



# MACSAS Finding & Choosing a Counsellor or Therapist

MACSAS is unable to recommend counsellors or therapists.

The British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy has very good advice on its website and can also help you find a counsellor / therapist. [www.bacp.co.uk](http://www.bacp.co.uk).

It is important that you consider the following *before* embarking on finding the right person:

1. What sort of counselling would suit me? There are many different 'schools' of therapy and counselling. Some look at the past in depth, some look at the present and how to cope, others try to help you think differently about your problems. Before choosing read a little about the different approaches.
2. Does the gender of the counsellor / therapist matter to me? Think about who you feel most comfortable with. If you are referred via the NHS you will hopefully be able to say which gender is more comfortable for you.
3. What are the costs? Is there a sliding scale? Can anybody help you with fees? Fees can be a problem for survivors but some organisations offer free counselling. This tends to be short term.
4. What are the qualifications of the counsellor / therapist? Ideally you should choose someone with good qualifications and registered with a credible association / professional body.  
You are perfectly entitled to ask your therapist questions.

These points will give you some idea of the training and qualification of the person:

- What training did you do?
- What qualification do you have? May I see proof? (all BACP therapists & counsellors have to satisfy certain criteria to be registered see [www.bacp.co.uk](http://www.bacp.co.uk))

These are important because you want to know what experience the person has with sexual abuse survivors and 'for how long' may indicate the level of experience:

- Have you worked with clergy abuse survivors before?
- How long have you worked with survivors or been in practice?

These are safeguards against professional misconduct:

- Are you registered with a professional association?
- Who supervises you?
- Do you keep notes why and what for?
- How is confidentiality ensured?
- What are the complaints procedures? What do I do if I'm not happy?

Going to see a counsellor or therapist can be nerve-wracking and we often fail to ask the right questions in our nervousness and vulnerability. Asking questions straight away might help you get over this hurdle. For example:

“Before we begin would you mind if I asked you some questions about you?”

“I need to feel safe and this is important to me”.

### **Safeguards**

Unfortunately some therapists & counsellors act unethically and clients are at risk to these individuals. This is comparatively rare but you need to consider how the counselling / therapy is proceeding. Sometimes boundaries slowly erode almost without noticing.

If you are concerned about any of the following, it is wise to re-consider whether you are safe in this situation:

- Professional tells you about their personal problems
- Professional suggests going out together
- Professional asks intrusive questions
- Professional is intimate in some way (hugs, kisses, or more extensive)
- Professional gives gifts or favours

These suggest a problem with boundaries and constitute misconduct. Some may constitute the new criminal statute of Breach of Trust.

### **What do you do if you are worried?**

You can seek the advice of an organisation such as Witness, who supports clients who have been abused by therapists / doctors or other professionals. Their website is [www.witnessagainstabuse.org.uk](http://www.witnessagainstabuse.org.uk). Their helpline is 08454 500 300.

You can ring MACSAS helpline 08088 010340 or write to PO Box 46933, London E8 1XA or Email [macsas1@hotmail.com](mailto:macsas1@hotmail.com).

You can contact the BACP if your counsellor / therapist is registered with them.

Seeking a counsellor or therapist is a very useful thing to do. The vast majority of people are happy with their therapist. Some are not. It is important that you rely on your 'gut' feeling and to take steps to safeguard yourself in that hour.

Most people find therapy or counselling has helped them move forwards in their lives and to feel more able to cope with day to day living.

We hope you will have a good experience and that this leaflet has been helpful.