

CLIENT INFORMATION

At the PF Counselling Service, we like to offer a warm and supportive welcome to all our clients. We hope these notes give the answers to common questions and will help you feel at home with the way we do things. **Please read this carefully before you start your counselling at the PF**, and let us know if anything is not clear.

Initial Appointment

When you request counselling with us, we start by offering you an initial appointment, usually after a short wait. This 'assessment session' is used to help us work out, together with you, whether or not counselling at the PF is the right thing for you at this time. You will be able to discuss your reasons for wanting to come for counselling, and we will give you information about what we can offer. This session takes around 50 minutes and will usually be with a different counsellor from the one you will see later for your regular weekly sessions.

Waiting for a Regular Appointment

After you have had your initial session, you may have to wait before beginning regular weekly counselling. We will offer you an appointment at a time that you can manage, based on what you have told us. There can be a long wait for an evening appointment, but it is less for a daytime appointment. Details of the current waiting times can be found on our website.

While you are on our waiting list, please update us as soon as possible about any changes to the days or times you told us you can attend for weekly sessions, or if you change your email, address or phone number. This will help us to offer you regular counselling as soon as we can.

If we email you or leave you a message offering you an appointment, please get back to us as soon as possible to let us know if you are able to come to this. If we do not hear from you by the date given, we will offer the appointment to another person, and will not contact you further. In case our offer is treated

as spam, check your junk folder regularly for our emails. **Please let us know if you change your mind and no longer wish to come for counselling.**

Regular Appointments

Your counselling will be at the same time on the same day each week on a regular basis. Each session lasts for 50 minutes and will always start at the same time unless agreed in advance with your counsellor. If you are not able to continue on that particular day or time, please discuss this with your counsellor, or let the office know as soon as possible.

We offer up to 12 sessions at first. If you and your counsellor feel that a longer period of counselling would be helpful for you, you can talk about this together in the sessions. It is sometimes possible to continue your counselling for up to two years in our core service, or for up to a year in our Young Adults service on Saturdays.

Cancellations

If you are unable to attend your appointment, please try to let us know as soon as possible. If you give less than 24 hours' notice, or if you do not attend one of your appointments without telling us, this affects both the PF and your counsellor. When this happens we feel it is fair to ask you to make your usual donation for the missed session.

If you miss an appointment and we do not hear from you, we will try to get in touch with you to ask you to confirm that you can come to the next appointment. However, if we do not hear from you after a second missed appointment, we will assume that you no longer wish to continue with counselling. If you have good reasons for missing your appointments, you should let us know as soon as possible, and discuss these with your counsellor when you next meet. Please let your counsellor know about any planned holidays at the earliest opportunity.



Contact with You

If you have given us your email address, we will use this as our main way of getting in touch with you, unless you tell us otherwise. This is a confidential and cost-effective way for us to communicate with you, so please ensure that you check your email regularly. It is useful to add us to your list of 'safe senders' to avoid our emails going into junk.

If we telephone you, our number is shown as 'withheld', to ensure your confidentiality. Please answer these calls if you are waiting to hear from us.

Confidentiality

We offer a confidential counselling service. Under normal circumstances, no information about you will be passed to anyone outside PF Counselling. This includes information about your initial enquiry, your attendance at counselling sessions, and anything that you have told your counsellor during the sessions.

In certain circumstances, the PF may pass on confidential information about you.

This would only happen if:

- **You have asked your counsellor or a member of staff to share the information.**
- **Your counsellor or a member of staff believes that you or another person is at risk of serious harm.**
- **Your counsellor or a member of staff is required by law to do so.**

If any of these things were to happen, your counsellor would normally encourage you to pass on the information to the relevant person or agency yourself. However, if the situation is critical or we cannot contact you, the member of staff or counsellor may pass on the information directly. If it is at all possible, we will ask you first for your consent.

Fair Access

We operate a Fair Access Policy which aims to balance the needs of individuals receiving counselling at the PF with those in the community who are seeking counselling or are on our waiting lists. Details are available on our website under *Helping You*.

Your Counsellor

Your counsellor will come from one of many different theoretical and practical approaches, or may have had training in more than one. At the PF we do not offer just one 'type' of counselling, and support many recognised approaches to therapy.

The relationship that you have with your counsellor is very important to the success of the counselling work you do together. If you have difficulty with this relationship at any point, you should discuss it with your counsellor or, if necessary, with a PF staff member. If the Director agrees, and if it is possible, you may be offered the opportunity to change to a different counsellor. However, there may be a delay in restarting your counselling until a new counsellor is available. It can be helpful to try to talk about any problems first with your counsellor to see if you can work together on what you are finding difficult.

How counselling ends is important for both you and your counsellor. When you feel that you would like to finish counselling, please discuss this with your counsellor in a session before the one that you would like to be your final appointment.

As well as providing counselling to clients, the PF also supports the training of new counsellors. This means that some of our counsellors may be in the final stages of a Postgraduate Diploma or other professional training. They will usually have received at least two years training and are closely supervised by their training organisation as well as by the PF.

Record Keeping and Your Privacy

We are committed to looking after your privacy, and the confidentiality of the work we do with you. We need to keep your name, contact details, and statistical data on record in the office. We keep a record of all appointments offered, attended, and cancelled, and of the financial contributions made. We do this so that we can run an efficient service, maintain the appointments system, and make sure that the premises are safe for everyone.

Your counsellor will keep notes about your sessions, which are stored securely by PF. They will usually be short and factual, and will include things such as background information, key topics discussed, and issues that have come up for you or your counsellor during the session.

By accepting the PF's offer of counselling, you are agreeing to these records being kept according to the terms of the PF Privacy Policy, available on our website.





Donations

Counselling at the PF is offered to everyone on a voluntary donation basis. We are a registered charity whose aim is to provide quality counselling, available and affordable to all members of the community.

The typical cost of a private counselling session in Edinburgh is around £45 - £65, but at the PF we do not charge fees. Instead, we ask all clients to make a donation at each session, according to what they feel they can afford. This is seen as a way of valuing your therapeutic work, as well as supporting the PF.

The amount you are able to offer will be agreed with you during your initial assessment appointment. You will then give your donation to your counsellor each week, in cash or by card. You may do this for a number of sessions in advance if you wish.

You can discuss and change your weekly donation (downwards or upwards) with your counsellor at any time. Circumstances can change, and we do not want you to stop coming for counselling because of financial worries. If you find that it is difficult to keep donating the amount that you first agreed, please discuss this with your counsellor. On the other hand, you may find work or have some other change of circumstances which means that you can make a larger donation. That would be much appreciated!

Our counsellors and receptionists provide their services on a voluntary basis in the core service, but we need donations to cover the running costs, including the expenses of premises, counselling supervision, office administration and training. Although the PF Young Adults service was supported by some initial funding, your donations enable us to keep it going now that this has been used up.

Gift Aid

The Government's Gift Aid scheme allows us to claim a refund of tax you have paid on the amount you donate. It can add 25p to every £1 donated.

For example: If you donate £20 per session for 12 sessions, Gift Aid will add £60.00 to your total donation, at no additional cost to you.

You will be asked to make a Gift Aid Declaration at your initial session, and if you can help in this way we then reclaim tax. You do not need to do anything else. If you are not a tax-payer then you should not make a Gift Aid Declaration. And if for any reason you think that the amount you pay in tax may be less than the amount being claimed for all the donations you are making to all the charities you support, please tell us.

Your form is kept securely by us for the sole purpose of providing a record of your declaration to HMRC, so that we can claim Gift Aid. If you would like any further information on the Gift Aid Scheme or have any questions, please ask the staff in the office.

If you pay enough tax, we can claim Gift Aid!

Data Security

All records and notes are kept securely within the PF Counselling Service physical and electronic systems. Notes are kept anonymously, which means that your name is not on them. Other information that we need to keep about you, such as your address and phone number, are kept separately and securely. Only authorised office personnel have access to these.

In line with best professional practice, your personal information and notes are kept for a period of three years after you finish counselling. After this time they are destroyed by shredding or secure deletion. We keep anonymous statistical data for longer in order to monitor and develop the counselling service.

GDPR

Under GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations), we have a duty to process personal data carefully and securely, and you have a right to see the material we hold about you. If you would like to see this information, please speak first to your counsellor. They will be able to tell you more about what is in your file and why. This is often more helpful than simply seeing written material. You can also contact the Director to ask to see the information we hold. We would need one week's notice to administer a data request.

Professional Ethics

The PF is a COSCA (Counselling & Psychotherapy in Scotland) Recognised Organisation. Counsellors working at the PF work within the COSCA Statement of Ethics and Code of Practice (available from the COSCA website www.cosca.org.uk).

Supervision

In line with the counselling profession's requirements and standards, all our counsellors undertake professional supervision. In supervision, they may discuss aspects of what arises in their sessions, as its purpose is to help your counsellor think more deeply about the counselling that you are doing together. This offers extra support and safety for both you and your counsellor. Supervision is confidential, and takes place both individually and in groups with other counsellors. You should tell us if you know any of the other counsellors, or clients, at the PF.

Complaints

We hope that your counselling with us will be a very positive experience. However, if you are not happy with any part of our service, or if you have a complaint to make, please let us know. We will make every effort to sort out any problems as soon as possible. All complaints will be treated seriously and in confidence.

If you are attending counselling sessions, please talk about any concerns first with your counsellor if you can. If you do not wish to do this, or if you have already done this and are not happy with the outcome, please put your complaint in writing to the Director. There is a copy of our formal Complaints Procedure on the PF website and in the waiting area of our premises, or you can ask for a copy from the Office.

Service Evaluation

The PF works hard to offer a high-quality, well-run, and effective service, and we welcome your feedback on any aspect of your experience with us. You can write to the Director or Operations Manager at any time, or make an appointment to speak to them in person.

You may be asked to complete questionnaires, which help us better understand your experience and how much we are helping. This information is treated with the care described under Record Keeping & Privacy.

We will invite you to fill in a short, simple online Feedback form a few weeks after you have ended counselling with us. The invitation will be sent by email and this will be the only communication you receive from us after you have stopped being a client, unless you tell us that you would like to keep in touch. We would really appreciate you taking a few minutes to fill in this form, as your views are important to us.

Questions & Concerns

Please feel free to contact the PF office or the Director if you have any questions or concerns before counselling begins, or during the course of your time with us.

Useful Information and Contacts

The PF website has a range of information, FAQs and resources which you may find useful before and during your counselling. This includes links to self-help, online CBT, and other materials:

www.pfcounselling.org.uk

iThrive Edinburgh – ithriveedinburgh.org.uk

Edinburgh-based information and resources covering a wide range of mental health and wellbeing topics.

Thinking About Therapy? – bit.ly/pf-bacp

An introduction to counselling from one of the UK governing bodies, BACP.

Get Self Help – www.getselfhelp.co.uk

Self-help information, resources and downloadable CBT-based worksheets and audio files.

Edinburgh Crisis Centre – 0808 801 0414

Practical and emotional support for people in crisis, available 24/7.

Samaritans – 116 123

Telephone listening service available 24 hours.

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