

## Three Basic Aspects of Counselling and Psychotherapy

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The feeling of being properly heard and understood is deeply transforming. In our lives when helped by partners, friends or work colleagues we are often advised to change ourselves, to correct our direction. The effect of this is often to make us feel criticised, diminished or annoyed and resistant. In counselling and psychotherapy the approach is different. The therapist aims to treat everything we bring with respect and generosity, accepting our inner world exactly as it is without trying to impose a particular agenda.

Three key aspects to the process of counselling and psychotherapy facilitate this:

1. An acceptance of the unique truths that we sense intuitively, through our gut and our senses and our imagination rather than rationally. The therapist helps by entering our world to explore it, helping us to work with images, metaphors, feelings and what we sense in a way that completely works for us and doesn't need to work that way for anyone else. The therapist validates, acknowledges, recognises it's truth to us as unique individuals.
2. A therapist listens differently. It's all about you, whereas when sharing such explorations with a friend it often ends up being about them. A friend may well feel that by sharing their fellow experience you will feel less alone. That may be true, but it's more likely that you will feel irritated that they are imposing their view of the world onto your unique situation and don't really understand, and their response has the effect of closing you down. Therapists' questions tend to be non directive, openly enquiring and without an 'edge'. They do not interject 'I know exactly how that feels because when it happened to me....' With a counsellor or psychotherapist we are not being told to see or make sense of things in a particular way, and they do not impose their interpretation.
3. One of the most valuable experiences in counselling and therapy, is when we hear our own words reflected back at us. Sometimes they may be paraphrased or rephrased, but often they will be exact. This simple thing has a very powerful effect, on making us feel affirmed, respected and 'allowed'. It might seem a basic thing to do, however this simple thing requires considerable focus and close attention from the therapist.

We are capable of making extraordinarily deep and powerful changes to apparently intractable problems when we are fully heard, validated and supported in this way. It's a wonderful thing that this simple human service of contact through receptivity is available to us all in counselling and psychotherapy.

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