

A DEFINITION OF PSYCHOTHERAPY AND COUNSELLING *

Psychotherapy and Counselling are professional activities that utilise an interpersonal relationship to enable people to develop understanding about themselves and to make changes in their lives. Professional Psychotherapists and Counsellors work within a clearly contracted, principled relationship that enables individuals to obtain assistance in exploring and resolving issues of an interpersonal, intrapsychic, or personal nature.

Professional Psychotherapy/Counselling...

...utilises Counselling, Psychotherapeutic, and Psychological theories, and a set of advanced interpersonal skills which emphasise processes of facilitation. Such processes are based on an ethos of respect for clients, their values, their beliefs, their uniqueness and the right to self-determination.

...requires an in-depth training process to develop understanding, knowledge about human behaviour, therapeutic capacities, and ethical and professional boundaries. Because it is explicitly contracted and requires in-depth training to utilise a range of therapeutic interventions, professional Counselling should be differentiated from the use of 'counselling skills' by other professionals.

...takes account of the cultural and sociopolitical context in which the client lives and how these factors affect the presenting problem. This includes an awareness and assessment of cultural influences such as age, development, disability, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, indigenous identity, nationality and gender. Professional Psychotherapists and Counsellors value such differences and avoid discrimination on the basis of such factors.

...may involve work with current problems, immediate crisis, or long-term difficulties, Depending on the nature of the difficulties, the work may be short-term or long-term, and may involve working with an individual, a couple, a family or a group, and may occur in a variety of organisational contexts in the public or private sectors.

...regards the processes of self-monitoring, self-examination, self-awareness, self-development, professional development and on-going clinical supervision as central to effective practice. Such practices lead to enhanced capacity to utilise oneself in the therapeutic endeavour.

Although Psychotherapy and Counselling overlap considerably there are also some differences. The work with clients may be of considerable depth in both modalities; however, the focus of Counselling is more likely to be on specific problems or changes in life adjustment. Psychotherapy is more concerned with the restructuring of the personality or self.

Although both Psychotherapists and Counsellors work with a wide variety of clients, Psychotherapists are more likely to work very intensively, with more deeply disturbed individuals who are seen more frequently over a longer period of time. Counsellors are more likely to work in specific areas where specialised knowledge and method are needed (e.g. Marital and family counselling, bereavement counselling, school counselling, addictions counselling, HIV/AIDS counselling). At advanced levels of training, Counselling has a greater overlap with Psychotherapy than at foundation levels.

* Originally prepared by a working party chaired by Dr Jan Grant, Edith Cowan University, and adopted at the 1997 conference of the Standing Conference of Educators and Trainers in Counselling and Psychotherapy.