

ABOUT MYSELF

I bring to counselling over 20 years' experience of working with people, primarily in the area of personal relationships and sexuality. During the 1960s I was Secretary of the Homosexual Law Reform Society, which successfully campaigned for passage of the 1967 Sexual Offences Act to remove criminal penalties from homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private. In the course of that work, and as Director until 1977 of the Albany Trust, a Charitable agency set up to promote psychological health and with a major involvement in counselling people about their social and personal difficulties in relation to sexuality, I have counselled several hundred people about a wide range of matters.

I have been actively involved since the early 1970s in the establishment and development of the British Association for Counselling, and have taken part in many of its activities, including training workshops concerned with various modes of counselling. I recently completed a three-year part-time counselling course at South West London College, and hold a Diploma in Counselling Skills.

Other aspects of my professional life include a legal qualification (although I am not in practice), and a considerable amount of journalism and other writing about a variety of social issues.

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WHY COUNSELLING?

Counselling is a process aiming at the enhancement of self-knowledge and personal growth. According to the British Association for Counselling, "people become engaged in counselling when a person, occupying regularly or temporarily the role of counsellor, offers or agrees explicitly to offer time, attention and respect to another person or persons temporarily in the role of client. The task of counselling is to give the client an opportunity to explore, discover and clarify ways of living more resourcefully and toward greater well-being."

People seek counselling for many reasons, but a common factor is dissatisfaction with the way things are in their lives and a desire for change, for personal development and growth, and for increased self-awareness which will enable them to live more positively and creatively and to resolve the problems they experience.

The counselling I do is based on the conceptual frameworks of Transactional Analysis, Gestalt and other techniques such as Assertiveness Training. Transactional Analysis is a system for looking at and understanding (analysing) what is happening in our relationships (transactions) with other people, and for bringing about the changes we desire in our mode of transacting. Gestalt brings us more in touch with our immediate mind-body responses to our environment. Through Assertiveness Training we learn how to ask for what we want, and how to say no to what we don't want, by means of non-aggressive confrontation.

All these methods are most effectively applied in groups, although individual counselling can also be beneficial. The counselling group is a place where problems, difficulties and attitudes can be aired, shared and examined together, and where new methods of tackling them can be devised, practised and monitored in a mutual learning situation.

CONTRACTS

A guiding concept of TA is that everyone takes responsibility for where each of us is at and what we do (or don't do) about it. Counselling is about what YOU want for yourself — not what I, or anyone else in the group, thinks you ought to want.

Progress in counselling depends primarily upon the client's willingness to work for her/himself utilising the group's supportiveness and insights as a stimulus and aid to self-help. I ask you to bring to the groups a willingness to share yourself and to work as positively as you can on whatever motivates you to join.

The setting of personal goals, and their effective monitoring, is done by means of mutually agreed personal and group contracts, which are negotiated by each client, usually within two months of joining a group. There may also be some short-term 'homework' contracts for specific pieces of work, on a week-to-week (and sometimes a longer) basis. Group ground-rules which are important to me include punctuality and regularity of attendance, confidentiality, and mutual trust between everyone connected with the groups. My aim is to make the groups a place which is usually interesting, sometimes exciting, and always safe: where risks can be taken in a secure setting, personal goals set and, hopefully achieved.

I expect a commitment to the group in the form of your staying in it for a minimum of two months in order to ascertain properly whether the group is helping you. This commitment also includes staying in the group for at least two additional sessions after a decision to terminate — this gives you extra protection, allows you and group to deal with the process of saying goodbye, and also allows you to review, and possibly to reconsider, your reasons for leaving.

Group fees are currently £7 per 2½-hour session. Before a new member joins a group, I like to meet with them for about 45 minutes (without charge) to explore their reasons for seeking counselling and to enable us to make a mutual decision about working together.