

### **Secular counselling isn't always enough**

Secular counselling is aimed at facilitating psychosocial, behavioural and emotional functioning. Typically, someone has a difficulty getting along with others or in feeling satisfied with oneself or in meeting personal goals and/or societal expectations. Social workers, psychologists and psychiatrist generally offer this counselling. However, persons with other academic training can provide it too. The counselling is often known as individual, couple/marital, or family counselling and is provided from a non-religious perspective.

What secular counselling cannot offer is to repair one's relationship with God or appease concerns such as when one's preferred choice brings him or her into conflict with religious beliefs or expectations.

For example, infidelity is a sin. Secular counselling may repair the person-to-person relationship but cannot, by extension, repair one's relationship to God or one's faith in view of sin. For many persons whose behaviour has put them in conflict with their faith and religious training, they experience a shame and remorse that can go well beyond the secular relationships to place them at odds spiritually. This in turn may cause them to feel or actually be outside of their faith and/or congregation. They may withdraw from religious practice and their supportive community. Some of these persons may feel they will be held accountable in an afterlife and suffer. They carry a weight that next may undermine their day-to-day performance and relationships that secular counselling cannot undo.

For persons whose faith and religion has played a role in their lives, it becomes necessary to meet with their clergy or religious leader to address their sin and thus repair their spiritual relationship. This may require certain rituals such as confession and/or other requirements for atonement and for reconnection with one's faith and congregation.

In other situations, a person may experience a dilemma trying to meet their own needs in view of demands imposed by the expectations of one's religion. Again, by way of example, some persons have been abused by a parent but may feel the edict, 'honour thy father and mother', requires them to

continually subordinate their needs to their parents even when contrary to one's well being. Hence, meeting with one's clergy or religious leader can play an important role in clarifying religious expectations and finding solutions that mitigate such dilemmas. The issue here is not one of sin per se, but finding a way to act in accordance with one's faith against the backdrop of ethical, spiritual or religious requirements. This becomes even more paramount if an abusive parent appears to hold the child hostage to their demands on the basis of scripture. In such situations a secular counsellor cannot speak with the authority as one's clergy or religious leader.

Persons in these kinds of situations would benefit from guidance and direction from their clergy or religious leader or at least someone representing their faith.

There is at times a divide between those who provide secular counselling and those who provide pastoral counselling or spiritual guidance. In the interest of the person needing help, attention to secular and spiritual needs may both be necessary. Both needs if unaddressed can undermine day-to-day functioning.

If you are suffering, the result of a perceived sin or from being stuck in a dilemma where your decision may be contraindicated by your faith, seek pastoral counselling, the guidance and direction that can only be offered by your clergy or a religious leader representing your faith. Further, you may feel more at ease with faith based counselling rather than secular counselling. You need not be in conflict with your religious beliefs. You should be able to enjoy spiritual peace of mind as well as repair relationships person-to-person and feel good about yourself.

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Gary Direnfeld is a social worker. Courts in Ontario, Canada, consider him an expert on child development, parent-child relations, marital and family therapy, custody and access recommendations, social work and an expert for the purpose of giving a critique on a Section 112 (social work) report. Call him for your next conference and for expert opinion on family matters. Services include counselling, mediation, assessment, assessment critiques and workshops.