

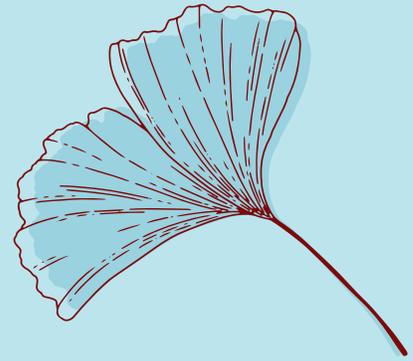


Choosing a counsellor

WORKBOOK

By Dr Astrid Coxon

Choosing a counsellor



With so many practitioners advertising online, choosing a counsellor can be a daunting prospect.

Where do you start? Where should you look? What should you look for? How do you know they're "qualified enough"?

I've been working in mental healthcare for over ten years, and have been a counselling client myself. The key thing I've learnt is the right "fit" is the most important element of a therapeutic relationship.

Yes, your counsellor should be trained, qualified, registered and insured. But that's all for nothing if you don't feel safe and comfortable talking to them.

I want to help you to find the right counsellor for **you**. Searching for support shouldn't be stressful. That's why I wrote this workbook - to help take some of the guesswork out of the process.

So let's get started!

Dr Astrid Coxon
Psychologist & Counsellor
PhD, CPsychol, MBPsS, MBACP



What do you want?



Before you even begin your search, it's important to think about **what** you want from a counsellor.

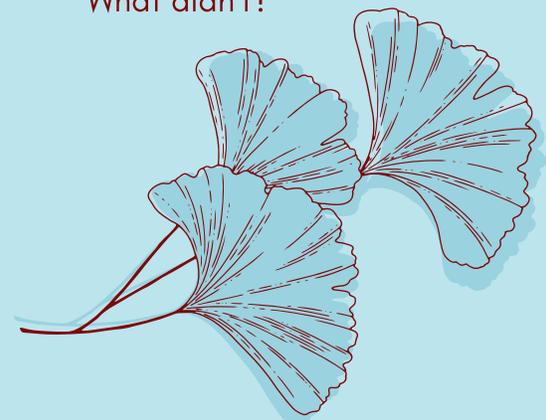
It can help to consider **why** you want to consult a counsellor before you approach one.

Consider what it is you want - is it something very specific, like some strategies for coping with work-related stress?

Or is it something less easy to put your finger on - perhaps you want to talk to someone about meaning in your life, or your sense of identity?

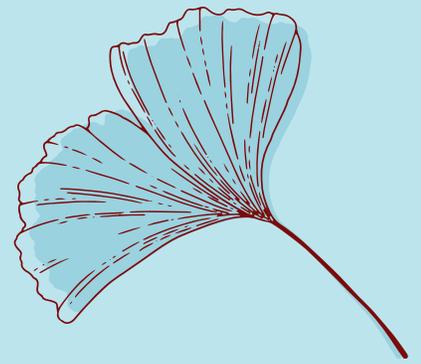
- ★ Are you looking for advice on a specific problem?
- ★ Are you feeling "stuck" but aren't really sure why?
- ★ Do you want a space to simply talk or explore?
- ★ Do you want a new perspective on something?
- ★ Are you looking for strategies or insight?
- ★ Have you had therapy before - what helped? What didn't?

What I want from counselling:

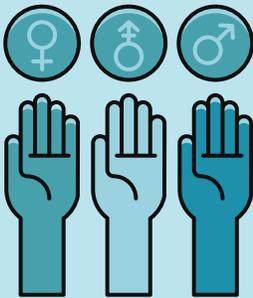




What's important to you?



Whilst they're trained professionals, counsellors are **human beings**, with their own experiences and values.



Some counsellors are upfront about their values or lived experiences, and may advertise as feminist, neurodivergent, or LGBTQ+

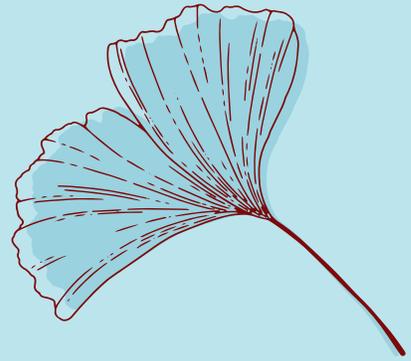
Perhaps you want a counsellor of a particular culture or ethnicity, gender, religion, or social class.



What's important to **you**? How much do you need to know about a potential counsellor in order to feel safe, or to know they will understand **you**?

What's most important to me:

Face-to-face? Online? Outdoors?



When you think of counselling, it's likely that you picture two people sitting in a room, talking face-to-face. Whilst this is still the most common approach to counselling, it's not the **only** way.

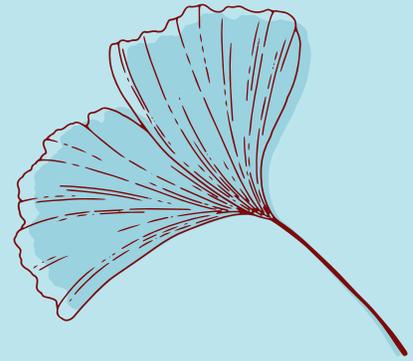
Remote counselling has boomed in popularity since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic - many counsellors now offer their services via videoconferencing platforms (such as Zoom), or over the telephone.

Not only does this potentially broaden your choices of counsellor (because you're not restricted by how far you can reasonably travel), but some people prefer to see a counsellor

from the comfort of their own homes. It eliminates travel time (and cost!) and some people find it easier to talk when they are in their own, familiar surroundings.

Another option is **outdoor** or **walking** therapy. Aside from the known physical and emotional benefits of being outside (particularly in green spaces), some people find it easier to talk whilst walking - you don't necessarily need to make eye contact, the "shared space" of the outdoors can feel less confining, and things you encounter as you walk can complement the therapeutic process.

Where to search



It can be tempting to simply go on Google and search for "counsellors near me". However, I would recommend starting with a reputable directory of registered, qualified counsellors.

Directories such as [Counselling Directory](#), [Psychology Today](#), and [Harley Therapy](#) verify practitioners before listing them - they check that they have a recognised qualification and are registered with a recognised membership body (such as the **BACP**, **NCS**, **UKCP**, **BABCP** or the **BPS**).

You can search these directories by location, specialism, mode (face-to-face, online, outdoor)

or modality (CBT, person-centred, psychodynamic, etc.) of therapy, or by other characteristics (for example, if you specifically want to see a female therapist).

There are other directories with a more specific focus, which can help narrow your search.

[Pink Therapy](#) lists professionals who specialise in LGBTQ+ or GSRD (gender, sexuality & relationship diversity).

The [Association of Neurodivergent Therapists](#) and [Thriving Autistic](#) lists therapists who have expertise in neurodiversity (and many are neurodivergent themselves).

Shopping around



Counselling is first and foremost a **human interaction**. Yes, it's important that your counsellor is a trained professional who is insured and qualified. But ultimately, you need to feel **safe and comfortable** talking to them. You need to shop around!



First impressions

Look at their profile pictures - do they look friendly, safe, professional? If they have a blog or videos, do you like the way they talk or express themselves? Can you imagine yourself talking to them?



Read more

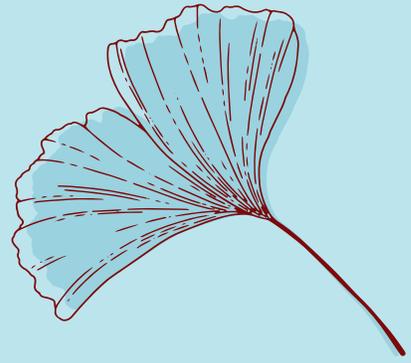
A counsellor's directory listing only gives a snapshot of who they are & how they work. If they have a website or social media pages, take a look - what else do they say about their practice, values or approach?



Make some enquiries

Send a few speculative emails, make some phone calls - whatever you're comfortable with - to get a "feel" for potential counsellors & ask any questions. There is no obligation to "sign up" at this stage!

Asking questions



Many counsellors offer initial consultations (often for free). These are usually 10–30 minute appointments, via telephone or video call.

Perhaps you simply want to ask practical questions:

- What do they charge?
- What is their cancellation policy?
- How long do their sessions last?
- How many sessions do they offer?
- Are session times fixed, or flexible week to week?

Or perhaps you want to ask more specific questions about **them**:

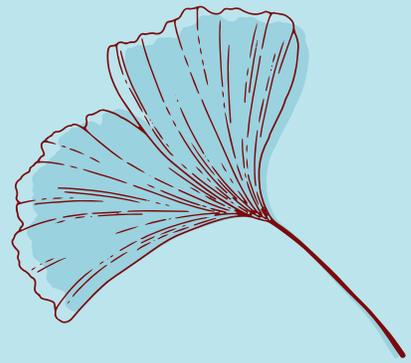
- Do they have lived experience of the issue you are facing?
- Are they a feminist?
- Are they LGBTQ+ positive?
- Are they anti-racist?

Different counsellors will have different views on self-disclosure (how much they tell clients about themselves), but if it's important for you to know where your future counsellor stands on a particular topic, it's important to ask.

Questions I want to ask:

And finally...

You can change your mind!



You've gone through everything I've suggested so far, you've narrowed down your search, and you've chosen someone who you think will be perfect for you to work with. You have a few sessions and...

Something feels off. Despite all your optimism about therapy, it just doesn't feel right. Perhaps you don't click, you don't like their therapeutic approach, or you just plain **don't like them**.

There is nothing wrong with deciding that this counsellor isn't right for you! You can simply tell them "I've changed my mind" or "this isn't working for me" or "I'm done".

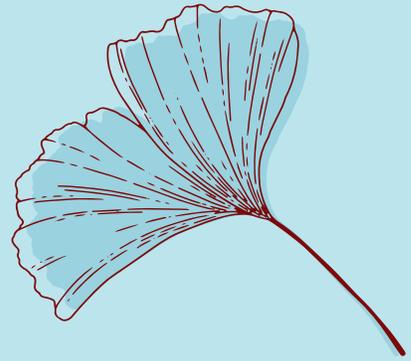
You're under no obligation to stay. Any counsellor worth their salt would rather support you to make a decision that's right **for you**.

You don't need to "stick with it" if it doesn't feel right for you. It's a professional service, not an irreversible pact.

Leaving therapy can be hard - you've invested time, emotional energy, and cold hard cash into getting this far.

But counselling is unique in that you're working within a **human relationship**. You'll know if it doesn't feel right, and you want to look elsewhere.

Want to know more?
Get in touch!



You're ready to start your search!

I hope the pointers in this workbook help you in finding the right counsellor for you.

If you have any questions, want to get in contact (or even book a free consultation with me), visit my website

<http://www.astridcoxon.com>

For more information about counselling, check out my blog series "[Counselling Basics](#)".

