

# CHRISTIAN MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELING

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## WHAT CAN I EXPECT?

**Sometimes it can be hard to cope with all of life's changes and challenges. If you are having trouble dealing with certain situations or emotions, counseling is usually helpful in finding answers and sorting things out.**

**How do I find a counselor?** Many professionals can help you find a counselor. You can ask your health care provider (doctor or nurse) for a referral or you can ask someone you trust, such as a pastor, relative, or friend. You may also want to check out mental health agencies in your area via the web or phone directory. If you are concerned that the counseling you receive might conflict with your spiritual beliefs, please be sure to seek out a Christian counselor. All of the counselors at Meier Clinics are committed Christians and integrate Biblical truths in their counseling.

**What types of counselors are there?** When you are referred for counseling, you may be referred to a psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker, or some other type of mental health worker. All counselors are trained in understanding feelings and behaviors and know ways to help people through difficult times. These professionals may also have additional training and/or experience in a specialty area, such as treatment of anxiety, depression, attention deficits, marital problems, addictions, etc.

Psychiatrist: a medical doctor (M.D.) who has graduated from medical school with extra training in psychiatry. A psychiatrist can provide counseling, but often focuses on the diagnosis and management of psychotropic medications that can help treat depression and other disorders.

Psychologist: has a doctoral degree from college and graduate school, such as a Ph.D., Psy.D., or Ed.D. A psychologist provides counseling and can also do special testing to diagnose and treat personality, emotional, and learning disorders/disabilities such as Attention Deficit Disorder.

Social Worker: a counselor who has graduated from college and studied social work in graduate school. A social worker has the degree M.S.W. or the certification L.C.S.W. or L.I.C.S.W. They provide counseling and often help people connect with other services they may need in their communities.

Licensed Counselor (L.P.C., L.C.P.C.): has a Master's degree from graduate school and is a licensed counselor who has advanced training in counseling. Some of these licensed counselors may have extra training in marriage and family therapy (LMFT).

**What will happen when I talk to a counselor?** When you talk with a counselor, you get a chance to talk about anything that is on your mind. A counselor will listen to you and not judge you. You may choose to talk about more serious things some of the time and you can talk about less serious things at other times, depending on your mood and level of comfort.

**What kinds of questions will the counselor ask me?** The first visit generally includes "orientation" and "assessment" tasks. At this stage, the counselor will welcome you, explain the procedures related to counseling (scheduling appointments, payment structure, etc), and also review confidentiality rules. The counselor will ask you questions about your current life and recent stressors and how you've been feeling during the past year. Your counselor may also ask you some questions about your health, your relationships, your family, and your friends. In addition to getting acquainted with you, the purpose of this meeting is to help your counselor better understand your personal and psychological needs related to your well-being.

After this initial session, your counselor will begin to guide you through your personal counseling treatment. This is usually started by formulating a treatment plan that includes discussing with your counselor your goals, desires for the type of help you hope to receive, and a plan to achieve this. Your counselor may also discuss with you the projected timeline for your progress and some strategies that will be used in achieving your goals. It is important that you actively participate in the process of discussing your goals and preferences for treatment.

The last phase of therapy is called "termination." This is when your counseling goals are adequately met or when you feel you are no longer making progress. This stage includes evaluation of your progress, discussing maintenance

and prevention strategies, or discussing alternative treatment options to help you again make progress in the healing journey.

Some people continue to see their counselors occasionally for “booster sessions.” This is when you choose to seek some additional support and guidance from your counselor in the process of your continuing personal growth.

**What should I expect from counseling?** When you decide to start talking with a counselor, you should expect to meet with one person who will get to know you well. Most counselors understand that it takes time to get used to someone before you will feel like talking about the more serious things on your mind. It's hard to tell at the first session if you feel comfortable enough with your counselor to talk about things that are important to you. Building a relationship and trusting takes time. Thus, try to give yourself and your counselor a chance to get to know each other. If you still don't feel comfortable talking with your counselor after a few visits, you may consider choosing a different counselor. Since you will be talking about sensitive issues, you need to have a counselor with whom you feel safe and comfortable.

**How long will counseling last?** The type of help that you are offered by your counselor will depend on (1) the type of personal concerns that you have (duration and severity), (2) what you tell your counselor (openness and cooperation), and (3) the kind of relationship you have with him/her (trust). Some people are helped after only a few sessions (called “short-term treatment” that may last for only a few weeks), while others may need and prefer longer treatment (“long-term treatment” that may last from several months to a few years). When appropriate, family members may attend some of the counseling sessions to provide extra support and to help improve the family relationships.

Counseling lasts various lengths of time for different people. Your counselor will try to work with you to decide how counseling sessions will best fit into your schedule. You might meet with your counselor once a week for as little as 30 minutes or as long as 90 minutes. Sometimes you might choose to meet with your counselor more often (two or more days per week) or less often as you and your counselor decide what is best for you. You can continue meeting with your counselor for as long as you need help working out your problems. This could be one week, six weeks, six months, or even longer.

**Why should I go to counseling?** If you are thinking about whether counseling could be helpful to you, here are some questions to ask yourself:

Do you ever feel really sad, frustrated, or lonely?

Do you feel especially angry, annoyed, or out-of-control?

Do you feel very anxious, worried, or guilty?

Have you experienced some major problems at home, at work, at school, or in your neighborhood?

Have you noticed some changes in the way you sleep, eat, think, or feel about life?

Is it hard for you to talk about your feelings with family or friends?

Is your life being negatively affected by the way you are feeling?

Is your personal life, your work and/or your relationships with family and friends more difficult than you think it should be?

If you answered YES to any of these questions, then it may be a good idea for you to talk with a counselor (also known as a therapist or mental health counselor).

People go to counseling for many reasons. Counseling can help you better understand your feelings and problems, and help you learn how to more effectively manage them in your everyday life. Counseling takes place in a completely confidential setting. Confidential means that the counselor cannot tell anyone, not even your close family members, about what the two of you talk about together, except as allowed by state and/or federal law. These exceptions generally include if you are a danger to yourself or others, instances of abuse or neglect, or if a minor as defined by state law.

**What else can I do?** In addition to going to individual counseling, there are many activities you can do on your own to help work through difficult feelings and solve problems. You may want to join a support group where people with concerns that are similar to yours meet to discuss different topics, to express their concerns, and to seek and give support and encouragement. You might want to try talking with a family member, trusted friend, or a pastor/priest. You might try writing down your feelings in a journal or diary. Other things to try are relaxation exercises, listening to music, watching a good movie, or exercising. Also try getting involved in an activity that you are good at such as a sport, drama, music, or hobbies such as writing, reading, needlework, etc. The combination of doing activities you like to do and talking with a counselor will improve how you are feeling and make your everyday life much easier in many ways.