

## The Professional Counseling Process

by

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*Perspective clients to Homestead Hope often have questions concerning the process known as 'professional counseling' or 'therapy'. This article will address the specific process we use to care for our clients. Please call us at 817.812.3021 with any additional questions.*

Instead taking a narrative type of approach, we will describe the counseling process in a step by step, chronological order beginning with the initial phone call.

The first step in the process happens within each person who contacts a therapist. The individual or couple realizes there is an issue for which they need help. We call that, *insight*. The second step is a phone call or email inquiry. That action is indicative of a person realizing they need the assistance of a professional who is competent to deal with their concern. We call that, *courage*. Insight and courage on the part of the client, and competency on the part of the counselor, are the building blocks of therapeutic success.

Once a person contacts a counselor and the necessary documentation is complete, an appointment is scheduled. The first appointment with a therapist is known as an 'intake'. It is the beginning of the professional relationship between a client and counselor.

**Intake Assessment:** The intake is intended to gather as much useful information from the client as possible to figure out what the primary issues are - and then move forward toward goal setting. Exploring relevant historical information is part of this assessment.

True assessment is ongoing. In some cases, it is useful to conduct client focused, written assessments and evaluations to help determine the root of the situation. For example, we do marital and premarital assessments on a regular basis. After the intake, follow up appointments are normally scheduled.

**Schedule of Care:** For the best therapeutic outcomes, Homestead Hope Counseling schedules weekly appointments, preferably on the same day and at the same time (with no specific end date). We can remove individual appointments from the calendar as needed leaving all others intact. We can cancel unused appointments when ready. This process is known as multi-scheduling and works extremely well.

Therapeutic counseling typically requires additional steps that are somewhat predictable, even though they often overlap and are not always discernable. Progress and lasting change are typically slow and happens incrementally throughout the steps, which are identified below.

**Plan of Care:** A client will receive a Plan of Care, otherwise known as a Personalized Treatment Plan within their first few sessions. It will describe therapeutic goals and benchmarks indicating success. The Director of Clinical Care periodically reviews these Treatment Plans.

**Crisis Diffusion / Stabilization:** Before underlying issues can be explored there are sometimes immediate safety concerns that must be addressed. If there is a crisis, immediate steps will be taken to stop or prevent physical, emotional, psychological, or spiritual harm. The level of crisis

will determine how many sessions per week will be needed - one or two - for the first few weeks. If three or more are needed, hospitalization may be necessary for stabilization before regular counseling sessions will be effective.

**Problem Discovery:** The therapist needs to learn how the client perceives their presenting concerns and what the most urgent and pressing issues are - with or without a specific crisis in mind. This too is ongoing throughout the therapeutic process but is particularly important during the first several sessions.

**Solution Discussion:** While spending time together, both counselor and client hope to arrive at meaningful outcomes for each issue. As clients learn to solve certain types of problems, they will be able to apply that knowledge and insight to other areas of life. The therapeutic goal, therefore, is not necessarily to solve a particular problem, but to guide a person in the use of different approaches that enables them to solve their own problems - effectively putting your counselor out of a job!

**Solution Focused Behaviors:** This stage puts into practice ideas and concepts already discussed, beginning in the first session. Change is normally observable. Life long, lasting change will take considerable time and intentional effort for all involved. It is an ongoing process.

**Periodic Evaluations:** Treatment will likely include short assessments offered by your therapist or our Director of Clinical Care. The purpose of these assessments is to determine if the therapeutic approach and processes are effective. If so, they will continue to be used; if not effective, then adjustments will be made as needed.

**Maintenance:** As increased purposeful changes are being made and therapeutic goals are attained, the discussion in session will tend to shift. Sessions then become the opportunity to review progress, identify strong and growth points, and address and adjust attitudes that detract from therapeutic goals. The maintenance stage is one of accountability and ensures the gains made during the process are not lost, even though the frequency of sessions is gradually reduced.

**Termination:** I don't know what genius came up with the term, 'termination' to describe the complete cessation of treatment, but that's what it's called! Termination normally happens when a client abruptly stops engaging in counseling; it can also happen when the client and counselor agree it is time for a pause in sessions. On-going maintenance is usually the better option. Some clients, after much hard work and goal accomplishment, come into session once per month, or once per quarter - depending on the need. Terminating sessions, particularly abruptly before therapeutic goals are met, is not a good idea or a positive sign.

Regardless of the circumstances of termination, returning clients are always welcomed. It is good to catch up and learn what has been going on in their lives.

As always, Homestead Hope Counseling Services provide help for today, and hope for tomorrow. Call 817.812.3021.