

Can Counseling Help?

Utah Marriage Commission

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As a perfectionist, “do your best” did little to calm my nerves. In fact, most times, it stressed me out. Being a perfectionist means you live your life in a way that requires you to put forth your all in everything you do. “Your best” is often time consuming, energy inducing, and emotionally draining. Putting forth everything you’ve got again and again is great until you run yourself right into the ground. I was nearly at my breaking point when I came to the conclusion that something had to change.

When I started going to counseling, one of the first things we started working on was teaching myself that it was okay not to be perfect. It was okay to have a bad day. It was okay to be sad. It was okay to be a little slower. I learned that I was allowed to take a break, take a deep breath, and take care of myself. Over time, counseling helped me accept that I am human. It also helped me accept that being perfect is not required nor desired.

Fortunately, I’m not alone in finding help with counseling. Though my counselor and I focused on perfectionism,

people have found help and guidance in all aspects of their lives while attending counseling. Research has found that between 60% and 65% of individuals benefited and experienced notable relief from their symptoms within one to seven sessions of psychotherapy. This number increased to 70%-75% after six months, and 85% after one year!¹ Antidepressant medication is another helpful resource. That being said, studies have found clear evidence that for major depression, panic disorder, and OCD, a combination of both therapy and antidepressant medication is more effective than treatment with antidepressant medication alone.² Both therapy and medication have been found to be beneficial, but they are most helpful when paired together.

There are many factors that make counseling work. This is known as the common factors theory which says that there are core elements that various therapies have in common, and they are what makes therapy successful. One of the biggest factors is known as the therapeutic alliance. In essence, this is the relationship between the therapist and the client and their common goal in helping the client feel better and as well as overcoming their bad habits.³ Other factors include motivation, one’s belief in themselves (known as self-efficacy), and insight.⁴ One of the most important factors is the bigger picture of having a willingness to change. With a willingness to change, counseling can give individuals the skills and tools necessary to feel better.

As mentioned, counseling can help and has many benefits, and it can be personally beneficial to different individuals in varying ways. Simply put, counseling is an individualized way to learn and grow. However, one has to wonder why it is more beneficial for some than it is for others. One possible answer to this question is Prochaska’s Transtheoretical Model of the stages of change. This model was originally created for overcoming problematic behaviors and/or addictions, but it has since shifted to be helpful for anyone looking to make changes in their life. Prochaska’s Transtheoretical Model is broken into six parts. (The sixth one is unofficial, but oftentimes necessary.) These are:

1. Pre-Contemplation

At this stage, people are unaware or deny that they have a problem. Consequently, they will often refuse therapy unless forced to do so.

1. Contemplation

Individuals at this stage are aware there is a problem or a behavior they’d like to change, but they are not quite ready to do anything about it. They may weigh the pros

and cons, but they are merely thinking about changing and not willing to take action yet. Clients may be in this stage from anywhere to a few weeks to their whole lives.

1. **Preparation**

At this stage, individuals are ready to make changes and will often start gathering information, taking small steps for future plans, and are more determined than they've been before. Most importantly, they have made a commitment to do the work to change.

1. **Action**

They are ready to address the problem, learn the tools and skills to make their lives better, follow-through on their plans, and are actively moving toward their goals.

1. **Maintenance**

Change is not easy, and this stage acknowledges that. In this stage, people are focused on maintaining their changes, keeping up the momentum, consolidating gains, and reminding themselves of the progress they've made. It is important that they build and take advantage of their social support system. Change is not simple and having people to support and motivate you is key to avoiding relapse!

1. **Relapse** (not official, but may be necessary)

Relapses are often common and normal in the process of changing behaviors and enhancing one's life. This is when people fall back to their old habits or behaviors. Realizing that relapses are okay and are normal will help clients move towards their goals once more. Revisiting an earlier stage, such as contemplation or preparation may be necessary in going forward.

So back to the question, "can counseling help?" Well, it depends; are you willing to recognize what stage of change you're in? Are you willing to do the work necessary to make your life better? Are you willing to practice the skills you will be learning? Are you ready to feel better? Counseling can give you tools and skills necessary to enhance your relationships and your quality of life. If you are ready to change, counseling can help. If you are not ready to acknowledge where you are and don't care to implement new coping skills and move towards a better life, then counseling could be a waste of time. So while asking, "can counseling help?" you should also consider, "am I ready to change?" And if you are, make an appointment today. Your future self is waiting.