at serious risk of harming themselves or others.

How long will my child need to see a counsellor for?

The time period is usually decided on at the end of the first meeting between the counsellor and their client. Many counsellors work for short fixed-term periods such as six or 12 weeks, although some work in a more open-ended way, continuing to provide sessions until the client feels ready to leave.

Where do I go to find a counsellor for my child?

Your GP or your child's school will be able to give you details of local counselling services for young people. Counselling is sometimes available in schools and may also be provided in youth clubs and advice centres for young people. Your GP could also refer your child to the local child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS), although not all CAMHS offer a counselling service.

Other agencies you could contact

Association of Child Psychotherapists (ACP)

Tel: 020 8458 1609 (Mon-Fri 10am-5pm)
Email: acp@dial.pipex.com
Website: www.acp.uk.net

Provides details of child psychotherapists in your area either working within the NHS or privately.

British Association of Psychotherapists (BAP)

Tel: 020 8452 9823
Email: mail@bap-psychotherapy.org
Website: www.bap-psychotherapy.org

Provides psychotherapy services for adults, adolescents and children.

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

BACP House
35-37 Albert Street
Rugby
Warwickshire CV21 2SG
Tel: 0870 443 5252 (Mon-Fri 8.45am-5pm)
Email: bacp@bacp.co.uk
Website: www.bacp.co.uk

Provides details of local counselling organisations, and the names, qualifications and accreditations of private counsellors in your area.

United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP)

Tel: 020 7436 3002 (Mon-Fri 9am-5pm)
Email: ukcp@psychotherapy.org.uk
Website: www.psychotherapy.org.uk

Holds a national register of psychotherapists and can give details of private psychotherapists in your area who meet training requirements specified by UKCP and abide by its ethical guidelines.

Youth Access

Tel: 020 8772 9900 (Mon-Fri 9am-1pm, 2pm-5pm)
Email: admin@youthaccess.org.uk
Website: www.youthaccess.org.uk

Provides details of local advice, information and counselling services for 10-25 year olds. Also refers young people to free services such as drop-in centres.

YoungMinds

102-108 Clerkenwell Road
London EC1M 5SA
Tel: 020 7336 8445
Fax: 020 7336 8446
Parents Information Service: 0800 018 2138 (Mon & Fri 10am-1pm, Tues-Thurs 1pm-4pm)
Email: enquiries@youngminds.org.uk
Website: www.youngminds.org.uk

YoungMinds is the national charity committed to improving the mental health of all babies, children and young people. YoungMinds Parents Information Service is a free confidential telephone service providing information, advice and details of other national/local services (including CAMHS) to any adult with concerns about the mental health of a child or young person.

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