

Understanding Counseling Professionals And The Help They Offer

from the American Counseling Association

Many people have little idea of who professional counselors really are and what they really do. For most of us, our experience has been limited to the school counselors we've known, or the mental health professionals we've seen portrayed on TV.

Fictional counselors we encounter through books, movies and television seldom offer an accurate picture of the profession. Their clients are usually "crazy people" with serious mental and behavioral issues and the counselor's work seldom seems to help.

The reality, however, is that professional counselors fulfill a variety of roles, most of which have nothing to do with people being "crazy." The people most professional counselors see are simply ordinary folks facing problems that may seem overwhelming, or who are at a place in life where they're feeling troubled or unsure of what to do next.

Another misconception is that seeing a professional counselor means someone is weak and in need of being told how to live his or her life. The truth, of course, is that it's a sign of strength to know when to ask for assistance. And a counselor's job is not dictating to clients how to live their lives.

What professional counselors do offer is help. Most counselors, for example, base their interventions on the person's strengths, the things he or she is already good at, not on the person's weaknesses and problems.

The job of a professional counselor is not to make a person feel uncomfortable, guilty or ashamed. Rather, it's to assist the client in growing, in learning new things, and in discovering how to make changes for the better. The counselor is a facilitator and guide, someone who offers suggestions about helpful directions and possible actions, but not someone who magically provides answers. With a good counselor you should feel safe and comfortable as you discover for yourself the answers that will help you.

Counseling is a process that does change and help people. Whether it's dealing with a loss, relationship problems, work issues, child rearing, feelings of anxiety, anger or depression, or any of hundreds of other all too common issues, professional counselors are trained and licensed to provide needed help.

You can learn more about what professional counselors have to offer by making an appointment with a local counselor (check your phone directory for the specialties offered in your area) or through the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcornet@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org

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