

## WHY COUNSELING?

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John Pavlovitz states that sometimes when adversity strikes, we lie to other people and sometimes, we lie to ourselves. Has anyone ever suggested to you that you need to go to counseling or to therapy? Or, have you ever thought that talking to a counselor or therapist might be helpful? Then, you shrug off this idea and push it away. Why counseling? Why do I need a counselor anyway? I do not want to talk to someone I do not even know about my problems ...this would not be comfortable ...others will know ...think I am crazy ...think ... no, not me.

So, why counseling indeed? Did you know that many of the reasons people go to doctors could be prevented with counseling or mental health treatment? For example, stress is a causation or contributor to things we consider illnesses such as headaches, digestive or stomach problems, and many types of pain including back and joint pain. When we experience stress, regardless of whether it is sudden or prolonged, our bodies become tense. We increase our production of cortisol which becomes toxic and which increases inflammation. That, in turn, causes the physiological responses of headaches, stomach problems and pain which may lead to major complications of heart disease or stroke, even death. Therefore, it is essential to learn healthy ways of managing stress and coping with the stressors in our lives before the stressors and symptoms become overwhelming and control us. Sometimes, books, meditation and prayers are helpful and enough. Sometimes, it is not and counselors can offer additional approaches or perspectives.

Counseling can have a significant impact on your employment or career success. Did you know that research through various studies has indicated that the three highest predictors of employment success are early work experience, academic success and achievement and social skills? If you want to succeed in employment, it is essential then, to achieve in these three areas in your life: work in high school and college; develop your highest potential academically early on in your life, and, develop your social skills. Yet, for a variety of reasons, many people struggle in one or all of these areas which is why counseling might be helpful.

In his article, "Meaning and Mindfulness in Everyday Life", Michael Formica (2009, Enlightened Living), explains that we often become stuck in our everyday lives because we develop or establish unhealthy patterns. These patterns impact our relationships with family, partners, friends and coworkers in ways, often negatively. They may influence the choices we make as to partners, or jobs, or social outlets; or, even when we are not involving ourselves in social outlets, careers and meaningful relationships. We form these patterns based on our previous and present experiences and the information we have gained from those experiences. Our worldview is consistent of our beliefs, and values which then forms our thoughts, feelings and behaviors. These behaviors reflect on who we are and consequently, the choices we make—either positive or negative, healthy or unhealthy. Those choices can be anything from what foods or other substances we take into our bodies, what words and language we use, what activities we engage in, what careers we choose to do, with whom we associate,

and how we allow ourselves to be treated or interact with others. Again, by identifying the patterns we are living, we can make healthy choices about how we want to live the remainder of our lives.

Why counseling? A qualified counselor can offer guidance or reflection, or a new perspective for your consideration. A counselor should not be perceived as judgmental or critical. The counseling experience needs to be one of warmth and safety where you, the client, are able to look at and express yourself freely and openly, yet receive feedback and helpful insight into your behavior that offers the possibility of thought for growth and development as a person. In “how to Find and Connect with your Therapist” (Rayl, 2010), it is suggested that a bit of research and homework is done in finding a counselor. First, be certain that the counselor has the qualifications and credentials, and is on your insurance provider. This can save considerable frustration. The professional counselor will have this information readily available and will tell you. For example, you may not want to see someone who has never worked with addictions if that is your primary problem, or, you have the right to know in advance how much you will be expected to pay before you receive the bill. While looking for similarity may initially seem important, (e.g., the counselor must be male, the counselor must be Caucasian), you may find that absolute similarity is not as important as it initially seems and that, in fact, being open to a whole new experience is not only helpful, it is the best experience of your life. Counseling may be an entirely new experience for you, so why not with an entirely different person than your usual associates who will, likely, offer you an entirely new perspective. Having said that, asking a few questions may be helpful as well. For example, you want to ensure that the counseling experience is going to foster positive and helpful growth in you versus create further conflicts in your value structure. Counselors should not impose their own beliefs and values on the client. Although some may share, they should not tell you what or how to believe.

Now that you have decided to seek counseling, or have been pretty much been given no choice, make it a good experience for yourself. Try it for more than one session. It is important to recognize that the initial session is, first of all, generally uncomfortable for you and perhaps even somewhat for the counselor. Each person may be reading and picking up the others' discomfort. Any number of other things may have happened that day in both, or either, of your lives which just simply makes it awkward or seem strange, so give it several tries. Meeting your counselor for the first time is like meeting anyone for the first time and although we are humanly disposed to believe our first impressions, we need to be careful with that. Ask yourself: was it really the counselor, was it me, or was it the experience itself? It may well have just been a little bit of all three or the experience itself. Why counseling? Evidenced research indicates “talk therapy” has a higher success rate for treatment of depression, anxiety and all other problems than medications only. This is because our thoughts regulate our feelings, and our feelings regulate our behaviors, and, our behaviors regulate our choices. Our choices reflect what we gain from life, and, generally, what we do not.