

A Little Bit About Counseling with Me

Hey! I'm guessing if you're reading this that you have either decided you would like to give counseling a try (or maybe you've been in counseling before but decided you want to do it again) or your parent/guardian is encouraging you to give counseling a shot. Either way, I know it is usually nerve-racking to meet someone new, be in a new environment and not know what to expect. Either that or, if it feels like you are being forced to do counseling, you might feel frustrated, angry, resentful along with being nervous. No matter what you are feeling, I am hoping that knowing a little more about what to expect will be helpful.

Here are some answers to questions people usually have before starting counseling:

- What should I expect when I come to you for counseling?

First, every counselor is different. Since we're people, we have different personalities and we often have different ways of doing counseling. What matters most is that you find a counselor you feel comfortable with (maybe not right away but pretty soon after you start seeing him or her).

Here's a little more about my approach:

I am not looking for what is "wrong" with you or trying to change you to what I (or your parents, teachers, etc.) think you should be doing. I want to get to know you, all the parts of you, including the parts of yourself you might not like so much or that tend to get you in trouble/lead to negative consequences.

I also want to hear your story. What has life been like for you so far? Sometimes this might involve talking about things that you often avoid thinking or talking about and can feel hard at first. We go at your pace so if you need a while before you feel ready to talk about this stuff, that is okay.

We talk about what is working for you in your life. What actions/thoughts/feelings tend to work in your favor and get you the results you want? We talk about what is not working for you. This means things that you do/say/think that make you feel bad about yourself; make people in your life get angry, upset, or pull away; make you feel stuck and hopeless/helpless, etc. We work together to help you

understand these patterns and make changes if you decide that is what would be best for you.

One main thing in counseling with me is that I see it as YOUR session. I change things based on what you need that day in session and what you want to accomplish. You always have a voice in session with me and it is not about what I want. This means that you also have some responsibility in session. In other words, you get out of the session what you put into it. If you come in and challenge yourself, push past your comfort zone a little, talk about the things that might be harder to talk about, then you are going to get a lot out of the session. On the other hand, if you come to session and keep yourself hidden, answer questions with just “I don’t know” without even thinking about it, and stay in your comfort zone, then you probably won’t get a lot out of counseling. This is where your power to choose affects what you get out of counseling.

- Do you tell my parents/guardians what I say?

Part of what is helpful about counseling is that it is YOUR space. You can talk about everything and anything, and our understanding is that nothing you talk about in your counseling session leaves my office. It all stays in the room with me for you to re-visit each session, sort of like a journal/diary but with a person instead. You will not be blind-sided by me telling your parents/guardians something that you didn’t want them to know. However, there are a few exceptions to this and, if you decide you would like to see me for counseling, I will go over all of those exceptions with you in detail in our first session (and you can ask me about them any time). An example of something I would need to talk to you parents/guardians about is if you were to tell me you have a plan to commit suicide. I would be required to share this with your parents so they can keep you safe.

Having said that, I also know that your parents/guardians are likely a large part of your life and, in a lot of situations, I think it is really healthy to challenge yourself to be more open with your parents/guardians. Most parents/guardians are doing their best and want to do what is best for you. A lot just might not have all the information or might need some help to do this. If this is the case, including your parents/guardians in some sessions can be helpful. I would help you talk to your parents/guardians about things that might be hard to talk about otherwise. Please know, this is not always the case and we would decide together if this would be a

good idea or not. I would never have your parents join the session without your permission.

- What happens the first session?

This depends on the situation. If you are under 15, I will meet with your parent/guardian for the first 30 minutes to get to know about your life before you can remember (usually from when you were born to age 5ish). Then, I will meet with you alone and we can get to know each other some. Depending on what you want, we might talk some about what is going on that brings you to counseling and what you want to get out of counseling (if anything).

- Do I have to want to change something to be in counseling?

Not at first. If you come in and don't see anything you want to change in your life and are there because you don't have a choice, that is completely okay. The idea is that if you are honest with yourself and explore your life some, you might discover that there are some things that aren't working for you that you would like to work on. Or maybe it isn't you but it seems like other people in your life are the problem. We can talk more about that too. Obviously, we can't change other people but talking about it can be helpful and you might even discover that you have more power to make changes than you thought.

I know this form doesn't cover all the questions you might have but hopefully it is helpful. If you decide you would like to see me for counseling, I am always open to questions and think it is courageous to ask questions and bring up concerns. I also know it can be helpful to hear from other people close to your age that have been to see me for counseling. Here is what other teens have said after seeing me for counseling:

"When my parents told me I was going to start counseling I was like, you can drag me into the room but I'm not talking. I was thinking, whoever this person is is going to try and make me talk and ask a ton of questions. Good luck to them, they're getting nothing."

My first session with Hannah I pretty much stuck to that. She was really nice and all but I wasn't budging. I was kind of surprised because she didn't get mad and try to make me. It was different than what I am used to with most adults. I agreed to play a game with her and decided I was okay to talk a little.

I've been going to Hannah for about a year and I actually like going. I don't feel like I have to talk but I mostly want to now. I feel better after being there.

If I don't want to talk about hard stuff that day, it's okay and we play a game and talk about anime and other stuff I like. If I do want to talk about hard stuff, that's good too and I know she will listen and not judge me." -from a 14 year-old client

"A helpful thing I have received through therapy with Hannah is an adult that supports and helps guide me through the process of my transition without a bias that I would get from a family member.

Before starting therapy I would cry myself to sleep every night and after the first appointment, I stopped. I saw Hannah before I came out as transgender and now I am out and on testosterone. Hannah has helped me get to where I am today in my transition and I am still benefiting from seeing her.

Hannah makes sure you are always benefiting from seeing her by changing how your appointments are for your needs and what you are comfortable with.

When I look back to my first appointment with Hannah, I remember being really scared and nervous to meet her. As soon as the appointment started Hannah made sure I felt safe and, quickly, I was glad I came. I have been seeing Hannah on and off for about two years now and I have never switched therapists or thought of finding someone new.

When I go to my appointments I get to decide what I want to talk about, and if I don't know what to talk about, Hannah always remembers what I have talked about in the past appointments in which she thinks I may want to recap or work on more.

I highly recommend Hannah for LGBTQ teens (or anyone) because she has helped me with my transition, anxiety, and depression.

I have recommended Hannah to friends that are looking for a therapist because Hannah has helped me so much and I know that they will have a good experience with her."-from a 17 year-old client

"The best thing about seeing Hannah for therapy is knowing there is a safe space to talk about anything I need to. Hannah gets to know you as a person and structures your sessions to what works best for you.

My mood has gotten consistently better and I've found myself to have more energy to go through the day when I'm not weighted down by worries and anxieties.

My confidence and awareness has gotten so much better since I began therapy with Hannah. I'm now able to realize what is negative self-talk, as well as negativity around me, and how to deal with and rationalize it.

I like seeing Hannah because the sessions are focused around you. What you want to talk about and what you'd rather wait to talk about. Even if you don't want to talk, that's cool too! I know some sessions there would be more games/drawing rather than a straight conversation. The sessions were very personalized. I mentioned how I was drawn towards the more "scientific" and "logical" approach and how things worked, and Hannah would give me articles with studies and facts to read and would break down certain things to help me understand.

Therapy with Hannah is very free and welcoming. The office has a very homey feel and I've never felt uncomfortable or uneasy.

My advice- make sure your therapist is a good fit for you! My first therapist I went to before Hannah was not a good match for me, and I didn't start seeing progress until I started going to Hannah." -from an 18 year-old client