



Your First Counseling Session

What you should know

Mental health is inextricably linked to physical health, so your primary care physician (PCP) may be the first place you turn to when you need help. Since most PCP appointments are short, it's important to be prepared to describe your condition, think of what questions you want to ask beforehand, and be ready to share your family's mental health history. Consider bringing a friend or relative for support, and to help you remember what you and the provider discuss. Most important, be honest about your symptoms so your PCP can make the appropriate referrals.

Once you have a referral to a counselor, therapist or psychologist, remember that you are a consumer in this process. If at any point you feel that the fit is not a good one, it is okay to move on. Only you can decide if the relationship "feels" right and if you feel that the counselor can help you with your concerns.

What to expect at your first appointment

The initial appointment with your counselor will probably be geared toward establishing a connection, getting to know one another, defining goals and providing you with a sense of hope for the future. If you're using your insurance benefit, the counselor may ask for demographic and insurance information. The counselor should also provide his or her HIPPA (privacy) statement and review the confidential nature of your sessions.

Questions to expect

The counselor will likely ask questions surrounding the reason for your visit. Be as honest as possible with them, keeping in mind that the conversation is confidential, and that the counselor is interested in helping you to feel better. Questions may include:

- What are your current life circumstances?
- What are your symptoms? How have you tried to manage them thus far?
- Have you had any counseling before? When, and what was your experience like?
- How's your health? Which medications are you currently taking?
- How much alcohol do you drink? Do you use any recreational drugs?
- Do you have any family history of depression or substance use?
- What are your goals for therapy or counseling?

Questions to ask

- What is your training? How long have you been in practice?
- Have you worked with individuals who have faced the same issues I am currently confronting?
- How do I reach you outside of my scheduled time?
- Do you have backup coverage if I need an immediate consultation?
- What is your cancellation policy?

The counselor should be open to answering your questions, so don't feel funny about asking anything that's on your mind. Remember, this is your time. The counselor is a consultant to you and is there to help you understand current challenges while helping you make some changes in how you cope.

#MentalHealth #MakeItMainstream

If you or someone you know is struggling with mental health issue, help is out there. Contact the Mental Health America 24/7 Crisis Text Line (Text MHA to 741-741).

