

Counselling Modalities

This is a summary of the main therapeutic orientations used in counselling, including those that may be used across Edinburgh agencies. The majority of agencies offer Person Centred, Psychodynamic, Gestalt and Integrative approaches. The Forum's minimum recommended standard for training in any approach is Diploma level.

It should be noted that due to the constraints of funding and waiting lists, agencies are generally not in a position to offer clients a specific choice of orientation.

What are the different types of counselling?

There are several types of counselling that follow similar lines to the various different types of psychotherapy. Each model has its own theory of human development and its own way of working. Some practitioners work in an 'eclectic' way, which means that they draw on elements of several different models when working with clients. Others practise a form of 'integrative' counselling, which draws on and blends two or more specific types.

From the client's point of view, perhaps the most obvious difference between the types of counselling is whether the counsellor is directive (suggesting courses of action and perhaps giving 'homework' exercises) or non-directive (with the client taking the lead in what's discussed). While it's not possible to include all the various types available, the most popular are discussed below. They are all non-directive, except for gestalt and cognitive behavioural counselling.

Psychodynamic counselling

This is based on the idea that past experiences have a bearing on experiences and feelings in the present, and that important relationships, perhaps from early childhood, may be replayed with other people later in life. It translates the principles and insights of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic psychotherapy into once-a-week counselling.

The counsellor usually aims to be as neutral a figure as possible, giving little information about him or herself, making it more likely that important relationships (past or present) will be reflected in the relationship between the client and the counsellor. This relationship is therefore an important source of insight for both parties, and helps the client to 'work through' their difficulties. Developing a trusting and reliable relationship with the counsellor is essential for this work.

Client-centred or person-centred counselling

This is based on the principle that the counsellor provides three 'core conditions' (or essential attributes) that are, in themselves, therapeutic. These are:

- empathy (the ability to imagine oneself in another person's position)
- unconditional positive regard (warm, positive feelings, regardless of the person's behaviour)
- congruence (honesty and openness).

Again, the counsellor uses the relationship with the client as a means of healing and change.

Transpersonal counselling

This is an integrative and holistic approach that utilises creative imagination. It assumes a spiritual dimension to life and human nature. It also presupposes the interconnectedness of all beings with a higher spiritual power, and specifically addresses the bridge between the two.

Transpersonal counselling emphasises personal empowerment. It takes account of the client's past experiences, but also looks to the future and what is likely to unfold for them, the challenges they may face and the qualities that need to emerge in them to meet those challenges. Its basic belief is that whatever the hardships of human experience, the core essence, or soul, remains undamaged.

Transactional analysis counselling

Transactional Analysis counselling emphasises people's personal responsibility for their feelings, thoughts and behaviour. It believes people can change, if they actively decide to replace their usual patterns of behaviour with new ones.

The counsellor offers:

- 'permission' (for new messages about yourself and the world)
- 'protection' (when changing behaviour and thoughts feels risky)
- 'potency' (to deliver what he or she promised).

Planning the goals of the counselling is part of the process. The focus is on uncovering the 'life scripts' (life plans) that reflect the messages the client was given as a child. The counselling teaches the client to identify in which of the following modes he or she is operating, at any given time:

- the 'child' (replaying their childhood)
- the 'parent' (copied from parents or parent-figures)
- the 'adult' (appropriate to the present situation).

Existential counselling

This helps people to clarify, think about and understand life, so that they can live it well. It encourages them to focus on the basic assumptions they make about it, and about themselves, so they can come to terms with life as it is. It allows them to make sense of their existence.

The counselling focuses the client on how much they already take charge of their life, and not on what they are doing wrong. At the same time, it takes note of any real limitations, so that they can make choices based on a true view of the options available.

Personal construct counselling

This is based on the idea that nobody can know absolute truth. Instead, each person constructs their idea of the truth from their own experiences, and this affects the way they see the world. The problem is that people can get stuck with a view of things that prevents them from living life to the full, because they can't find any alternative ways of seeing things. Personal Construct counselling helps people to look at different ways of behaving that may be useful in changing the way they see the world.

Gestalt counselling

This is a more directive type of counselling, focusing on gestalten (patterns of thought, feeling and activity). It encourages people to have an active awareness of their present situation, and also incorporates communication that goes beyond words. A key part of gestalt counselling is the dramatisation, or acting out, of important conflicts in a person's life. This could involve using two or more chairs, for instance, so that they can physically take up different positions to represent different aspects of themselves.

Rational-emotive behavioural counselling

This takes the view that people have two main goals in life: to stay alive and to be happy. It aims to remove the obstacles that people place in their own way, and also to achieve a healthy balance between short-term and long-term goals.

Cognitive-behavioural counselling

This is another directive model, concerned with the way people's beliefs about themselves shape how they interpret experiences. The objective is to change self-defeating or irrational beliefs and behaviours by altering negative ways of thinking.

Clients learn to monitor their emotional upsets and what triggers them, to identify self-defeating thoughts, to see the connections between their beliefs, feelings and behaviour, to look at the evidence for and against these thoughts and beliefs, and to think in a way that is more realistic and less negative.

The counsellor usually gives the client tasks or homework to do between sessions. This could mean recording thoughts and feelings, or doing something that tests out a basic assumption about themselves. This might mean, for instance, going to the shops when their fear is that they may panic. (See Mind's booklet, [*Making sense of cognitive behaviour therapy*](#).)

Brief Solution Focussed Therapy

A structured therapy, usually carried out over one to five sessions. Unlike most other talking therapies, therapist and client usually spend little time on details and causes of the problem. The client is helped to define their own goals and therapy focuses on finding the best way towards the goals in the briefest time possible. It helps the client to recognise their own strengths, resources and abilities. To focus on what is getting better and to build on this.

Interpersonal Therapy (IPT)

A semi-structured therapy which examines how problems in relationships contribute to emotional difficulties such as depression and vice versa. IPT primarily focuses on working and improving relationships with the aim of bringing about change, leading to improvements in mood, or other troubling symptoms. IPT is usually offered over the course of up to 16 sessions. Available mainly through the NHS.

Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT)

DBT was developed from CBT and adapted to suit the specific needs of people with Borderline Personality Disorder. Available mainly through the NHS.

Psychosynthesis

A holistic approach to self-realisation and the development of potential. Includes creative approaches such as artwork, metaphor and imagery, visualization, therapeutic writing etc.

Core Process (Karuna Institute)

A gentle contemplative approach to exploring our life struggles, relationships, and inner process. Usually includes Mindfulness Meditation; underpinned by Buddhist principles.

In Core Process work, a depth awareness of what is happening in the present moment is used to explore our inner process. This awareness encompasses our energies, sensations, feelings, mental processes and their expressions in the body. The aim is not to alter our experience, but to sense how we relate to it, so that it becomes possible to move with greater creativity and flexibility in our lives. Core Process work is based on the understanding that within the conscious mind there is a deeper wisdom that moves naturally towards healing. Integration and healing come from insight into the ways in which we hold onto our suffering, and from a deeper connection with the openness, compassion and wisdom at the heart of our human condition.

Integrative

Combines ideas from more than one theoretical approach (usually including person centred and psychodynamic, and others), drawing on elements of each as appropriate for the client / issues.

Process Work (Process Oriented Psychology – developed by A. Mindell)

An emphasis on awareness over specific interventions. Process Work, developed by Arnold Mindell, has roots in Jungian Psychology and Taoism. Its methods reflect a dedication to accurately following the way of nature, while bringing awareness into the patterns structuring our lives; including those parts normally unseen, unappreciated, disturbing or marginalized. Bringing awareness into this interaction, a surprising wisdom emerges and a creative way forward in even the most difficult situations.

Counselling Psychology

Integrating psychological theory with therapeutic practice. An active collaborative relationship which can both facilitate the exploration of underlying issues and can empower people to confront change.

This outline includes extracts from a draft publication by Mind (National Association for Mental Health), from the L-PIN Guide to Self Help and Talking Therapies, and from websites related to the different modalities.