



Age Concern and Help the Aged **Down, but not out factsheet**

Counselling and Psychotherapy **Author: Judith Brech**

Challenges in later life

The later years of your life can bring rest, relaxation and fulfilment, but they may also bring challenges. You may have experienced illness, disability or have had to cope with losses amongst friends and family. Feelings of unhappiness, low mood, anxiety and exhaustion can be the result and this can lead to depression. Counselling and psychotherapy provides a place for feelings to be talked and thought about.

What is a counsellor?

A counsellor is a trained mental health professional. They will work with you confidentially to help you express your thoughts and feelings and make sense of painful and confusing experiences and/or relationships. It will allow you to find the best way to manage problems and make changes to your life.

What happens in counselling?

Counselling will normally start with an assessment session. In this session the counsellor may ask you some questions in order to understand your situation better. The main emphasis, however, will be on helping you to identify and explain the issues that are troubling you most.

Counselling sessions usually last up to an hour. The number of sessions may be agreed with the counsellor at the outset or, depending on your needs, this may be decided as you go along. If you are receiving counselling through the National Health Service, there may be a limit to the number of sessions that are available.

The aim of counselling is to help you to understand yourself better. The counsellor will help you to talk about the things that are important to you. Having someone listen to you carefully and sensitively can give you a sense of relief and help you gain confidence in finding a way forward.

One of the main differences between counselling and many other talking therapies like Cognitive Behavioural Therapy is that in counselling there is no pre-set agenda.

What is discussed during counselling?

There may be things in your current life that you want to talk about. There may be things from the past. You might need to talk about relationships with other people, both those in the past and in the present.

Counselling provides a valuable opportunity to review your lifetime's experience, with all

its successes and happiness and all its difficulties and losses. It can help you to:

- Make links between past painful experiences and current difficulties
- Identify and change unhelpful patterns of behaviour
- Help you to understand yourself better and in doing so, learn to understand other people better too

The counsellor will help you explore difficult issues but will work at the pace that is right for you. Counsellors do not normally give advice but can help you to find more positive and satisfying ways of managing things in your life.

What if counselling does not help?

Counselling is usually time-limited and can help to address many problems, particularly those that are short term. When there are more severe or long-standing difficulties, psychotherapy may be recommended.

What is psychotherapy?

'Psychotherapy' means a treatment that is based on talking. For example, this can include Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) or Interpersonal Therapy.

'Psychotherapy' is also used to mean a longer-term treatment related to counselling that offers the opportunity to look at issues in greater depth including exploring unconscious factors.

How does psychotherapy differ from counselling?

Psychotherapy is concerned with how we feel about ourselves – this is referred to as our 'internal world'. A psychotherapist is specially trained to make sense of all aspects of how a person communicates and relates. They would help you become more aware of your unconscious feelings that may be creating difficulties, both in your relationship with yourself and with others.

Psychotherapy sessions are likely to take place at least once a week and may go on for a longer time period than counselling.

Is psychotherapy worthwhile in later life?

Psychotherapy can be particularly valuable in the second half of life. Existing coping strategies and lifestyles may have become less effective as a result of the natural changes associated with getting older. Psychotherapy can help access underlying potential and creativity which enables a more positive adaptation to changing circumstances. Most of us rely on and develop our predominant strengths and abilities in the first half of life. However, in this process, other internal capacities and interests are suppressed and it is accessing these which can allow for new development in later years.

Carl Jung, the eminent psychotherapist, worked predominantly with older people. He said, 'The afternoon of life is just as full of meaning as the morning; only, its meaning and purpose are different.'

Related information:

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy
Telephone: 0145 588 3300. Website: www.bacp.co.uk.

British Psychoanalytic Council
Telephone: 0207 267 3626. Website: www.pschoanalytic-council.org

UK Council for Psychotherapy
Telephone: 0207 0149 955. Website: www.ukcp.org.uk

Further reading on psychotherapy

'The Art of Psychotherapy' by Anthony Storr

Other sources of help

Age Concern and Help the Aged

Many local Age Concerns provide, or can direct you to, a range of support services such as:

- Information and advice
- Day centres and lunch clubs
- Befriending schemes
- Bereavement counselling, depression support, person-centred therapy
- Transport to activities
- Exercise programmes
- A free benefits check
- Insurance services
- Dementia care

For more information, or to find your nearest Age Concern, please contact our free National Information Line on **0800 00 99 66**.

More information about our depression campaign 'Down, but not out' and our free resources and factsheets can be found on our website:

www.ageconcern.org.uk/downbutnotout

Factsheets in this series include:

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| What is depression? by Professor Carolyn Chew-Graham |
| The causes and effects of depression in later life by Professor Klaus Ebmeier and Dr Philip Wilkinson |
| Medication for depression in later life by Dr Robert Baldwin |
| Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) by Dr Philip Wilkinson |
| Interpersonal therapy by Dr Rebecca Mather |
| Self help for beating depression and staying well by Philippa Cuttell & Lisa Bracher |
| Thoughts of self harm and suicide by Dr Dan Harwood |

Depression Alliance

Provides information and support services to those affected by depression

Telephone: 0845 123 23 20
Email: information@depressionalliance.org
Website: www.depressionalliance.org

Mind

Provides information and advice on depression and campaigns to promote and protect good mental health for everyone.

Telephone: 020 8519 2122
Email: contact@mind.org.uk
Website: www.mind.org.uk

Mind Cymru

Telephone: 02920 395 123
Email: contactwales@mind.org.uk
Website: <http://www.mind.org.uk/>

Alzheimer's Society

Gives support to families by linking them through membership and provides information on Alzheimer's disease and other dementias.

Telephone: 020 7423 3500
Email: info@alzheimers.org.uk
Website: alzheimers.org.uk

Aware (Ireland)

Assists and supports those suffering from depression and their families in Ireland. A helpline is available as well as support groups, lectures, and current research on depression.

Telephone: 1890 303 302
Email: wecanhelp@aware.ie
Website: www.aware.ie/

Samaritans

Provide a confidential 24 hours a day helpline for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which could lead to suicide.

Telephone: 1850 60 90 90 (24 hours)
Website: www.samaritans.org
Email: jo@samaritans.org

CRUSE - Bereavement Care

Offers a service of counselling, advice and opportunities for social contact to all bereaved people.

Telephone: 0870 167 1677
Email: helpline@crusebereavementcare.org.uk
Website: www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Depression UK

A national mutual support group for people suffering from depression

Email: info@depressionuk.org
Website: www.depressionuk.org

Healthtalk Online

People's accounts of their illnesses and treatment, including older people with depression in the Mental Health Section

Website: www.healthtalkonline.org/

Royal College of Psychiatrists

Provides free mental health information and leaflets.

Telephone: 020 7235 2351

Email: leaflets@rcpsych.ac.uk

Website: www.rcpsych.ac.uk

Recommended Reading

Depression and how to survive it, by S. Milligan and A. Clare

Malignant sadness: the anatomy of depression, by L. Wolpert

Managing depression by David Westbrook