

What is counselling?

Counselling aims to help people to explore and find their own ways to deal with the things in their life that make them feel distressed, dissatisfied or confused.

Counselling takes place within a relationship, where one person supports and enables another person to make sense of themselves and their lives, to develop and to make changes within their lives in a positive way. It usually involves sitting and talking face-to-face with another person in a safe, confidential environment where you can express your thoughts and feelings without being judged or told what to do.

Why do people seek counselling?

There are many reasons why people seek counselling, common examples are:

- To get things off their chest
- To make desired changes in their lives
- To make sense of things going on in their lives, or inside themselves
- To help cope with difficult experiences such as bereavement, loss, relationship problems, traumatic experiences, or sexual problems
- To resolve or find ways to cope with difficult feelings such as anxiety, depression, stress or anger
- To adapt to major changes in their lives

What is the difference between counselling and therapy?

In its broadest sense, the term therapy can refer to any means of resolving difficulties or disorders. The BACP uses the term therapy to describe the process engaged in by counsellors and psychotherapists, and do not make a specific distinction between them.

I use the term to describe what I do, because my own training was in counselling, and it is a term that many people are familiar with and understand well.

What is the difference between counselling and psychotherapy?

Counselling and psychotherapy are similar, and there is a great deal of overlap between the work that counsellors and psychotherapists undertake. The BACP argue that it is not possible to make a clear distinction between the two.

Although the two terms are often used interchangeably, some practitioners do not agree with this. In particular, the term psychotherapist is used by practitioners from a psychoanalytic perspective. Psychoanalytic psychotherapists are more likely to engage in longer-term, intensive working and to emphasise the importance of past experiences and unconscious processes in the therapy.