

New to counseling? What to expect...

Congratulations on taking the first step toward recognizing you may benefit from some extra help and support from a counselor. For the purposes of this tip sheet, we'll use the term "counselor" but you could also be referred to a therapist, social worker or psychologist. The guidance presented here is the same, regardless.

This may be the first time you've ever spoken with a counselor, for some people, the prospect of this experience can be unnerving. Even if you have had prior experiences with a counselor, a little "refresher" on what to expect during the initial meeting may be helpful as you anticipate what the first session will be like.

First and foremost, remember that you are a consumer in this process, if at any point you feel that the fit with the counselor is not a good one, it is okay to move on.

Our goal is always to find a good match for you. Only you can decide if the relationship is right for you and you believe that the counselor can help you with your concerns. It's helpful to have an initial conversation with the counselor over the phone to determine if you feel a connection and if he or she has the training and expertise to meet your needs. If the counselor is not available when you initially call, try to schedule a 5 to 10 minute chat at a later time. If the conversation goes well, make an appointment for a face-to-face, video or telephonic session. Keep in mind that the first visit is still not a commitment – it can merely be an opportunity for you to get more information and/or further confirm that the match is a solid one.

What to expect at your initial face-to-face, video or telephonic appointment:

The initial appointment with your counselor will probably be geared toward establishing a connection, getting to know one another, defining goals and providing you with a sense of hope for the future. The counselor should also provide his or her HIPAA (privacy) statement and should review the confidential nature of your sessions.

Questions your counselor may ask you:

The counselor will likely ask questions surrounding the reason for your visit. Be as honest as possible with him or her, keeping in mind that the conversation is confidential* and that the counselor is interested in helping you to feel better. Please remember that this is not an all-inclusive list, and each professional has his or her own style and way of approaching an initial interview:

- **What brings you in to see me today?**
- **What are your current life circumstances? (The counselor will want to know a bit about your family, support structure, work situation, etc.)**
- **Have you had any counseling before?**
- **When and what was your experience like?**
- **How's your health? What medications are you currently taking?**
- **How much alcohol do you drink? Do you use any recreational drugs?**
- **Do you have any family history of depression or substance abuse?**
- **What are your concerns? How have you tried to manage them thus far?**
- **What are your goals for therapy or counseling?**
- **How can I be most helpful to you at this time?**

Questions you may want to ask the counselor...

The counselor should be willing to answer your questions, so don't feel awkward about asking any questions that are on your mind. These may include:

- **What is your training?**
- **How long have you been in practice?**
- **What are your areas of expertise?**
- **Do you have experience working with individuals who have struggled with the same issues I am currently confronting?**
- **How do I contact you outside of my scheduled time?**
- **Do you have backup coverage if I need an immediate consultation?**
- **What is your cancellation policy?**

In addition, you may want to pay attention to the office environment. Does it feel comfortable and private? Some people find it helpful to write down questions that they would like to cover during the first session so they can refer to them during the meeting. Professional counselors are used to this and welcome the opportunity to work with clients who take this initiative.

Remember, this is your time. The counselor is a consultant to you and is there to help you sort through and understand current challenges while helping you make some changes in how you view and cope with these challenges. If it's a good match, great. If not, give us a call and let us help you find a different counselor.

Your EAP is here for you around the clock. Reach out to us 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Our website — EAP4YOU.com — offers a wealth of information, tools and resources available any time and professionals are ready to take your call at:

800-327-4968 (800-EAP-4YOU) or TTY: 877-492-7341.

*EAP counselors have master's degrees and are licensed professionals. Your privacy is protected by strict federal and state confidentiality laws and regulations and by professional ethical standards for counselors. Information you share with the EAP may not be released to anyone without your prior written consent, except as required by law (e.g. when a person's emotional condition is a threat to him or herself or others, or there is suspected child or elder abuse) or the issuance of a court order upon a showing of good cause.