

I'm not really sure what counsellors do. What happens in a counselling or therapy session?

People consult counsellors for a variety of reasons. Some people require help in dealing with everyday problems such as work stress or relationship problems or in coping with chronic physical illness, while others seek assistance in managing their mental health. We will discuss with you the issues of concern to you, before working with you to establish the goals of therapy. In ongoing sessions we will work to develop effective ways of coping with difficulties and to make changes to patterns of thinking, feeling and behaviour where appropriate.

What is the difference between counsellors and psychiatrists?

Counsellors assist mentally healthy people to find ways of functioning better, in addition to providing interventions for people with mental health problems. Psychiatrists study medicine to treat mental illness, and may prescribe medication. Counsellors and psychiatrists may work together to assist clients. At the Liverpool Sexual Health Centre, ongoing treatment is offered by a counsellor. Some clients may see a psychiatrist occasionally for consultation and prescription of medication if required.

How many sessions will I need?

We will negotiate this, and it depends on the nature of the issues addressed. Liverpool Sexual Health is able to provide short term interventions. Generally this means a maximum of eight sessions. If at any time you decide that you would like to stop seeing your counsellor, please try and let them know.

How long do sessions last?

Sessions last for fifty minutes. They usually start on the hour or half-hour.

Are sessions confidential?

Brief notes on each session are entered in your file, and only staff directly involved in your care can access the file. Other staff at the centre may occasionally read the notes in order to provide continuity of care. These notes must be kept for seven years, after which you may apply to have them destroyed. Your counsellor or the file may be subpoenaed to court (usually only if you are currently involved in a court case). Counsellors are required to have supervision and may also discuss your case with other involved professionals in order to optimise your care. Confidentiality is limited in circumstances where duty of care overrides confidentiality. For example, if you indicate that you may harm yourself or someone else then your counsellor may need to discuss the circumstances with a colleague or supervisor, or with another agency, such as the crisis team of your local mental health service. Your counsellor is also required to report any risk to children, or if a very serious crime (like murder) has, or is about to happen. Except in an emergency, this would be done in consultation with you.

Information on services provided to you is kept on an electronic database. This information is collated across the centre and is given to the appropriate monitoring bodies, such as the Ministry of Health, with information relating to your identity removed. This information may also be used by the centre to monitor clinical practice. This database is also confidential and access is restricted to staff involved in your care. Further information on confidentiality in health is available in the Privacy Act.

It can be helpful to keep your GP (or doctor at the Liverpool Sexual Health Centre) informed of your progress. With your consent, your counsellor may contact your GP from time to time to let them know how you are going, and if you are attending the service.

What do I do if I'm running late?

We understand that people are sometimes late for appointments, and we appreciate a call to let us know when this happens. It is important to note that sessions still need to finish at the arranged time.

Is there any risk?

Just like any medical procedure there is some risk involved in treatment. Sometimes you may cover topics in therapy that are difficult and make you feel uncomfortable. This is not predictable at the outset, however, your counsellor will do their best to keep you safe and manage issues as they arise.

What if I can't make an appointment or forget to attend?

If you are unable to attend an appointment, please call. We appreciate as much notice as possible as these appointments can be allocated to others in need. If clients miss several appointments, their need for ongoing counselling will be reviewed. Because we are a free service, you may not always be able to get an appointment immediately.

My counsellor wants to refer me to someone else, and I don't understand why.

We aim to provide comprehensive care and treatment for our clients. Sometimes this means that we may suggest a referral to other staff at Liverpool Sexual Health Centre or another service. For example, if you identify your weight as an issue, referral to a dietician might be appropriate. Furthermore, if your issues cannot be adequately addressed in the number of sessions available, or if your issues are not best addressed at Liverpool Sexual Health Centre, your counsellor may suggest referral to another service for ongoing care.

What if I need to talk to someone outside my appointment time?

During difficult times, clients sometimes need to talk to someone between appointments. If you are feeling distressed, you can phone or call in to see the counsellor who is available on the day -9827 8022. This availability will vary.

If there is an emergency or if you are in crisis and need to talk to someone outside working hours, please phone

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| • Lifeline | 13 11 14 |
| • Mental Health Line | 1800 674 200 |
| • QLife (for clients who identify as LGBTI) | 1800 184 527 |
| • Sexual Assault/Rape Crisis Line | 1800 424 017 |
| • PEP Information Line | 1800 737 669 |

If you or someone else is at immediate risk please call **000**

If you have any questions that we haven't covered, please do not hesitate to ask.