

Online Counselling-‘Help Is Just A Click Away’ Helping men to access counselling

Traditionally men have found it difficult to recognize that emotional issues might be driving some of the problems they are encountering in life.

Alcoholism, workaholism and other addictions, have long been common behaviors exhibited by men.

Some men act out their pain and their anger by directing violence towards their partners, and by walking away from relationships.

Other men suffer in silence.

Traditionally, asking for help has been viewed by men as a weakness, as many men have been taught that they should be able to *fix* their own problems.

Acknowledging the need to talk with a professional counsellor, still remains a very difficult thing for many men to do.

Depression, a previously unspoken illness continues to affect large numbers of men, numbing them and causing them to distance themselves from those around them.

Books such as “ I Don’t Want to Speak About it.....by Terence Real, have helped to raise awareness amongst men and women of that silent illness.

Still men have been reluctant to seek help for their concerns, despite the attempts made by loved ones and friends.

Face to face counselling has typically been the most conventional method for men to seek help. However it is intimidating for many men to conceive of the idea of sitting down in a counsellor’s office, and acknowledging they have a problem.

Furthermore the fear of running into someone they might know also serves as another deterrent to meet with a counsellor in person.

Over the last ten years a new approach to seeking help has become increasingly popular.

Online counselling, also known as E-Counselling or Cybercounselling, has become more available to people all around the world.

In this approach a person seeking help emails a professional counsellor and can communicate with that counsellor without ever meeting him/her.

Some counsellors provide assistance through live chat exchanges.

This writer favors *asynchronous* communications or email exchanges sent back and forth over a period of time.

Writing to a counsellor can be done in stages. A client can start an exchange, save it, stop it, and resume it at a later time, editing it, or adding new information, as his perspective changes..

The written word can be quite powerful and by using this approach, a client can begin to see new meaning and alternative solutions, which may not have been as apparent in the past.

If at sometime in the future, that individual encounters more difficulties, he can access previous

exchanges. By recalling the words he (and his counsellor wrote) he can be reminded of his strengths, and of his ability to overcome adversity.

Men are increasingly turning to online counselling as a way of gaining easy access to a counsellor. They enjoy the flexibility of being able to communicate with their counsellor when it suits them.

They often comment on the fact they do not experience the long waits to see a counsellor in person, which are sometimes accompanied by traffic and parking problems.

Furthermore the *anonymity* of online counselling enables many men who may be reluctant to meet a counsellor, to establish a presence with a counsellor online.

The computer screen in front of them allows them to reveal painful and often suppressed feelings and thoughts which they have been harboring for sometime.

Suddenly they find that they have a safe place to express themselves without feeling as if they are being judged.

Many male clients have told this writer that they would not have sought counselling, if they had not had access to online counselling services.

Their experiences were too shameful and too embarrassing to reveal to a counsellor in person.

Men are choosing to write to their counsellors for many reasons.

In this writer's experience, many men have been using online counselling to discuss relationship issues as well as work related concerns.

Anger and other emotional concerns are more readily revealed in online sessions, than in face to face counselling sessions.

Men are also more likely to discuss their addictions to alcohol and to drugs, to sex and to gambling online. In fact, many men openly acknowledge these concerns in their initial email, feeling safe behind the shield of the computer screen.

By engaging a client in more discussion of these concerns, support, information and more specialized resources, can be offered to help him in dealing with these addictions.

Some men might never have made it to the AA meeting or to the appointment with the drug and alcohol intake counsellor at the local treatment center, if they had not experienced the support and encouragement of the online counsellor.

Online counselling also enables the counsellor to present the client with information from other websites, or from the counsellors' own writings, which are relevant to the issues being discussed. Links to other website, can easily be added and the client is then encouraged to access additional resources at his discretion.

The client can be directed to books, articles and other resources easily accessible on the internet.

In spite of the success and growing popularity of online counselling, not all situations are appropriate for this unique form of counselling.

Violence, cannot be discussed in online sessions. More immediate assistance is needed which asynchronous exchanges cannot provide.

Anyone who is suicidal or in a psychiatric crisis cannot be helped adequately either and should be encouraged to seek crisis services and other forms of in person counselling.

As well, online counselling is not appropriate for the man who is uncomfortable expressing himself in writing, or who is not open to using computer technology.

In summary, online counselling offers men a highly effective and innovative way in which to seek help.

The flexibility of writing to a counsellor when it is convenient for him, coupled with the anonymity of the computer screen, allows a male client to feel safe and in control enabling him to *open up* more readily.

‘Help is Just a Click Away’ is becoming a means by which men are changing their lives.

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Paul has 30 years of clinical experience working with individuals, couples and families.

His work experience has included child welfare, children’s mental health and chronic care.

Paul enjoys working with men and has provided assistance to men seeking help for a wide range of issues.

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