

Counselling: Knowing your options

When personal distress reaches a level beyond acceptability counselling is seen as a viable option to address the problem. This article describes counselling options.

Public Services

Public agencies are usually supported by charitable donations or government programs or grants and operate on a not-for-profit basis. Service is provided on a fee-geared-to-income basis. This means services will be affordable. While some public services may offer brief crisis intervention services with quick access, more often there is an extensive waiting list causing delay in receiving service. Further, the user has no say in the counsellor assigned. The background and experience of the counsellor can vary but most will have between 2 to 10 years of experience. Services are confidential, but there may be many other persons in the waiting room you meet as you come and go.

EAP

Employee Assistance Programs are counselling services contracted for by employers for their employees. These services are generally free to the employee and there may be a range in the total number of sessions available. As in public services, the actual service provider is assigned to the employee. Services are confidential and some service providers have policies to reduce the chance of people from the same company as one exits and another enters. If you require additional sessions beyond what is provided by the employer contract, you would pay for this yourself. It is important to know how many free sessions are offered and the cost of additional sessions if required. Most EAP counsellors usually have at least five years of counselling experience.

Third Party Benefits

Third Party Benefits are provided through an insurer. The insurer offers the policyholder set funds for service with some restrictions on the choice of counsellor. It is important to read your benefits card and phone your insurer before you access service to make sure it is covered and to learn about the restrictions. You will be responsible for costs beyond

coverage. Matters of confidentiality will depend on the service provider.

Private Counselling Services

With private counselling services the user has full choice in who they see. However, you will have to pay directly for service. Fees generally range from \$75.00 - \$150.00 depending on the experience of the counsellor. Anyone can provide private counselling services, with or without credentials. Therefore it is important that the user always ask about the credentials, education and experience of the counsellor. When counsellors are in private practice, there may be no means of accountability if you are not satisfied with the service. Therefore it is also important to know if your counsellor is a member of a profession and is licensed or registered. If the counsellor is licensed or registered, then they have a system of accountability and you have recourse if you are unsatisfied with service. Counsellors in private practice are often able to see people sooner and many offer a very high level of confidentiality as they have the most control of their practice and setting.

What matters most to you?

The factors you must weigh in making a counselling decision include: cost, level of confidentiality, access to service and choice. Depending on the issue you may weigh these factors differently. Regardless of option, you have the right to ask about any counsellor's education, experience, approach to counselling and number of sessions usually required. Depending on your situation and the nature of the problem, either option may be appropriate. The choice is up to you.

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Call Gary for your next conference and for expert opinion on family matters. Services include counselling, mediation, assessment, assessment critiques and workshops.