



Toolkit for Teens
Tip Sheet #7: When to Talk to a Counselor

Counseling can be very helpful for individuals and couples for many different reasons. Individuals and couples may seek counseling at different stages in their lives and in their relationships to build upon strengths, resolve conflicts, and manage stressful life transitions. Whether you're thinking about seeking counseling as an individual or with your partner, we've included some questions you may consider when thinking about selecting a counselor.

1. **What training or experience do you have related to working with teenagers and teenagers in dating relationships?** **Note: If you're in a relationship, consider asking what training and experience the counselor has related to counseling couples specifically.** Find out what experience the counselor has in counseling individuals in your age group. If you're interested in couples counseling, discuss what training your counselor has in couples counseling. The counselor should have specific training in working with couples since this is a unique specialty area in the counseling field. The counselor should be able to explain their level of training and the specific approach they use when working with couples in simple language.
2. **How many sessions will there be?** Discuss the amount of sessions you and your counselor feel would be appropriate for addressing your presenting concerns. Your interest in individual or couples counseling may or may not dictate the length of counseling, so be sure to discuss this up front with your counselor. It may not be possible to determine an exact timeline at the start of counseling, but once your counselor has a general sense of your goals for counseling, they should be able to offer a general timeline so you'll understand what time commitment will be involved.
3. **What is the cost?** Costs for individual and couples counseling can vary widely, and unfortunately, many health insurance companies don't cover couples counseling specifically unless one person has a diagnosable mental health disorder. It is important to discuss the cost of counseling (either individual or couples) up front with your counselor in order to make an informed decision about how much you are able to afford. If one counselor's cost for services is too high, ask if they can provide referrals for more affordable services in your community.
4. **Would you provide couples counseling to a couple in which abuse was occurring?** If you have experienced violence or abuse in your relationship, couples counseling is **NOT** appropriate and may not be safe. Therefore, if you've been abused by your partner, you should not seek counseling from a provider who says that they would provide couples counseling to address an abusive relationship. There are specific intervention programs for people who are abusive in relationships, and this issue is not safe to address in a couples counseling context.

In addition to the questions above, it's also important to consider how well you "click" with the counselor. It's important to work with someone with whom you and your partner (if applicable) are comfortable. The more positive you feel about the counselor, the more safe you'll feel in exploring challenging issues in yourself and/or your relationship.