

Myths About Counseling

by

D. J. Palmiter, Jr., Ph.D., ABPP

The Mental Health News

One of the biggest public health challenges in the new millennium will be to educate our citizenry on the tremendous benefits that can be garnered through effective counseling. The purpose of this article is to join such efforts by reviewing a few of the myths that may keep people from pursuing counseling.

Myth

If I enter therapy I might become too dependent on the therapist. Therapy will never end.

Counseling costs too much money.

Only crazy people are in therapy.

People who spend significant time and money on therapy are being self indulgent and selfish.

Reality

The goal of psychotherapy is to foster healthy independence, not unhealthy dependence. The aim of contemporary therapies is to reach treatment goals as fast as possible. Indeed, the chief job of the competent therapist is to make her services obsolete. While some problems require longer treatment, many do not.

Most health insurance policies cover a portion of psychotherapy. Clients end up being out of pocket only for the part not covered by the insurance company. In addition, the costs incurred are considered a medical expense and may be deductible from taxes. Studies also suggest that trips to a counselor can dramatically reduce trips to the medical doctor, saving a great deal of money. Finally, there are options for low fee services all across the country, including in the Scranton area.

This is really a bunch of nonsense. Putting aside the meaning of the word “crazy” for a moment, choosing to be in therapy is often a very rational act. It seems much more irrational to avoid therapy, because of silly myths, when therapy might be helpful in important ways. Effective therapy helps people to identify new methods for overcoming emotional pain and solving life’s problems. What is crazy about the pursuit of such learning?

If effective therapy does anything, it increases a person's freedom to love. Did you ever try to give to others when you have a sharp tooth ache? The same thing applies with emotional pain. Those who have been healed in counseling are in a position to be able to love others more and better. How can this be considered selfish?



Myth

I'll get better eventually anyway.

Being in therapy is a sign of weakness. Strong, effective people don't need help solving their problems.

If I take my kid in for an evaluation, he'll get the idea that there is something wrong with him.

Reality

According to studies on counseling, effective psychotherapy promotes healing and recovery. It may not be helpful to wait years for change. Even if change does come, the same problem may resurface later if the central issues have not been sufficiently resolved. Psychotherapy provides a way to confront and resolve problems at their source. It also provides tools for dealing with future problems. Some fires do burn themselves out but this does not mean that it's advisable to avoid calling the fire department when smelling smoke.

Maybe in a Rambo movie. In the real world more vulnerability is often found in the person who fears acknowledging human limitations and faults and is unwilling to take the steps necessary to overcome them. Counseling is no panacea and not everybody is a candidate for counseling. However, those who can acknowledge the possible need for counseling may be stronger, and more secure in themselves, than those who cannot.

Experienced child therapists know that parents are concerned about this and have developed procedures that minimize this risk. Besides, a child or teen with a legitimate behavioral or emotional problem is much more likely to think that there is something wrong with him, and to have that reflected in others' eyes, if he does not get help. Also keep in mind, as is the case in medicine, that behavioral and emotional problems are more easily understood and resolved sooner rather than later.

If you are wondering if counseling might be of benefit to you or a loved one, why not look into it? A competent therapist will be able to evaluate whether or not counseling is advisable and, if advisable, what it might be able to accomplish and how long it might take to complete. What do you have to lose?
