

9. Learn

Psychoeducation helps. It really, really helps. We give ourselves a hard time because we don't understand about dissociation, flashbacks or attachment. Yet, almost all our behaviours and beliefs can be seen as logical once we understand them. Our behaviour and beliefs are normal responses to abnormal events. The more we understand ourselves, the more we will value ourselves as ingenious survivors who are courageous and resourceful.

Knowledge is power, and power is what we need to overcome the disempowerment of trauma.

10. Don't let go of the rest of your life

It is important to priorities therapy, but it's important to keep a balance, too.

Counselling is there to help you re-engage with life and conquer the world. It is not a substitute for life. The things you work through in therapy need to be worked out in real life; therapy is where you get to practice and figure out your relating, but you need real relationships in real life to put it into action.

Counselling is our springboard for life. Through therapy we increase our relational and experiential wealth, because therapy won't last forever and it's only a poor imitation of the rich life we have ahead of use.

Further information and suggested reading can be found on our website: www.firststepleicester.org.uk

Extracts taken from Carolyn Spring's 'Recovery is my Best Revenge'

Making the most of your counselling



FIRST STEP

... on your decision to come to First Step to start getting the help and support you deserve. Chances are it's taken you a long time to get here, so take a moment to pat yourself on the back. **You did it!**

Counselling is not something that is 'done' to us. It's not a case of sitting comfortably and letting the therapist do the work. In fact, in many ways, it's the opposite. For therapy to be effective, we need to actively engage in it.

None of us have been to 'client school', so it's hard to know exactly what to do to make sure you get what you need out of your sessions.

This is a short guide about how you can make the most out of the 50 minutes, weekly sessions you have. Because the more you put in, the more you'll get out of it.

1. Make it a priority

Put your sessions in your phone or calendar and prioritise them. You will be offered 26 sessions write them all down now. It's your responsibility to get yourself to the sessions and to give yourself the time for them.

2. Get in the Zone

Plan for your sessions. Give yourself plenty of time to get to First Step. You might even write a list before your session to focus on what you want to talk about in the next session. Find a quiet space and imagine how talking to your counsellor is going to go.

3. Plan your session and take the driver's seat

Sometimes you expect the therapist to take the lead. It may seem as if the counsellor is lazy and can't remember from one week to the next what you've spoken about. But they are waiting to see what you bring to the session. This makes counselling a collaborative effort. See yourself as the driver and therapist as the navigator.

4. Respect the 'therapeutic frame'

Not a familiar phrase for most of us. Think of it as 'implicit' rules for counselling. It should be a fixed point in the week and for a specific amount of time. It's not a social chat, it's a safe place to disclose, be self-focussed and express emotions. We can sabotage the therapy by being late, distracted, 'forget' to come, leave early, pretend to be open, or play a role. None of these will help us to recover. If we respect the frame, we respect ourselves.

RESPECT

5. Encourage others to respect your therapy

Not everyone understands what counselling is for and how it works. People might think counselling is a nice chat and a bit self-indulgent. Or they might be dismissive of your need for it. It can be difficult explaining counselling is important, it will help and it's a priority.

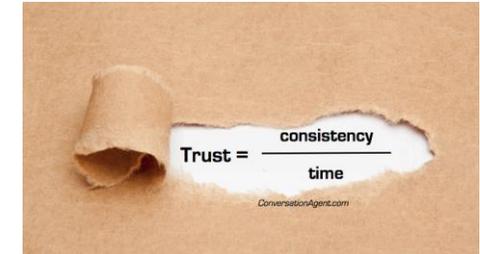
6. Do the hardest work between sessions

It's tempting to finish the session, breathe a sigh of relief and put it out of our minds until the following week. So much of the therapeutic work is about changing the wiring of our brains that we have lived with for decades. In counselling you are making changes to the neural networks. Saying 'it wasn't my fault' in the session will make a difference, but not as much as saying it 100 times or thinking, writing, drawing, meditating, considering and dreaming it. That way our brains can be busy creating new connections all week long.

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7. Honour and guard your relationship with your therapist

It's easy to see your counsellor as a 'professional', where 'professional' means they are not really human, and it's just a job and they don't really care. Certainly, you're not responsible for your therapist's feelings, and you shouldn't hold back on talking about what you need to for fear of upsetting them. But they are still a human being. If you can honour your relationship with the, if you can guard it by treating them with dignity and respect, you will gain in the end.



Therapy is where things get said, feelings get felt, reality is faced. It's not a place for playing games, avoiding anything real, hiding emotions or trying to stay one step ahead. You need to be willing to engage, be honest and be challenged.

8. Don't undermine therapy by contradicting it the rest of the time

We want to live free from abuse, but we continue to abuse ourselves. We want to put up boundaries with our abusers, but then we invite them to stay. And we go to our counselling session and hand our head in shame and say, 'it's not working'.

You can talk about trauma and understand its impact on you but until you start to make active choices, choose not to abuse yourself, choose not to let your abusers in, the change won't happen.

You can't compromise by talking about recovery in therapy and then continue to make the same choices the rest of the time. There has to be agreement between your intentions in therapy and your actions in the rest of your life.