



Life Lines

Improving your quality of life, one step at a time

Issue #3: Asking for Help

Sometimes we need help and we aren't sure where to turn. Who should I talk to? Where do I go to get help? How does counselling work? You are not alone. There are answers and people who can help.

Here are a few frequently asked questions that will help guide you where to start.

Q. When should I consider getting help from a trained professional?

A. There are times that we all would benefit from assistance with life's challenges and difficulties. Sometimes it just seems that, no matter what you try on your own, it just isn't enough. Consider getting help from a trained professional if any one or more of the following circumstances apply to you:

- You are finding it difficult to carry out everyday activities: for example, you are unable to concentrate on assignments at work, and your job performance is suffering as a result.
- You are concerned about the impact that your feelings have on your physical health.
- Your problems don't seem to get better despite your efforts.
- You feel an overwhelming and/or prolonged sense of sadness and helplessness.

- Your actions are harmful to yourself or to others (e.g. you drink too much alcohol and become overly aggressive).
- You worry excessively, expect the worst, or are constantly on edge.

Q. How do I find a qualified counsellor?

A. Choosing a counsellor is a highly personal matter. Consider the following when you make your choice:

- Is the counsellor licensed by the province or territory in which he or she practices?
- Has this counsellor helped clients in the past with problems that are similar to your own?
- Do you have a preference for age, gender, ethnicity, religious identification, cultural tradition, etc.?
- Do you feel comfortable talking openly about personal issues with this counsellor?



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Once you meet with your counsellor, you should give some thought to the following:

- Does this counsellor understand me?
- Does the treatment plan make sense to me?
- Do I believe that this counsellor can help me?

Q. How do I get the most from my counselling?

A. You will get the most from your counselling if you:

- Communicate openly with your counsellor about the reasons you want help.
- Clearly define your goals at the start of therapy, in consultation with your counsellor.
- Put effort towards maintaining a good working relationship with your counsellor. For example, keep your appointments, give forethought to what you want to discuss before each session, and do your between-session assignments.
- Think about exceptions to the problem (e.g. What is different when I feel better?).

Q. How do I know if my counselling is working?

A. Most people experience a positive response to counselling when it first begins. But if you feel that you are not making noticeable progress after a few sessions, you should discuss this with your counsellor. In similar fashion, your counsellor should initiate this conversation with you if he or she feels that progress is not being attained.

A good indication of progress is whether you feel you are moving towards your counselling goals. If you have something to evaluate your progress against (e.g. reducing the frequency and severity of panic attacks, improving communication with your spouse, reducing thoughts of hopelessness) that will help you assess the progress.

Q. What are the kinds of trained professionals that can provide counselling and/or coaching?

A. There are many types of professionals who provide counselling and/or coaching. They differ in terms of the kinds of problems they counsel and their training background. In addition, counselling practices are regulated in Canada — this means that the requirements and licenses to practice are set by provincial and territorial associations. These same regulatory associations have strict rules about confidentiality and guidelines that tell counsellors how to keep your information private and how to deal with any exceptions to confidentiality (e.g. dealing with court orders to release information).

- A counselling psychologist, social worker who provides counselling, or clinical counsellor helps you address specific, emotionally charged issues in your life (e.g. job problems, marriage problems, bereavement issues, anxiety, depression). The more severe issues, such as anxiety, depression, or other mental health issues that meet criteria as a diagnosable mental illness, tend to be treated by licensed psychologists with a specialty in clinical psychology.
- Psychiatrists are medical doctors. They have completed medical school and then taken specialized training in psychiatry. They are qualified to diagnose and treat mental illness, and can prescribe medications for mental illness. They are particularly qualified for dealing with issues of severe mental illness such as schizophrenia or severe depression accompanied by suicidal intent.
- A coach helps you attain specific and practical goals or skills. For example, a coach may help you change careers, attain better physical fitness, or learn new parenting strategies.

Other types of counsellors include: Employee Assistance Professionals, Occupational Health nurses, and some healthcare practitioners (e.g. your family doctor).



Send us your questions, comments, and suggestions — lifelines@homewoodhealth.com

For more information, to arrange a counselling session, or to access any of your EFAP services, please contact a Client Services Representative. We are ready to speak with you 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in English or French. All calls are completely confidential.

1.800.663.1142

1.866.398.9505 (Numéro sans frais - en français)

1.888.384.1152 (TTY)

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