

What is Counselling and Psychotherapy?

Counselling and psychotherapy are professional activities that utilise an interpersonal relationship between counsellor and client to enable the client to develop understanding about themselves and make changes in their lives.

Professional counselling and psychotherapy:

- Draws upon psychotherapeutic and psychological theories, along with a set of advanced interpersonal skills which emphasise processes of facilitation. Such processes are based on an ethos of respect for clients, their values, their beliefs, their uniqueness and the right to self-determination.
- Requires an in-depth training process to develop understanding, knowledge about human behaviour, therapeutic capacities, and ethical and professional boundaries. Due to the explicit contract and in-depth training required to use a range of therapeutic interventions, professional counselling should be differentiated from the use of counselling skills by other professionals.
- Takes account of the cultural and socio-political context in which the client lives, and how these factors affect the presenting issues. This includes awareness and assessment of cultural influences such as age, development, disability, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, indigenous identity, nationality, and gender. Professional counsellors and psychotherapists value such differences and avoid discrimination on the basis of such factors.
- May involve work with current issues, immediate crisis, or long term difficulties. Depending on the nature of the difficulties, the work may be short or long term and may involve working with an individual, a couple, a family, or a group. This may occur in a variety of organisational contexts in the public or private sectors.
- Regards the processes of self monitoring, self examination, self awareness, self development, professional development, and ongoing clinical supervision as central to effective practice. Such practices lead to capacity to utilise oneself in the therapeutic endeavour.

Although counselling and psychotherapy overlap considerably, there are also some differences.

- The work with clients may be of considerable depth in both modalities; however the focus of counselling is more likely to be on specific problems, changes or issues in life adjustment. Psychotherapy is more concerned with the restructuring of the personality or self.
- Although both counsellors and psychotherapists work with a variety of clients, psychotherapists are more likely to work very intensely with more deeply disturbed individuals who are seen more frequently over a long period of time.
- Counsellors are more likely to work in specialised areas where specialised knowledge and method are needed eg grief and bereavement counselling, school counselling, HIV counselling, addictions counselling, marital and family counselling.

At advanced levels of training, counselling has greater overlap with psychotherapy than at the foundation levels.

Originally prepared by a working party chaired by Dr Jan Grant, Edith Cowan University, and adopted at the 1997 conference of the Standing Conference of Educators and Trainers in Counselling and Psychotherapy, later to become PACFA.