

## **About Your Counselling**

Counselling offers you an opportunity to explore issues within a safe and respectful environment that is confidential and non-judgemental. Counselling is not about giving advice, but your counsellor will help you to explore and achieve a better understanding of the difficulties that you are facing, thereby empowering you to move on.

### **Your Counsellor**

The counsellor you are seeing has been specially selected to work with you on the issues that caused you to contact off the record. All our counsellors, whether qualified or completing training, are members of the BACP/UKCP or recognised professional body and are assisted with the provision of group supervision, training, and team meetings, together with individual supervision with their primary supervisor.

### **Confidentiality**

Client confidentiality is of great importance to Off the Record. Any information that you reveal, either to the admin staff or to your counsellor is confidential to Off the Record.

In some circumstances, a counsellor may feel that it is in the client's best interests to provide information to a third party – for example, informing your GP of emotional issues that are affecting you. In these circumstances, you will be asked to sign a form that authorises the release of information. Confidentiality will not be broken unless the form has been signed.

**The only exceptions to the above are situations where information revealed by a client indicates that the client, another person, or the client's workplace may be in danger. This includes offences under The Road Traffic Act 1988, The Prevention of Terrorism Act 1989, The Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 and The Children's Acts 1989 and 2004.** If your counsellor has concerns about your safety, or that of anyone else, they will aim to discuss it with you first. If such a situation does arise, the information disclosed will be confined to what is strictly necessary and, wherever possible, the client will be consulted before the disclosure is made.

Your counsellor will make very brief notes each session which may contain a summary of the issues that you bring to counselling and the work that you and the counsellor do together. Your file will be held securely in a locked cabinet.

All counsellors working at Off the Record receive regular clinical supervision, a requirement of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy of which Off the Record is an organisational member. Information disclosed to counsellors' supervisors is bound by the same agreement as above.

Off The Record is a member of the Norfolk Safeguarding Children Board and all our staff have attended Child Protection training.

### **Discussing sexual abuse/rape with a counsellor during a legal case (pre-trial)**

Please be aware for these cases there are potential limits on confidentiality arising first from the need for close liaison with the Police, Crown Prosecution Service and, second from the requirement for both the prosecution and the defence solicitors to have access to the counsellor's records.

The CPS practice guidance covers in detail the implications of the type of therapeutic approach used and the focus of the therapy for the viability of the client's evidence in court.

The guidance outlines:

- The need to avoid any rehearsal of the client's evidence.
- Procedures for responding to the client making allegations of further, previously undisclosed offences.
- The need to avoid evidential problems inherent in attempts by the counsellor to distinguish fact from fantasy in the client's account.

### **Counselling/Other Approaches**

While counselling benefits many people and we hope that you will find counselling helpful, your counsellor cannot guarantee that the therapy will result in an improvement in your mental or physical condition or general well-being. Where counselling is not considered the most suitable approach an alternative may be suggested.

## **Appointments**

You will be offered a day and time which suits both you and your counsellor. Regularity and continuity are part of the therapeutic process so your appointments will be weekly, and it is important to attend all sessions.

Counselling sessions usually last about 50 minutes and clients are asked to be punctual to get the most from the time available. If you arrive early your counsellor will not be able to see you until your appointed time. Your counsellor will not usually be able to extend the session beyond the timeslot allocated. If you do arrive late for a session, your counsellor will still need to finish at the arranged time.

## **Donations**

A donation is requested for each session. If you find it difficult to keep up regular donations for your session, please discuss this with your counsellor. The amount will be agreed with the counsellor you see at the Intake session (very first appointment).

## **Cancellation and Missed Sessions**

If you are unable to attend a session, we ask that you contact us at least 24 hours in advance. Please also let us know whether you will be attending at your usual time the following week

***If you do not attend your session and have not informed us; or if you cancel with less than 24 hours' notice, you will be expected to donate the agreed amount for that session.*** If you do not make contact, OTR will try and get in touch to find out whether you wish to continue with counselling.

If you miss two consecutive sessions and do not contact us, your counsellors will assume you no longer wish to attend and OTR will allocate your space to another client. ***You will be invoiced for missed sessions if you do not continue your counselling.***

If you are on the ***low cost 12 sessions package*** and do not attend without contacting us the missed session will be counted as one of your 12, and you will lose that session. A donation will still be expected for the missed sessions and if paid you will get that session added back onto the original 12.

## **Holidays/Planned Breaks**

We will hold your space for up to 4 weeks in a row to allow for holidays and planned breaks from sessions. If the break/holiday is to last more than 4 weeks, please speak to your counsellor to discuss your options.

Your counsellor will inform you well in advance of their holiday dates, or of anything that may interrupt the therapy.

## **Telephone/Email Contact**

If you need to speak to your counsellor between sessions, please telephone/email and leave a message and OTR admin will pass your message onto your Counsellor.

## **Questions**

Please feel free at any time to raise questions about any aspect of your counselling you do not understand or feel unhappy about. The main purpose of the whole process is for it to work for you in a way which is genuinely therapeutic and to do this it must meet your needs.

## **Endings**

You are free to end therapy at any point. However, as many of us have difficulty with endings, talking through a decision to end therapy in advance can be therapeutically useful. It can be helpful to allow at least two or three sessions to work towards ending, although your counsellor will respect the way you choose to end your counselling.

## **Complaints procedure**

We aim to provide a high standard of service but if for any reason you are unhappy with the service you receive, a copy of our complaint's procedure is available on request.

If, for any reason, you are dissatisfied with your counselling you should discuss your concerns with your counsellor, initially. If this does not resolve the issue, or if you do not feel comfortable about talking about it with your counsellor, you can email our Head of Service – India Kirby at [info@otr-norfolk.org.uk](mailto:info@otr-norfolk.org.uk) or write to us at the above address. We will liaise with your counsellor involved in your case, and endeavour to respond to your complaint as quickly as possible. All complaints are taken seriously and will be investigated by the Head of Service.