

What to Expect When You Start Counseling

If you are considering engaging in counseling, (also known as therapy), you may be wondering what to expect. It is common to have conflicting feelings about beginning counseling.

Many of us have biases or misconceptions about therapy that can come from various influences, such as the opinions of our family and friends, the culture in which we were raised, and even internet articles and social media posts we read. In this article we aim to demystify the counseling process and address common questions about the therapy experience, such as what to expect in your first session or what to expect in your counselor/client relationship.

What is counseling?

Counseling (whether conducted in-person or remotely via telehealth) offers a safe, non-judgmental, therapeutic environment to work on your presenting concerns, process difficult emotions and experiences, and receive evidenced-based support from a licensed mental health professional. Individuals seek counseling for various concerns, including: depression, anxiety, stress and burnout, grief and loss, relationship concerns, life cycle events, substance abuse, trauma, and more. Counseling sessions often run anywhere from 30-60 minutes and can be scheduled based on your needs and availability (e.g., weekly, twice a week, every other week).

What to Expect in my First Session (Initial Assessment)?

In your initial session, you and your therapist will get to know each other. Your therapist will ask you questions about what prompted you to seek out therapy and what you hope to accomplish in treatment. You will likely be asked about your presenting concerns and symptoms, any past mental health history or treatment, and your current coping skills and support system. In this first session, rapport will begin to be established, but the primary focus will be on gathering information that will allow you and your counselor to collaboratively determine an initial care plan and treatment goals.

Over the following counseling sessions, you will work collaboratively with your therapist to make progress towards your treatment goals.

In these sessions you will have the opportunity to:

- ✓ Share openly in a safe space without judgement
- ✓ Receive support and empathy for what you are going through and feeling
- ✓ Gain insight into your experiences
- ✓ Better understand your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors
- ✓ Identify and practice new coping skills



As you attend sessions, the therapeutic bond will continue to develop over time.

What will my counselor be like?

Every counselor is different, as they are people, too. Counselors also come from diverse training backgrounds and therapeutic modalities. You can ask counselors about their therapeutic approach and what treatment modalities/interventions they use when considering the best match for you.

With that said, all licensed mental health providers are trained in evidenced-based interventions to support you in reaching your therapy goals. Counselors are compassionate and empathetic experts who will partner with you to identify your treatment goals and help you reach them. Many report having a “calling” to the profession and are dedicated to helping you live a more full and meaningful life.

A therapist/counselor's role is to offer you insights into your experience and strategies on how to handle life stressors, and to utilize their clinical expertise and evidence-based treatment interventions to reduce your mental health symptoms.

Easy Access to Counseling

Scheduling an appointment with a counselor through the EAP is fast and easy.



ONLINE:

Log on to your EAP portal,
guidanceresources.com.

- On the homepage, click the Connect Me Now button to open the services menu, then click Find a Therapist.
- After a brief assessment to determine your needs, you will be offered a list of local counselors. Those with the earliest available appointments are listed first.
- Choose a therapist to schedule your appointment.



BY PHONE:

Call your toll-free number.
(844.506.5374)

- A GuidanceConsultantSM will answer your call, discuss your needs, help you identify a local counselor you can feel comfortable with, and schedule an appointment at a time and place that work for you.

Contact us anytime for confidential assistance.



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