

For counselling to be truly beneficial to the client, fifty minute sessions must be offered on regular weekly basis initially, twice a week if the client is severely distressed, gradually lessening to fortnightly then monthly if need be, until the client is ready to move on. In some circumstances fortnightly sessions can be useful from the outset but anything less than this will be neither use nor ornament, in fact frequently it can be more harmful. Much depends on the personality of the client, the issues they bring and how long their troubles have been going on for as to how many sessions a client may need, I have seen some people go through the process in three or four sessions and others take a year or so. Unfortunately waiting lists and funding sometimes puts restrictions on the service clients are offered.

At the same time it is not appropriate for clients to see a stream of different counsellors. So that a trusting and healing relationship can develop there must be consistency. If the organisation inflicts changes then there is something seriously wrong with the service offered, however, if the client is not satisfied with their counsellor then it would be beneficial to talk this over with the counsellor and ask for changes. If the client is still not satisfied or finds the counsellor defensive then they have every right to take the power back and ask to see someone else, providing this doesn't develop into a pattern as a way of avoiding difficult issues.

Then there is the delicate question of fees. There are public and voluntary agencies that offer counselling to clients on a referral or self-referring basis, these can be free or maybe request donations. There are also private centres, like ourselves, who can offer a diversity of therapies to suit individual client needs for a fee. On the surface these fees may seem high, but when you take out the cost of qualifying, continuing training, room rental, public liability insurance, supervision, therapy, advertising, sundries etc., the therapist is left with very little for his/her time. We can only be altruistic to a point! Regardless of the setting, clients' book appointments to see a counsellor and frequently either cancel at the last moment or

don't turn up at all; this is a total waste of resources and prolongs waiting lists, especially if the client later rings for a second or even third appointment and still doesn't arrive. For the student or volunteer it can mean a costly and frustrating wasted trip to the centre.

Sadly at the moment there are many cowboys out there calling themselves counsellors and this can be very harmful for a troubled client. Even sadder is the fact that the damage such counsellors do is splashed across the newspaper headlines and so we are all tarred with the same brush. But equally there are some genuine and very hardworking counsellors out there who do a brilliant job. I know it is difficult when in a confused state of mind to take the courage to question professionals about their status but by the nature of the counsellor they should not become prickly but welcome your queries as part of your taking control of your life, this may be your second step in becoming empowered. The first step being to contact the counsellor in the first place!

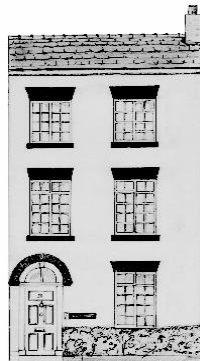
Joy Hazlehurst works as a Person-Centred Counsellor with adults, young people and children.

**Qualifications:**

BACP Accredited Counsellor  
Diploma in Counselling, Certificate in Counselling,  
Certificate in Working with Children and Young People,  
NVQ II in Childcare and Education.  
Trained in 'Triple P' – Positive Parenting Programme.

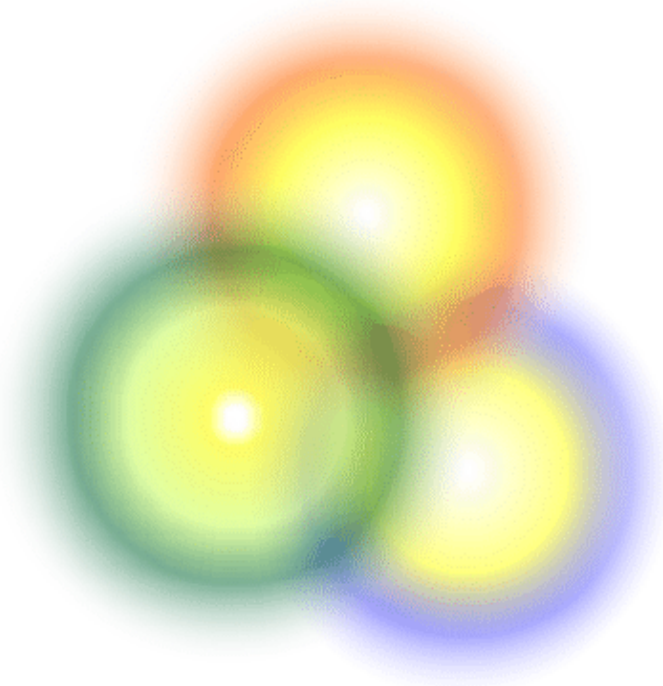
**Further information:**

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# The Hope Street Centre



## Bringing counselling out of the cupboard

# Bringing Counselling out of the Cupboard

by Joy Hazlehurst

We all struggle from time to time with what life throws at us, often a sympathetic chat with a friend can lift us enough to carry on but occasionally this is not sufficient and we need something more. Or maybe our troubles are just too personal, too overwhelming or too isolating to share with friends; likewise these troubles can wear our friends down or even frighten them away. So what do we do?

This is where counselling can help. A counsellor can offer a safe and caring relationship in which to explore even our darkest secrets and find a way forward. The counsellor will not tell you what you must or must not do, they will not advise you and they cannot wave a magic wand over you to make everything all right. At the end of the day only you know what will be right for you, only you will know how best to move forward. The counsellor is there to help you search for your answers, in an unconditional and honest way.

I am aware there is much stigma and confusion over what counselling is and this saddens me greatly, which is what has prompted me to write this booklet. I have benefited hugely from receiving counselling myself and have marvelled as clients grow from strength to strength through facing their challenges, no matter how painful this became at times, to living fulfilling and contented lives.

It is very important that potential clients find the right counsellor for them and I can't emphasize enough that they have every right to question both the model of therapy on offer plus ask to see the therapists' credentials. Before you agree to seeing a counsellor have a word with them about what they offer and what their therapeutic background is, do you warm to them, are they easy to talk to, do they seem open and approachable? It doesn't matter whether you are referred by another

professional or refer yourself you have a right to find the counsellor that suits your requirements.

My own journey to qualifying as a counsellor took six years of study; I divide this up into three parts:-

- o 1 part theory
- o 1 part skills (working with the client)
- o 1 part personal development

All three parts are equally important if the counsellor is to 'be there' for the client. For example if the counsellor has not undergone extensive soul searching themselves how can they truly know what it is like to be a client and how can they learn to put their own problems to one side so as not to get it confused with what is going on for the client.

If your counsellor uses the session to discuss their own issues then there is something seriously wrong, this time belongs to the client and the counsellor should have their own personal therapy to off-load in. However, there may be rare moments when it would be appropriate for the counsellor to offer some personal information to the client in order to advance the relationship or clients' progress, as long as this is relevant and not intrusive on the clients time then this is acceptable.

Negotiations are under way to put Alternative Practitioners on a National Register just as Doctors etc., are. To achieve this Counsellors must become accredited and then apply to be put on the Register. For me this can only be a good thing; ensuring a high standard and quality of service plus safety for clients. Is your counsellor accredited, or at least 'working towards' accreditation?

There are many counsellor courses available these days. Sadly some offer a Certificate (or even Diploma) in a weekend, so theoretically these students are qualified. As a general rule of thumb a Certificate course will take twelve months and Diploma two years but some establishments offer them as a split combination over three years. Counsellor training is very costly, course fees, study sundries, placement expenses, supervision and personal therapy can run into thousands of

pounds, I shudder to think what the financial outlay has been for me up to this present date. Courses will also be required to become accredited.

As with Doctors, Nurses, Teachers etc., qualification (usually the Diploma in Counselling) is not the final hurdle for a counsellor, governing bodies insist on continuing professional development, providing it is in a compatible field. Check out with your counsellor, what they are doing now?

There are a number of Governing Bodies counsellors can become members of, two big ones being BACP (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy) and UKCP (United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy). Membership to such organisations ensures the Counsellor will work to their Ethical Framework and Standards of Practice; any breach of such regulation can result in their being struck off.

Further to all this Counsellors must receive monthly supervision, this is an opportunity to discuss their work with a more experienced counsellor in order to further the counsellors experience and knowledge, as well as a way of ensuring the 'quality' of counselling being offered. The counsellor protects client identity during supervision, confidentiality is ensured according to the boundaries initially discussed with the client. A counsellor is always learning, the day they believe they are the expert is the day they should retire. Only the client is ever the expert on what is right or wrong for them. Supervisors are also to become accredited in the future.

All counsellors, as part of their training, need to start seeing 'real' clients and so many establishments offering counselling will, thankfully for the trainees, take on student counsellors. There is nothing wrong with this, many organisations can only exist because they take on so many valuable students but I believe clients should be given the choice as to whether this is OK with them or not. These students will have been passed to a standard by the course tutors and also by the establishment but many do not tell the client that they are seeing a student.