

## Counselling, Psychotherapy, Psychology – How do I Choose?

### Purpose of this Information Sheet

Staff often seek information from the CSEAS regarding professional services available in the areas of Counselling, Psychotherapy and Psychology. While the CSEAS does not provide these services, it can provide support and information in accessing them. The purpose of this leaflet is to give a brief outline of these talk therapies, what they can offer and options for choosing a service.

### What is Counselling and Psychotherapy?

The terms counselling and psychotherapy are often used interchangeably and overlap in a number of ways. Both are talk therapies, delivered by trained practitioners.

Counselling is a short term process that encourages clients to explore their issues and find more effective ways of coping and initiating change.

Psychotherapy tends to focus on working with individuals for a longer-term and draws from insight into emotional problems and difficulties.

In both cases, the practitioner offers an impartial relationship in which an individual can explore specific issues and develop more satisfying and resourceful ways of living. Confidentiality is recognised as a vital basis for such a relationship.<sup>1</sup>

### What is Psychology?

Psychology is the scientific study of thought, emotion and behaviour. Psychologists examine the various aspects of human experience, such as human emotions, thoughts and actions. They apply their understanding of people in a variety of professional settings including; clinical, counselling, educational, organisational and academic.<sup>2</sup> A psychologist can assess, diagnose, treat and advise on strategies to help manage mental health difficulties in working collaboratively with the individual. Visiting a psychologist can be particularly useful for help with issues such as anxiety, compulsive disorders and panic attacks for example.

### How can these services help?

Talk therapy can be beneficial in times of change, crisis, mental or emotional distress. It can be helpful when a person is experiencing life challenges such as a bereavement, separation, depression, addiction, relationship and family issues.

#### *Useful questions to consider*

*Have you experienced a personal loss in your life e.g. a bereavement, divorce/separation, loss of health? Would it help to avail of professional support? Consider counselling.*

*Are you experiencing challenging or distressing life events? Consider counselling or psychotherapy.*

*Have you noticed a pattern of recurring difficulties in your life which are causing you concern? Is it time to gain insight into this and initiate change? Consider psychotherapy.*

*Do you suffer from anxiety, panic attacks, compulsive behaviour? Consider contacting a psychologist.*

*Consultation with your GP may be the best first course of action*

<sup>1</sup> Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy [www.iacp.ie](http://www.iacp.ie)

<sup>2</sup> The Psychological Society of Ireland [www.psi.ie](http://www.psi.ie)

## Education and Training

The education and training for each of the disciplines differs. Many professionals will build on basic qualifications and specialise in particular areas. The following table may help to differentiate between the disciplines.

Counselling	Psychotherapy	Psychology
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Helps people identify problems and crises and encourages them to take positive steps to resolve these issues</li><li>•It is a useful course of therapeutic treatment for anyone who already has an understanding of wellbeing and who is also able to resolve problems</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Helps people facing issues that have built up over a long period of time</li><li>•It assists in understanding feelings, thoughts and actions more clearly</li><li>•Psychotherapy is a longer-term process than counselling that identifies emotional issues and the background to problems and difficulties</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Through observation, interpretation and documentation, psychologists can understand and predict behaviour</li><li>•Psychologists employ scientific methodology, principles and procedures in their research</li></ul>

## Therapeutic Approaches and Models

Professionals from any of these disciplines may use varying therapeutic approaches and models, often adopting an eclectic approach tailored to the needs of the individual. Some of these therapeutic approaches may include Person-Centred, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Psychodynamic, Gestalt and Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SBFT). You will often see references to these and other therapeutic terms when you begin your search for a practitioner. The scope of this leaflet does not allow for full explanations of these terms. You will be able find explanations on the internet, discuss them with your GP or your Employee Assistance Officer (EAO).

## How to choose a service?

It can be difficult to decide what avenue to follow. A good starting place is to talk to your **GP** who will be able to refer you to services appropriate to your situation. Sometimes talking to family or friends can be helpful in deciding your next step. You may wish to consult your Employee Assistance Officer who can

- offer confidential<sup>3</sup> support and guidance should you be experiencing personal and/or work-related difficulties
- assist in considering whether or not any of the above services would be beneficial to you
- assist in accessing services by providing you with information on the range of services appropriate to your situation.<sup>4</sup>

In the interest of impartiality EAOs cannot suggest individual private professional practitioners.

Ultimately choosing the right mental health professional may rest with finding the right fit. The connection between the individual and practitioner is a very important factor in successful outcomes.

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<sup>3</sup> Details on CSEAS confidentiality and exceptions to this are available on the CSEAS website [www.cseas.per.gov.ie](http://www.cseas.per.gov.ie)

<sup>4</sup> Costs arising are the responsibility of the individual

## General Points

- **Duration of therapy** – Engaging in any of the above talk therapies will generally involve attending a number of sessions on a regular basis over a period of time.
- **Confidentiality** – Discussions between the individual and practitioner are generally confidential with certain exceptions. The practitioner can outline these exceptions to confidentiality at the first session or when the appointment is being made.
- **Choosing a Qualified Practitioner** – ask about professional qualifications and accreditations with relevant professional bodies. To be accredited, a practitioner is required to undertake professional training, continuous professional development and abide by the Code of Standards/Practice of the relevant accrediting body.
- **Practitioners' Expertise** – Some practitioners specialise in a particular area e.g. bereavement, relationship or addiction counselling.
- **Therapeutic Relationship**
  - It is important that you find the right counsellor, psychotherapist or psychologist for your needs.
  - First impressions – you will usually get a sense from your first phone-call or face-to-face session if the fit is right for you.
  - The relationship between the practitioner and the individual should always remain professional. If you are in doubt about any aspect of the therapeutic relationship, discuss this with your practitioner.
- **Location** – Ensure the professional service you have chosen is convenient as you may be attending on a regular basis.
- **Frequency of sessions** – You may decide to attend on a weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis. Agree this at your initial session.
- **Affordability** – Discuss the fee structure at your first session. Fees may be negotiable, on a sliding scale or on a donation basis. Be realistic about what you can afford over time. Free services may be available from the HSE, community and/or voluntary services.

### Sourcing a Practitioner

- Referral from your GP
- Discuss with the CSEAS
- Personal recommendation from someone who has availed of the services of a particular practitioner
- Professional accrediting bodies – Lists of their accredited members are generally available on their websites e.g. The Irish Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy, Irish Council for Psychotherapy, Irish Association for Humanistic and Integrative Psychotherapy, Psychological Society of Ireland
- Citizens Information Centres
- HSE – often provides free counselling/psychology services. There may be a waiting list and certain criteria regarding eligibility for these services
- Low cost services may be available from training colleges or institutes
- Voluntary and Community Services

## Useful website addresses

[www.iacp.ie](http://www.iacp.ie)

[www.iahip.org](http://www.iahip.org)

[www.psychotherapy-ireland.com](http://www.psychotherapy-ireland.com)

[www.citizensinformation.ie](http://www.citizensinformation.ie)

[www.psi.ie](http://www.psi.ie)

[www.accord.ie](http://www.accord.ie)

[www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)

Irish Assoc. for Counselling & Psychotherapy

Irish Assoc. for Humanistic & Integrative Psychotherapy

Irish Council for Psychotherapy,

Citizens Information

Psychological Society of Ireland

Marriage and Relationship Counselling Service

Health Service Executive

If you are facing challenges in your personal or work life difficult, contact the CSEAS for a consultation to assist in considering options to help



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[www.cseas.per.gov.ie](http://www.cseas.per.gov.ie)

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