

## The American Counseling Association's "*Counseling Corner*" Weekly Columns

### So Who Are Professional Counselors?

from the American Counseling Association

Too many people know only one aspect of the counseling profession, and may be unaware of all that professional counselors have to offer. In many cases, the only contact a family may have had was with a school counselor when their children were in elementary, junior or high school. Yet while the counseling profession includes school counselors, they're only one part of the profession.

For starters, it's important to understand that professional counselors must complete quite a bit of specialized education before they can work in the counseling field. All professional counselors today hold at least a Master's degree, and growing numbers have earned doctoral degrees. In addition, as part of their education, they have typically spent at least 3,000 hours in supervised clinics to earn their license.

As part of their education and training, most professional counselors specialize in specific areas of counseling. They may focus on wellness, on career development, on relationship issues, on working with children or in any of the many other areas in which people may need help.

And help is what counselors have to offer. Often people are under the mistaken impression that when someone sits down with a professional counselor, that counselor is going to be to tell the person how to change and live his or her life. The reality is that counselors don't dictate to their clients, but rather assist the clients in discovering for themselves what issues are concerning them and what alternatives there might be to overcome problems and develop solutions.

Yes, some people who work with a professional counselor may be facing severe lifestyle or mental health issues, but the majority of the clients with whom counselors work are just regular people who are looking for help with everyday issues. Maybe the person is unhappy in his or her career, maybe there are relationship issues, maybe the person is feeling depressed without really know why. Working with a counselor is a means for finding answers that are often difficult to discover on one's own.

Finding a professional counselor to work with isn't difficult to do. Your physician or local mental health center can usually make recommendations. The American Counseling Association's website also offers a free referral service to locate a counselor in your area. It's online at [www.counseling.org/findacounselor](http://www.counseling.org/findacounselor). Clicking there can be the first step in finding professional assistance to a happier and more fulfilling life.

*Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to [ACAcornet@counseling.org](mailto:ACAcornet@counseling.org) or visit the ACA website at [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org).*

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