

Ask Your Therapist

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Who goes to counseling? What is it like to go to individual counseling? What happens during the time you are there? What do you talk about? Who can find out what you say there?

People go to counseling when they run out of ideas or skills to cope with their lives. Some people are depressed, some are drug or alcohol addicted, some are in abusive relationships, some are wound too tight, or can't slow down, or are frozen in their lives. Sometimes people have very private things from their past or their present that they need to discuss with someone outside of their own circle of friends and family.

What it is like in counseling depends partly on the problem you have. If you have an addiction, the treatment will be "behavioral" and focus on the daily avoidance of that problem. Very little time will be spent talking about your history or the "meaning" of your behavior. If you have anxieties or phobias such as an inability to drive over railroad tracks, no matter how out of date they are, you will be directed to focus on your body ("Notice when you begin to feel the fear.") and you will work out a step by step process to "desensitize" yourself to whatever is triggering that fear in you.

Other things such as depression, bi-polar disorder, or moods relating to a medical condition will possibly be dealt with by both a therapist and a physician.

Problems with school, work, friends, in-laws, etc will be talked about in counseling and these are some of the areas where your history, your family of origin and your life experiences will be discussed. It is common for many therapists to be able to incorporate several approaches to one client so that the person's desire to avoid her boss by sleeping through the alarm several times each week will be dealt with both by behavioral and psychodynamic (talking about what that means to her) approaches.

Just as each person you meet is different than anyone else you know, so are therapists different from each other. It is important that you are seeing a therapist whose approach is right for you (talk therapy, behavioral therapy, medication only therapy) as well as you feeling comfortable with that person. There are many other kinds of approaches (dance therapy, art therapy, hypnosis, nutritional therapy) so shop around to get the services that are right for you.

Who finds out what you have talked about in therapy? There are 3 answers to that question. The first answer is: No one at all without your specific and written permission! You have a right to privacy!

The second answer is: the court if a judge subpoenas your records. And the third answer is: your insurance company if you choose to pay for your therapy by using your health insurance. They are never given specific details but they will want to know in general what you are dealing with and how you are progressing so that they will continue to pay for your treatment. Insurance companies are for-profit companies just like a factory or a grocery store. Their product just happens to be health insurance. Remember that.

Next month: Couples Counseling.

Krishnabai, MSW is a therapist in Ashby and Wellesley Hills where she sees adults, older teens and couples. The core of her work is the discovery and expression of the authentic Self. She focuses on the identification, expression, and resolution of emotions, commitment to honesty and the use of remedial education and information.

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