

Relationship Counselling Works for People of All Ages and Stages

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Research shows that relationship counselling works for people of all ages and stages in their relationships.



The effectiveness of relationship counselling is demonstrated in a meta-analysis of 15 outcome studies, where cases that receive treatment tend to do better than cases that do not (Dunn & Schwebel, 1995). In short, counselling does help unhappy relationships (McKeown et al, 2002). Studies show that counselling works by reducing stress, changing partners' negative behaviours of criticising, insulting and not listening, and by helping clients to become more satisfied with the partners' share in housework and childcare (McKeown et al, 2002).

Some people find counselling helps by offering practical advice on improving communication and managing potential arguments (McCarthy et al, 2004). Whereas others find value in the act of seeking counselling itself - a way of doing something to prove the relationship is worth saving (McCarthy et al, 2004; McKeown et al, 2002).

People who go to relationship counselling feel better about themselves afterwards and tend to develop more sharing and affectionate relationships (McCarthy et al, 1998). Following from this, counselling improves relationship satisfaction for around one third of men and one fifth of women (McKeown et al, 2002). Counselling works equally well for both men and women and all social classes (McKeown et al, 2002). Importantly, counselling helps unhappy relationships quickly, with 7-8 sessions being the optimum number (McKeown et al, 2002).

SMC's own statistics support these research findings, with clients attending on average just 4 sessions. SMC clients come for counselling at all ages and stages in their relationships. There is no most common age group or length of relationship to seek counselling. SMC clients come from all social backgrounds. Less than one-fifth of SMC clients report that their relationship has ended on termination of the counselling process and clients report a high level of satisfaction with our service:

"Very pleased with all the counselling sessions I attended. Don't think our relationship would have lasted without your help."

"I think the sessions were very good and it would be difficult to improve in my opinion. I wish we had gone years ago!"

“We found the counselling service met all our relationship issues. Very pleased with the service.”

“The counsellor was excellent and focused on moving forward.”



86% of SMC clients rate the effectiveness of the counselling they received as between 8 out of 10 and 10 out of 10 on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being excellent. Furthermore, almost 100% of SMC clients would recommend our service to a friend.

One fundamental outcome of counselling is that it reduces stress (McKeown et al, 2002) and enables people to manage their family situation much more effectively. Counselling can help separating couples to achieve a more amicable split, smoothing the transition to new families. Counselling in these circumstances does not make divorce easy but it does assist people in coming to terms with the situation and moving into a new life feeling better able to cope (McCarthy et al, 2004). Counselling under these circumstances can be favoured as an alternative to mediation, which is a different type of service to counselling. One study casts doubt on the effectiveness of mediation as most people that attended were not positive that they had achieved any wider benefits and fewer than half were satisfied with the mediation they received. 62% of people left mediation with issues that still required to be resolved (McCarthy et al, 2004).

Moreover, counselling has a positive influence on children too. It is well documented that family breakdown can lead to problems for children at home, school and in adult life (West & Sweeting, 2002; Sweeting et al, 1998; Rodgers & Pryor, 1998; Pagani et al, 1998). It is less well known however that the quality of the parental relationship, even if parents are separated, has a profound effect on children's development (Cowan & Cowan, 1997). Children from families where there is high parental conflict that is not successfully resolved often experience the same disadvantages as those children who experience family breakdown. The bottom line is that the quality of parenting is disabled by discordant family relationships (Mansfield, 2004). The work done by clients in the counselling room has a positive effect on the adult couple relationship, which in turn is beneficial to children.

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