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Frequently Asked Questions about Counseling / Therapy

Q I don't like to bother people with my problems. Wouldn't it be better just to work things out myself?

A That's like having a toothache and not going to the dentist. The results are the same - you keep on hurting and the problem will probably get worse.

Q If I make an appointment at a mental health center, what will happen at my first visit?

A A specially trained staff member will ask you some questions & talk with you about what's bothering you.

Q Talk about what's bothering me? I can talk to a friend for free - why pay someone?

A You're right, if you have a good friend who understands what you're going through & is willing to listen you may not need a professional. But talking to a friend is often not enough. You may need a professionally trained person to help you understand what's really bothering you & what you can do about it. Your friend probably does not have the skills to help you do this.

Q How can just talking make problems disappear?

A When you're talking to someone who has professional training & has helped many others with problems similar to yours, that person is able to see the patterns in your life that have led to your unhappiness. The point to therapy is to help you recognize those patterns - and help you change them. Some people need both medication & therapy.

Q Are psychiatrists the only ones who can help ?

A No. A therapist does not have to be a psychiatrist. Many psychologists, social workers, nurses, mental health counselors & others have been specially trained & licensed to work effectively with people's mental & emotional difficulties.

Q Does talking to a therapist for mental or emotional problems always work?

A Sometimes it does & sometimes it doesn't. It primarily depends on you & the therapist. It is important that you share concerns in a serious, sincere, & open manner. Only if you are completely honest & open can you expect to receive the best support & advice.

Q What if I really try but I still don't feel comfortable with the therapist?

A There should be a "fit" between your personality and that of the therapist. Someone else - or some other type of therapy - maybe more suited for you. You can ask your therapist for a referral to another mental health professional or ask to see another therapist at the same office.

Q I feel like I could use some professional help but I'm worried about what I tell someone. Will it stay between us?

A Absolutely. Confidentiality is basic to therapy and you have the right to control who has access to information about your treatment? What you tell your therapist stays between the two of you unless he / she thinks you're a risk to yourself or someone else. Some insurance companies require certain information from the therapist as a condition of payment, but that information is released only if you give written permission. If you have other questions or concerns it is important that you talk to the therapist about them.

Q I don't have insurance or enough money to pay for a therapist. Can I still go for help?

A Yes. Many therapists, including those at community mental health centers, work on what's called a sliding scale. That means your fee is based on your income & family size. Fees drop to as low as \$ 5 a session & sometimes even lower.