



LawCare Ltd.  
Health Support and Advice for Lawyers

# Counselling



[www.lawcare.ie](http://www.lawcare.ie)

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## What is Counselling?

In today's stressful world, and particularly the business world, the effects of stress upon an individual's functioning both at work and home have become well recognised. Stress leads to a variety of physical ailments ranging from headaches to heart attacks, and can also lead to serious mental health problems such as depression.

Some corporate firms are now so concerned with the consequences of stress on their workforce that they provide counselling services for their employees. They recognise that helping people deal with stress enables them to work more effectively. A more practical step would surely be preventing serious stress by not overloading staff or expecting them to work long hours with little support, but for many firms it appears easier to "provide a solution" than to review the entire system and change working practices which have been ingrained for years. LawCare offers free seminars to firms and DBAC associations on the subject of stress recognition and management, in part trying to get the message across that employers need to care about the welfare of their staff.

Stress treatment is a growing market, and more and more therapies have emerged taking in many different philosophies. Stressed executives can now attend stress-busting rhythm workshops, or can call for on-site massage. They can be taught meditation, or buy stress toys with which to clutter their desks.

Research has shown that counselling, "The Talking Cure", can be extremely effective at combating stress and certain mental illnesses such as depression, especially when used in conjunction with appropriate prescribed drugs. Counselling can help with a wide variety of problems from addiction and eating disorders to low self esteem and bereavement. There are many types, and a course can fit into most lifestyles; some counselling and particularly life coaching can be done over the phone, for example. Where there is a minor mental health problem – such as mild to moderate depression, for example – counselling alone can be effective in helping patients who are wary of taking pharmaceutical products. It is little wonder that it is currently so popular.

## Does Counselling Work and is it Necessary?

Whether or not counselling works largely depends on what is expected of it. Counselling is not a magic wand which can make problems go away, but talking with someone who listens non-judgementally can often be helpful in discovering new solutions and finding the strength and self confidence to apply them. Counselling is really about helping the patient to explore the problem, think it through logically, address the issues that lie behind it and make their own plan to overcome it. It's not an easy cure either; it can be painful to examine perceived flaws, fears and issues, often examining problems which go back many years.

Each year around three quarters of those calling LawCare do so because they are suffering from extreme stress with which they feel unable to cope. Many have also developed clinical depression or other mental illnesses as a result. Generally, we refer such people to their GP and suggest they consider counselling as an option.

There has been some debate in the media about whether counselling is actually helpful. It was found that counselling for post-traumatic stress disorder soon after the traumatic event did not relieve the symptoms of PTSD, and some patients, particularly children, were re-traumatised by being asked to relive and review the events. In these circumstances it may actually be better to

ignore and attempt to forget the distressing incident in the immediate aftermath, rather than facing up to it. As the saying goes, time is a great healer, and the event can be remembered and rationalised much later, once the raw emotional shock has passed.

This issue aside, there is ample evidence to support the effectiveness of counselling for a range of problems. A study by Booth, Goodwin, Newnes and Dawson found that patients referred to counselling improved their average score on the Quality of Life scale from somewhere between “bad” and “moderate” before counselling to between “moderate” and “good” afterwards.

Another study by Curtis Jenkins had between 80% and 90% of patients reporting that counselling had been “helpful or very helpful.” This has certainly been our experience at LawCare. Although LawCare does not employ professional counsellors, we do keep a database of approved counsellors to whom we can refer callers to our helpline. Many of these counsellors have a connection with the legal profession; for example, they may be former lawyers, or married to a lawyer. The feedback we have had from LawCare clients referred to one of these counsellors has generally been positive.

Much of the effectiveness of counselling is because talking about a problem often helps to put it into perspective and provide catharsis. Based on this there is an argument that paying for counselling is unnecessary—all anyone needs is a concerned close friend with whom to discuss their problems. For minor worries this may well be the case, but not all problems are minor, not all friendships could withstand the strain, and not everyone has a close and trusted friend.

At LawCare we sometimes find that lawyers calling our helpline in a state of distress will no longer feel the need for professional help by the end of the initial conversation—the experience of discussing the problem, in confidence, with the LawCare staff member has done much to alleviate it. Many callers are referred on to a LawCare volunteer – a lawyer who has been through a similar experience and can offer a friendly listening ear. The volunteers are not counsellors but the work they do in just listening and offering sympathy and support can be of tremendous value.

## How Do I Choose a Counsellor?

At present anyone can call themselves a counsellor or psychotherapist, and there is no telling what damage could be done by an unqualified person. A counsellor accredited by the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy ([www.irish-counselling.ie](http://www.irish-counselling.ie)) will have to have had a certain amount of training, have ongoing supervision, and practise within IACP’s ethical guidelines. Many will also be happy to discuss the situation first – often with a free consultation - to ascertain whether counselling will be beneficial.

When choosing a counsellor bear in mind that as well as specialising in types of counselling, most also focus on helping with certain problems, so look for one which has experience in the area you need help with. Counsellors are listed in your local Yellow Pages under Counselling and Advice where the display advertisements may give the counsellor’s qualifications and specialisms. You could also contact the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy on 01 2723427 for details of counsellors in your area.

However you select your counsellor, it is important that you feel comfortable with him or her. If, at any point during the first phone call or initial session you find that you would not feel happy revealing your deepest thoughts and feelings to that person, you should politely end the arrangement and look elsewhere. In order for any course of counselling to be successful there needs to be a good relationship between the patient and the therapist.

## What will it Cost?

The cost varies depending on the type of counselling and the amount needed, as well as locality. The average is around €50 per hourly session but this is often negotiable. For most problems six sessions or fewer may be adequate, but a good counsellor will discuss this first and may offer a discount on any additional sessions required. Sessions outside normal working hours are likely to be more expensive, and very few counsellors will offer weekend appointments. If finances are a problem then counselling may be available through your GP, but there may be a waiting list and you may not be able to choose which counsellor you see.

## What Type of Counselling Do I Need?

There are various approaches and philosophies in counselling, and it can seem difficult to understand or choose between them. However, a good counsellor will always be happy to explain their approach and let you know what is the most suitable therapy for you. Generally once in a session you should be unaware of the technique the counsellor is using.

We asked five counsellors to write a piece about the type of therapy they offer. The following, (with the exception of the section on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) are their contributions.

### Counselling

*Contributed by Diana Parkinson*

Good therapy can transform your life; the process should be a wholly positive experience, encouraging emotional understanding, becoming aware of the unconscious mind, enabling clear thinking. There are many different schools of counselling and psychotherapy, but a good therapist will have the ability to adapt and integrate these to suit each client. Good therapy happens intuitively as a connection occurs between therapist and client where the therapist is able to clearly understand the client as fully as possible and to reflect back to the client the client's spoken and unspoken thoughts.

Counselling is briefer than psychotherapy which usually continues for a few years or more. Counselling may range from three to twenty or more sessions, depending on need. It is usually possible to assess how many sessions will be required at the initial assessment. Work related and personal issues can often see a rapid improvement in half a dozen sessions. Alcohol and drug related problems would usually require several months or more of consistent therapy. A similar time scale may apply to depression where medication is prescribed.

The outcome of therapy is hopefully that one's life is balanced, peaceful and content. Difficulties are dealt with so one can move on rather than building into insurmountable obstacles.

When we go to school we learn to read and write, unfortunately we learn little about our own emotional response to people and events. We now know that babies in the womb are absorbing information and will remember music and nursery rhymes from that time. As soon as we are born we need to please the adults who care for us otherwise we will not survive, we are totally dependent; so on an unconscious, automatic level we are absorbing our mother's moods, if she smiles at us we are happy, if she is cross, angry, upset, so are we, she is our mirror as we have, at that age, no idea of ourselves as individuals. So we imitate our mother, father, siblings, and friends – it is how we learn. Of course we haven't necessarily learned what is best for us, but rather what seems to suit others. This leads to frustration, dissatisfaction, sometimes anger. Therapy offers the opportunity to explore and decide for oneself how to be happy.

*Diana Parkinson is a counsellor, psychotherapist and hypnotherapist. She is also a drug and alcohol consultant and supervises and trains counsellors and psychotherapists.*

## Psychotherapy

*Contributed by Renée Cohen & Susan Whitby, Psychotherapists*

Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy is a robust form of the non-directive talking therapies, working well with a wide range of common problems. It differs from some other kinds of therapy and counselling in that the focus is mainly on the relationship which develops between the therapist and the patient which will almost invariably over time reflect all the patient's usual ways of relating to people in his life, including primary figures. By analysing what is happening in the sessions, exploring recurring patterns the possibility of greater and deeper understanding which can then lead to long lasting change is offered. The other focus is on unconscious processes which have such a profound influence on our behaviour. The aim is to bring some of these unconscious thoughts and feelings into consciousness. The patient is encouraged to say whatever comes into his mind (free association) and this is then interpreted by the therapist. Dreams are another important way to access the unconscious.

Psychoanalytic psychotherapy is therefore a more intensive treatment, usually requiring more than once weekly sessions. Usually it is undertaken on an open ended basis and some treatments can and do last for several years with two years being a minimum time to get benefit from the treatment.

Psychoanalytic psychotherapy can also be offered on a time-limited basis. In this kind of treatment the same principles of the developing relationship and an uncovering of unconscious processes will be employed. There needs to be a more explicit issue which the patient wants to work on. Not everyone will benefit from short-term psychotherapy especially if the disturbance is more deep-seated and long lasting.

It is very important to have a good assessment in which the patient and therapist have an opportunity to explore as many facets of the patient's difficulties before deciding on the best course of action. An assessment interview will usually last one and half hours and sometimes it

may be decided to undertake an extended assessment with these additional meetings lasting the usual 50 minutes.

*Susan Whitby and Renee Cohen are psychoanalytic psychotherapists in private practice.*

## Life Coaching

*Contributed by Dianna Keel*

Do you have enough money? Do you love your work? Do you have a great marriage? Is your life in balance? If you can't answer "yes" to these questions, maybe you could use a coach? The last few years have seen a spectacular growth of coaching. Business giants like IBM, AT&T and Kodak have eagerly embraced coaching. In the UK, most of the Big Five accounting firms and the Magic Circle law firms have made coaching available for all their partners.

Coaching is not a quick fix, nor is it counselling or therapy. Whilst there is some overlap, coaching really starts where therapy and counselling end. Coaching also has its roots in psychology but can be clearly differentiated. All listen and reflect. All use assessment. All investigate and clarify values. However, therapy and counselling tend to focus on past-related feelings and on the resolution of old pains and old issues whereas coaches acknowledge their historical impact but do not explore these in-depth.

Coaching moves the functional aspects of a person on to greater success and refers clients to therapists and counsellors for dysfunctional issues. Therapists and counsellors rarely give advice, whereas coaches are free to advise, make requests, and challenge the individual. Counselling and therapy are about progress, whereas coaching is about performance.

Coaching is a relationship where a coach supports, collaborates with, and facilitates client learning and action by helping a person identify and achieve future goals through assessment, discovery, reflection, goal setting, and strategic action. The coach becomes a silent partner in the client's life, an advocate and confidant. Although it is hard to believe, in as little as three to six months a noticeable and favourable change can be achieved.

For the right person in the right circumstances, hiring a coach makes a lot of sense. If people want to make sustainable improvements, they may find themselves making some changes in their lives. The continuous support that coaching provides can be invaluable. Coaching can be particularly helpful for professionals, who often lack a committed ally free of any personal agenda.

*Dianna Keel, LL.B. - UK representative of the International Coaching Federation - is a principal of FutureVisions, a professional coaching and development practice.*

## Hypnotherapy

*Contributed by Andrew Cunningham*

Hypnotherapy can be a great choice of therapy for someone who wants to make changes in a short space of time. The average course of therapy sessions is about five sessions. In my experience when the client wishes to make some change in their life, they make that decision and use therapy to help them through that change. Longer-term therapy, in my experience, seems to drag out that decision and makes change slower.

Hypnotherapy is not a magic wand which turns the client into a kind of robot. It is more about the client taking on suggestion on a deeper level than someone (a friend or spouse) saying "get over it" or "stop it and just relax". The client often needs to be "de-hypnotised" from his or her past experiences and old beliefs instead of being hypnotised to do new things. New healthier habits or attitudes seem to come through naturally.

I attract clients with a range of anxiety and stress related issues, performance anxiety, addictions and emotional problems. I also use acupressure, a clearing process where tapping instead of needles is applied to acupuncture points. This again is a short therapy which can move the client on quickly. Often a client feels that the problem is stuck somehow in the mind or body and that talking does not shift it. Acupressure is a good alternative for those who feel conventional therapy is not their style.

*Andrew Cunningham is based in Harley Street, London.*

## Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy is a branch of psychotherapy which has become very popular in recent years, and has been shown to be very effective. It works by looking at how the patient thinks (Cognitive) and how they behave and react according to these thoughts (Behaviour). It addresses in particular negative thoughts and reactions, often by breaking an overwhelming problem down into small pieces and looking at how the patient responds to each piece individually. The five parts are the *situation*, the *thoughts*, *emotions*, *physical feelings* and *actions*.

CBT takes less time than traditional psychotherapy (about six months in weekly hour-long sessions) and focuses more on the here and now, although past events may occasionally be relevant. The focus is on improving the patient's state of mind by examining the connection between their thoughts and their behaviour. Often, unprompted negative thoughts and assumptions in a situation can lead to negative emotions, physical symptoms and behaviour.

CBT can be done individually or with a group of people. Initially you will be asked questions about your past life and background and may be asked to keep a diary of your thoughts and behaviour. As you break down the problem into separate sections you will start to identify thoughts or behaviours which are unrealistic or unhelpful. Your therapist may be more pro-active in suggesting solutions and changes than in other forms of therapy. You may have "homework" to do to implement these changes. At each session you will review your progress, and eventually you should develop the ability to identify and question negative thoughts, and develop a more realistic and practical approach to your problems and issues in the future.