

# **Introduction to Counselling**

**Chris Lindsay, M.Ed., RSW**

The following information is meant to help you to decide if you would like to proceed with counselling.

## **Privacy of Information and Confidentiality**

I take notes each time we meet, and keep a file with these notes, along with any other documents involved with our work together. The information in your file is your private, personal information. By law, I must keep this information secure and confidential. That is, it will not be shared with anyone, without your permission. Please refer to the separate handout entitled "Your Personal Private Information" for greater detail regarding the collection, use and retention of your personal information.

There are certain limits to confidentiality, which it is important for you to be aware of. There are four general situations in which I may not – by law and/or ethical obligation – keep your information confidential. These are:

- i. If I learn of a minor (someone under the age of 16) at risk of harm, I may be obligated to report this to authorities, for the safety of the young person.
- ii. If I learn that a person or persons (including yourself) are at imminent and serious risk of harm, I may need to take a number of actions, including talking with authorities, with the goal of preventing harm and/or maintaining safety.
- iii. If a court of law subpoenas information from your file, I am obligated to release it.
- iv. If I learn that another health professional has exploited and/or abused a client, I feel an ethical obligation to report that professional to their regulatory body.

While these situations tend to be rare, it is both fair and reasonable for you to understand the limits of confidentiality, prior to beginning counselling.

## **Fees**

My fee is \$100 for a session up to 45 minutes. Sessions up to 60 minutes are \$120. Additional time is rated accordingly.

I ask for reasonable notice – at least 24 hours – if you are not able to attend a scheduled session. Non-attendance, with or without late notice, will be charged a half-fee, based on a 45 minute session, which means \$50.

Fees can be paid in cash; cheque (made out to Chris Lindsay); credit card (I charge an extra \$3 to cover the processing fees charged by Square); or e-transfer to [chrislindsaycounselling@gmail.com](mailto:chrislindsaycounselling@gmail.com). At this point, I am not able to process debit card payment. Receipts will be issued, and can be used for income tax purposes.

I am a Registered Social Worker (Registration #426513). Most benefits packages cover registered social worker fees, typically up to a set limit (often around \$500). I recommend checking with your benefits manual, under "Extended Health Benefits," or calling your benefits provider before starting counselling. Not all benefits packages cover registered social workers, and occasionally, people have paid for an initial appointment, only to find out they are not able to get reimbursed.

## **Rights and Responsibilities**

My services are voluntary. Therefore, you are free to stop, pause, or limit your participation at any point along the way. Please do not ever feel obligated to participate in anything you do not wish to, or proceed further, if you feel you are finished with service.

You have the right to feel safe and respected at all times. You are never obligated to answer questions or otherwise participate, if for any reason you do not wish to.

If you decide to discontinue for any reason, please inform me at your earliest convenience. This is simply to allow me the chance to offer any scheduled appointment times to someone else.

You have the right to request access to your information. If for any reason you would like to review my session notes, you may request to do so verbally and/or in writing. Reviewing your file may not happen immediately, but should generally be possible within about two weeks.

Your responsibilities involve how you make use of counselling. Counselling does not typically work well when approached passively. In other words, sitting and waiting for me to tell you what to do tends to be much slower, and less effective, compared with active participation on your part. This includes active involvement during sessions, as well as practicing various tasks after counselling sessions.

### **Risks and Benefits of Counselling**

The benefits of counselling are fairly straightforward. You come to counselling because you want to achieve some kind of beneficial change. You want to grow and/or make improvements. One of our first tasks will involve negotiating and clarifying one or more goals which capture and define the change(s) you wish to achieve. Achieving part or even all of your goal(s) is the the most obvious benefit of counselling.

“Risks” sounds very dramatic. Please remember that you have the right to feel safe and respected at all times. However, counselling can sometimes feel uncomfortable. Some of the thoughts, feelings and behaviours we will discuss may not be entirely pleasant. In order to be as helpful as possible, I may raise topics to talk about, and recommend taking actions which you may not like or agree with. I encourage you to tell me when this happens, so that we can discuss how best to move forward.

Another risk is disappointment. While counselling can be very helpful, it is not a magic cure-all. When we negotiate your goal(s), part of that discussion will involve keeping the goals realistic. Making goals very specific and realistic helps to prevent unnecessary disappointment.

### **Outcome Focus**

Years ago, counselling was usually open-ended, and could go on for many years. This is not always necessary. Some problems can be tough and difficult to budge. It can require a fair amount of time and work to achieve satisfactory results. On the other hand, many people can achieve some or all of the progress they want within a reasonably short amount of time.

It helps to maintain an "outcome focus." This means identifying - in very clear and specific terms - the results you want to achieve. It also helps to regularly evaluate your progress together, and decide whether the goal(s) and/or the treatment plan need to be modified.

Try imagining this: you have completed counselling, and are leaving the very last session. As you walk away, you think to yourself, "I'm so glad I decided to try counselling. It was really worth the time and effort." What would tell you that those thoughts were true?