

Finding the Right Counselor for You

Counseling can benefit everyone. However, it is often large life events that cause a person to seek help from a counselor or therapist. The process can be overwhelming, intimidating, and often a deterrent to reaching out. This document is designed to take some of the unknowns out of the equation and assist you in finding a professional that best meets your needs.

What does it all mean?

There are a number of different certifications that allow a practitioner to practice counseling in Washington State. Some common certifications are listed below.

LMFT-Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist

LMHC-Licensed Mental Health Counselor

LCSW-Licensed Clinical Social Worker

LICSW-Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker

MA, MS, MEd, & MSW-you may see these letters in association with one of the above acronyms. They simply mean they have either a Masters of Arts (MA), Masters of Science (MS), or Masters of Education (MEd) in a field related to counseling. MSW refers to a Masters of Social Work

Each of these individuals has completed a Master's degree with coursework that qualifies them to pursue their respective certifications. They have also participated in hundreds of hours of clinical work supervised by a senior practitioner and they have passed state testing requirements for certification as well as continued education to keep their certification in good standing.

How to Find a Counselor

There are a number of Christian counselors in the Gig Harbor and Tacoma area. Two large practices are Pearl Counseling Associates in North Tacoma and the Shepherd's Center in Gig Harbor. You can visit both of these practices' websites and read about each of their practitioners, their qualifications, specialties, etc. These are just two specifically Christian practices in the area. There are several others as well as individual practitioners. A quick google search will reveal this. Believers Fellowship is also working to compile a list of practitioners that people within the body have benefited from.

What to Expect

When you first reach out to a potential counselor you may have the opportunity for an initial phone consultation. This is your opportunity to ask any questions you have, share a bit about why you are seeking counseling, and get an initial impression of the person you may work with.

There will be some confidentiality and client information forms you may need to fill out prior to your first session. The confidentiality paperwork will detail what you can expect from your counselor and when they are required by law to break confidentiality.

Your first session, sometimes called an intake session, may be longer than a normal session. Most counseling sessions last just under an hour. Many counselors have an intake form with questions they will go over with you during the first session. Each counselor may handle the first session slightly different, but they will likely indicate what you can expect from the session.

Counseling is not a one size fits all experience.

Each counseling practitioner has a distinct and unique personality. Additionally, counselors often have areas of expertise and certain types of theoretical framework they work within. In order for the relationship to be therapeutic it is important that the person seeking counseling feels a connection to the counselor they are working with. You might be able to discern this from the initial phone conversation, but often it takes a several sessions.

Do not be discouraged if you find yourself several sessions into therapy and are not finding it as helpful as you hoped. This is not uncommon. You may want to bring this up with your counselor. However, if it does not get better, do not stay in an unhelpful counseling situation. Work to find a new counselor that better suits your needs instead. Think of it like finding the right doctor for yourself or your child. Sometimes it takes time.

Counseling is NOT an easy fix.

If you are reading this be encouraged that you are on the path to mental, emotional, and relational health. As with anything worth doing well, engaging in counseling requires an investment on your part. It is hard work. Often things will get harder and possibly even messier before they get better. Do not be discouraged. Just know that it may take time for you to feel that things are improving.