



“ I have the privilege of participating in the healing process. By leading people down the path of acceptance and forgiveness, they find meaning in their pain. ”

—Jennifer Bradley

What Is A Professional Counselor?

Professional counselors help people gain personal insights, develop strategies and come up with real solutions to the problems and challenges we all face in every area of life. As trained and credentialed professionals, they accomplish this by getting to know clients, by building safe, positive relationships and suggesting tools and techniques they believe will benefit clients.



Why meet with a professional counselor?

Life is rarely perfect. We all face ups and downs, and sometimes we all need some extra help in our corner. If there is an area of your life that you are struggling with, or where you feel you could use additional insight, or even just a partner for the journey, then working with a counselor may be right for you.

Working with a counselor helps you focus on your mental and emotional health, overcome challenges, meet your goals, and lay foundations for a brighter, healthier future.



How can a professional counselor help me?

Professional counselors can help with every area of a person's life.

The right counselor can help you strive for optimal mental health, meet wellness goals, or work with you on relationship issues. Counselors can help with academic and career issues, as well as adjusting to chronic illness or rehabilitation. Counselors work with people across the lifespan and address issues related to life transitions, traumatic events, and difficult situations.

There is no right or wrong time to begin working with a professional counselor.

Often, when we think of someone who is seeking mental health care, we imagine someone who has a substance use disorder or other mental illness like anxiety, depression, or bipolar disorder, but the truth is you don't need a formal diagnosis to benefit from mental health care. While professional counselors are trained to, and do diagnose, professional counselors also work with clients who are seeking to generally improve their well-being.

Sometimes, there isn't one life event that makes people want to seek counseling. Everyday life challenges like unemployment/underemployment, financial worries, stress from work or even just seeing a lot of bad news in the media can leave us feeling down, though we may not be clinically depressed or feel unable to cope. We all learn to take challenges in our stride and many of us find relief from everyday troubles through talking to friends, our partners, through exercise or meditation, or through faith.

Although more people tend to seek professional counseling when they feel distressed, overwhelmed or stuck and aren't sure what to do, or because they are going through a hard time, e.g. if they have experienced loss or trauma, you can benefit from working with a counselor even if you are in a period of your life that you consider generally positive.

What is it like to work with a counselor?

All professional counselors have three things in common, so if you choose to work with a counselor you can expect:

1

A client-centered approach that focuses on you.

2

A wellness-based philosophy.

3

A professional commitment to ethical and culturally-inclusive practice.

1

“Counseling is not just about helping people to solve their immediate problems; it’s about helping them to build a better future.”

—Cindy Goehring

A client-centered approach that focuses on you

A professional counselor’s first goal is to get to know their client(s). Professional counselors want to see your challenges from your perspective and strive to meet you where you are.

Expect your professional counselor to be interested in hearing about you and your life. A professional counselor is likely to ask you questions about yourself. It is important for your counselor to learn about all areas of your life, because what is happening in one area may affect other areas, such as your relationships or self-esteem. They will likely ask you about your hobbies, your relationships, and your work.

By creating a safe, non-judgmental environment, and actively listening, professional counselors help you to explore what’s troubling you. As counselors get to know you and listen to your concerns, wishes, and goals, they help you develop insight so that you can identify and get to the root of your challenges.

It’s important to understand that every person is unique and brings a wealth of experiences and diversity. Professional counselors prioritize your individuality, so no two people who work with a counselor will have the same experience. Counselors regularly utilize evidence-based practices based on research to ensure top quality care.

2

A wellness-based philosophy

Counselors are committed to helping you achieve wellness in every area of your life. Traditionally, healthcare has used a disease model, identifying and treating symptoms and their underlying causes. While professional counselors are trained to diagnose and treat mental disorders, they can also work with you to improve your overall wellbeing. Whether you are struggling with life’s adversities or just looking to live a better life, a counselor will approach your treatment with your mental, physical, and spiritual wellness in mind. Additionally, counselors take into account your unique culture and experiences. They want to help you understand what is holding you back from achieving wellness, and help you build the knowledge and skills you need to come up with real solutions and healthy coping strategies for the challenges you are facing.

3

A professional commitment to ethical and culturally-inclusive practice

Counselors are committed to ensuring that every person who seeks counseling receives ethical, culturally-inclusive service that benefits and protects every client.

We embody this commitment by following the [ACA Code of Ethics](#).



Is it counseling?

Is it therapy?

What's the difference?

You may have heard of terms like 'counseling,' 'therapy,' 'talk therapy,' or 'psychotherapy.' These terms are interchangeable when you work with a counselor. They all refer to the process that helps counselors get to know clients and allows counselors to build a relationship with clients. Throughout this process, counselors may suggest therapies, techniques or exercises that their clients might find useful to help clients achieve what they want to accomplish.



Counseling and therapy types

You may have heard of certain therapy techniques, e.g. cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), play therapy, animal therapy. Although counselors are versed in many research-based therapy types, because counselors are client-focused, when they suggest therapy techniques as part of the counseling process, they propose them based on their knowledge of clients and the belief that certain techniques will help them. Counselors want to get to know clients before suggesting treatment options, so don't be surprised if counselors don't define themselves by the type of therapy or techniques they practice right off the bat, or if they don't suggest any right away. For example, a counselor might say of themselves and the techniques they use, *"I am a compassionate listener who has helped many clients overcome distressing anxiety that has held them back from experiencing true joy. I help my clients uncover the root of their fears and worries and then help them learn to manage them. I work with clients to develop a treatment program which may include Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, meditation, introspective exercises, journaling etc. depending on what is right for each person."*

Counselors and *confidentiality*

Counselors work to keep your concerns as private as possible while adhering to the [ACA Code of Ethics](#), as well as federal and state rules and regulations where they practice.

Counselors have the responsibility to tell you, and give to you in writing, everything you need to know about the counseling relationship, rights, and responsibilities throughout the counseling process. This process is called informed consent and includes patient safety and privacy laws.

Where do I find a counselor?



Counselors are everywhere helping people on their journey to wellness. They work in diverse settings: schools, universities, community agencies, hospitals, private practice, and rehabilitation settings, to name a few.

It's OK to interview a few counselors before you choose one. To find counselors in your areas, you can call your insurance company, ask your primary care doctor, or search online. Some places to look are Psychology Today, Counselor Find, and GoodTherapy.