

Seeing a Psychologist - info for young people

So, what is a psychologist?

Psychologists are expert counsellors who have a wide range of skills to help all sorts of people with all sorts of problems. Sometimes it's helping people deal with everyday hassles and stresses, but they can also help people who are really struggling to just do ordinary things each day, like get out of bed, keep up with school work, or make and keep friends. They also can deal with more serious problems like aggression or feeling really depressed or anxious, or when things seem really out of control.

Why do young people come to see a psychologist?

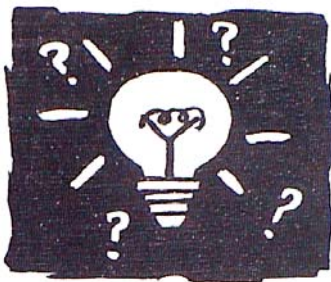
People see psychologists for all sorts of reasons. Usually, it is because they are thinking they want something in their life to be different. They may want to feel happier or like themselves more, deal with stress better, stop thinking, feeling or doing something that bothers them, or have better relationships. Sometimes someone has suggested they come like a teacher, counsellor or medical doctor, but it's important that they know that a psychologist will always be 'seeing things' from their point of view, not taking sides with anyone else, like a parent.



What if someone said "you need to see a psychologist" and now you're freaking out?

Don't panic! It's normal to be nervous about meeting someone for the first time. The psychologist's job is to make you feel comfortable and okay about talking. They will usually take time to get to know you by asking you about things you're feeling okay to talk about. They won't pressure you into talking about anything you're not ready to tell them, but they will help you to talk about difficult things if you want to.

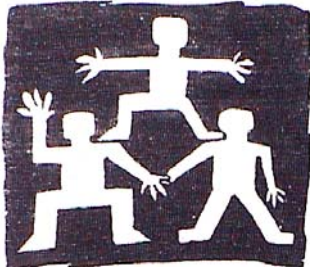
People often relax pretty quickly once they realize that this is a private and confidential discussion and they can talk openly with someone who understands them. It is really important to find the right "fit" with your psychologist, and if it doesn't feel right, then keep looking for someone with a different style. Remember, this is also a time for you to check them out.



How do psychologists help people with their problems?

Young people often say "How can talking about my problems fix them!" The truth is that people often feel much better when they share their concerns with someone who can help them make sense of confusion or not feel so trapped. Often having the psychologist's view on things opens up a whole lot of new ways you can deal with a problem. Once you can see things differently, they can then help you to think differently and then feel and act differently towards something that might be causing a lot of stress, concern or unhappiness.

Remember, psychologists are really good at equipping people with new skills or strategies to solve difficult problems, to cope better with pressures, or help change the way you think or feel about bad things that have happened. Other times they can help you understand yourself better, or learn new ways of managing situations like relationships with friends or family. In the end it's about the psychologist being able to understand you as an individual and together deciding what is the best approach for you.



How long will I have to see them for?

People usually say they begin to feel better after the first session because they now feel hopeful that things can be different. After a few sessions things usually start to change, so seeing a psychologist for only around 5-6 sessions may be all that is needed. Once things are going well though, people may like to keep coming to learn about how things got that way in the first place, and how to stop problems from happening in the future. So people will often come for around 10 sessions and may come back for booster sessions if they hit a snag in the future.

Are the sessions private?

By law, what you tell a psychologist is bound by strict privacy, or confidentiality. There are two exceptions to this: 1) when you or someone else may be in immediate danger of serious harm, and 2) where a court orders the psychologist to provide information in court. Usually, anyone over the age of 14 is given confidentiality. Psychologists take confidentiality very seriously because it allows young people to speak openly and freely about personal things they want help with. Counsellors and psychologists in schools may have more limited confidentiality depending on the school's policy.



What if it seems the situation will never change?

Young people sometimes feel that no one could understand their situation, or that something that has happened is so bad the psychologist will not cope hearing about it, or that nothing can be done to fix what's happened and change the past. Sometimes people think that to fix something you need to go back in time to change what has happened. The good news is that psychologists have been able to help many, many young people who have felt that their situation was hopeless and they could never be happy again.

The past can't be undone, but with understanding and effective help and encouragement young people can learn to make the changes in their lives, or in themselves that they want. They can have a hopeful future where they may not always feel good about what's happened, but they can feel good about themselves and how they've handled the challenges they've faced.

How much does it cost?

Seeing a psychologist in private practice may not cost much - if anything. You can get a Medicare referral from a medical doctor (or 'GP') through what's called a "mental health care plan." Medicare may then cover some or most of the psychologist's fee. If you are coming without your parent's involvement, your psychologist may let Medicare cover the total cost – this is called 'Bulk Billing'. When you book a time to see your GP you should always tell them before you book that you want a referral to see a psychologist. Also, private health insurance may cover some of the psychologist's fee and in this case you don't need to go to the doctor first.

Remember... "A problem shared is a problem halved"

We rarely achieve everything we want all by ourselves. Young people often find they learn more from a psychologist than just ways to maintain their psychological well being. Yes, they learn how to make themselves happier, but they also learn valuable psychological and social skills they'll use throughout their lives.

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