

Welcome to Therapy! Now What??

The counseling process involves the counselor and client exploring together places or situations where the client feels stuck, dissatisfied, or is experiencing pain. The process begins with the counselor coming to an understanding of each individual whose life is being affected by the “problem.” This requires the counselor’s growing awareness of how clients view themselves, as well as how they view the people who they are in relationships with. Together, clients and counselor will examine processes and patterns which are related to a client’s concerns. In addition, counselor and client will seek out together new processes which can improve the client’s situation or experience.

It is important that clients feel as *comfortable* as possible during counseling. For that reason, it’s best to let your counselor know about any discomfort you may experience in counseling. It also helpful for the client to ask questions, as process moves forward. Good counseling involves a *good, working, partnership* between counselor and client. From a counselor’s perspective, there are no “dumb” or “off limit” questions. A client’s questions help the counselor to do a better and more efficient job, and that’s why questions are welcome!.

It is also important for clients to be aware that sometimes, discussing the details related to a painful situation can itself be uncomfortable, or even painful. However, a good counselor will pace discussions according to *the client’s level of comfort*. It is essential that the client feels *respected* throughout the therapy process.

It is also possible for individuals to experience discomfort as relationship processes begin to shift. Occasionally, feelings may become more intense before they get better. Also, it’s good to be aware that some clients will change their goals as therapy progresses. Such changes can occur in ways which a client may not anticipate at the beginning of therapy.

Sometimes, a client may even “sabotage” their own progress, in order to remain in a place which feels more “natural” to them (even though they are attending therapy for things to get better). Old habits are hard to let go of, but it can be done! A good counselor will avoid being discouraged or intimidated by “setbacks.” They are another way of “shedding light” on the client’s concerns.

Fortunately, there is always a real possibility for new, helpful changes, and for new solutions in a client’s life. When clients are sincere about working towards goals they are most likely to benefit from the therapeutic process. Of course, almost everyone has some reservations about counseling at first. So, it’s common for new clients to “save their best work” until after *after* they have developed a feeling of trust for the counselor, and for the counselor’s ability to help.

Being ready to change necessitates being ready to work (or at least being willing to explore). Change is not effortless (though most of us would prefer that it were). A good counselor will be concerned with trying to understand each client’s experience, and he/she will avoid blaming, shaming, or “put-downs.” A good counselor will want to be a partner and a collaborator, so she/he usually refrains from assuming the role of “authority.”

The counselor helps the client to cultivate a sense of *safety and trust*, because such an environment is *vital* for successful therapeutic work. This type of safe environment also helps to bring about more satisfying - more productive - and more fulfilling processes, perceptions, and relationships for the client.

In order to help clients make quicker progress, a good counselor will sometimes suggest projects for the client to try out between meetings. These projects should be tailored to the specific needs of the client(s). However, it’s best when a counselor does not become “pushy” about the completion of such projects. It’s really up to the client whether or not they choose to do such tasks. A good therapist will only assign them when he (or she) believes that they will help clients to meet their own goals, and to meet them sooner.