

Women and counselling services

Office for Women
Infosheet

April 2007

This infosheet looks at counselling services – types available, what to expect and what your rights are.

This infosheet was produced in collaboration with Women's Health Queensland Wide Inc., a service 'for women by women' providing information and education services on current women's health issues via the Health Information Line, free lending library, extensive database and internet access, leaflets, forums and community talks.

1800 017 676 www.womhealth.org.au

Sometimes you need to talk to someone about your problems. Past or present experiences might be making you unhappy, you could be concerned about your emotional wellbeing, or you might need help with a specific problem such as abuse or drugs.

A good counsellor will help you find solutions and listen, support, challenge and stand by you without giving specific advice. A counsellor can help you gain insight into your problems and assist you to develop new skills so you can make the changes you want. Counselling won't help unless you want it to. It is up to you to make decisions and take action.

Before you see a counsellor it is important to remember that some emotional problems can be caused by health issues. You may have a physical problem, problematic medication or be experiencing stress. Talk to a doctor first to ensure any health problems are addressed.

Finding someone to suit your needs

There are many people practising as counsellors and therapists. Some of the different job titles they refer to include:

Psychiatrists are doctors specialising in mental illness. Their treatment may involve medication, education and/or hospitalisation. Psychiatrists are not always better counsellors and their skills may not be appropriate for all problems.

Psychologists hold university degrees in psychology but are not doctors and cannot prescribe medication. If they provide counselling, they should have completed an appropriate course and be registered.

Social workers are qualified and can counsel, assist, support and advocate for individuals or communities.

While some counsellors may have a behavioural science degree, some may not have university qualifications. These counsellors can still be helpful to you. However, they must be willing to refer you to someone more qualified if necessary.

Other options

Family doctors and ministers of religion can also provide short-term counselling and support.

Support groups, composed of people who have had similar experiences, may be helpful, especially in sharing and overcoming traumatic experiences.

Courses in stress management, self-esteem, managing conflict and assertiveness can also be useful.

Other types of therapy, such as music or art therapy can assist those who find it difficult to express their feelings in words.

Women's Infolink

Women's Infolink provides an information and referral service about health, safety, financial security and equity issues for Queensland women. It offers information about Office for Women programs, seminars, events, grants, fact sheets and publications.

Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm

Women's Infolink 1800 177 577

www.women.qld.gov.au

Telephone Translator Service 13 14 50

TTY (07) 3877 8226

Infosheet series

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How to find what you need

Finding a counsellor that is right for you is an important part of starting therapy. People you know may be able to recommend a good counsellor. Ask them about the actual process and make sure you are comfortable with that approach.

Your doctor, Community Health or Women's Health Centres can provide initial support to help you assess your needs and find an appropriate referral.

What to look for

A good counsellor should believe you, have information to help you, and allow you to experience the whole range of your emotions. They should never underestimate your experiences and their effect on you. They should help you to find and use your own strength, while respecting your abilities and limitations. They will inform you about the counselling process and allow you to make choices about your life.

If you want to check if the counsellor is right for you, set up an introductory session to ask questions about the counsellor's goals, methods, training, fees and attitudes, and see if they have been trained in your special area of concern.

Fees

The cost of seeing a counsellor will vary. If cost is an issue, some counselling services provide counselling for a reduced, means-tested fee or sliding scale fee. High fees do not necessarily mean better service.

Fees for some psychologists and psychiatrists are partially refundable by Medicare. Some private health care funds cover the cost of counselling. Check costs before you start – ask your doctor or health care fund if you are eligible for rebates, and check cancellation fees.

Your specific needs

Not every counsellor will be right for you. For example:

- Would you prefer a female or male counsellor?

- Would you prefer someone from your own cultural background?
- Is the counsellor skilled in the particular issue you want to address?
- Is the counsellor's age important to you?
- How far do you have to travel? Is telephone counselling an option?

Consumer rights

You have the right to:

- decide when to begin and end counselling
- be treated with respect, care, consideration and dignity
- confidentiality – your counsellor should not talk or write about you without your permission
- refuse experimental treatment, research requests, or to have students present
- feel safe – you should never feel compromised or unsafe because of unwanted or inappropriate comments, suggestive remarks or behaviours. No counsellor should ever form a sexual relationship with you.

What to do if problems arise

You may feel there is a misunderstanding, a lack of progress or that your rights have been abused. If possible, talk to your counsellor about how you feel. You can ask for more information, challenge your counsellor on their aims or attitudes, or discuss what you both think about your progress. You may need to clarify your counselling plans and goals.

If problems occur, it is a good idea to keep notes about conversations and copies of any letters as it could be valuable evidence if you wish to make a complaint.

If problems persist, leave and consider seeking a new counsellor.

Making a complaint

If you are still unhappy with the situation, you may need to speak with a supervisor or the person in charge.

You may want to contact a complaint service listed below, a counsellor's registration board or professional body or a women's health or legal service.

Contacts

Women's Infolink

For referral to a service nearest to you.
1800 177 577

Office for Women 'Find a Service'

Online service locator of more than 2000 government and community services for women. www.women.qld.gov.au/findaservice

Women's Health Queensland Wide Inc.

1800 017 676 (for calls outside Brisbane)
(07) 3839 9962 (Brisbane calls)
TTY (07) 3831 5508

Telephone counselling

Lifeline Counselling

24-hour service, 131 114

Salvo Care Line

24-hour service, 1300 36 36 22
(07) 3831 9016

Complaints

Health Quality and Complaints Commission

1800 077 308
(07) 3120 5999

Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland

1300 130 670

1800 numbers are free unless from a mobile phone and 13 and 1300 numbers are at local cost unless from a mobile phone.