

## “Should I See a Counselor?”



by ELIZA HUIE

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Have you ever wondered if you or someone you love should see a counselor? Perhaps you have been wrestling with whether or not the circumstance is really serious enough to warrant seeking formal help. The decision to talk to someone is an important one, and this article is intended to help you think through that decision. The following six questions can help identify some of the situations that may point to the need to see a counselor. Use them to assess yourself, or to guide a loved one or someone under your care to decide whether counseling is a good next step.

### **Do you need a fresh perspective?**

One of the most commonly overlooked times to seek a counselor is when you need a fresh perspective on a matter. Have you already talked to your friends, family, and pastor and yet it still feels like you are in need of new insights and unbiased feedback? This is a good time to look for additional help. After all, there is safety in a *multitude* of counselors (Prov 11:14). Friends, family, and your faith community are a vital resource in your life as a believer, but an experienced counselor can be a helpful extension of that community. Someone who is not personally connected to your situation can create space for you to process things more objectively while bringing godly wisdom to bear on the problem.

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### **Are you feeling distressed or undone by something that has happened to you?**

Have you experienced a traumatic event like a personal assault or other violent incident? Have you survived a disaster? You should likely seek out counseling. Talking with someone can be a helpful way to learn how to process these difficult experiences.

But there are other less dramatic occurrences that can also significantly unbalance your world. For example, the death of a family member, even if it was somewhat anticipated, can impact you in ways that are unfamiliar and challenging. A miscarriage is a terribly painful loss that can leave both mother and father with feelings of shock and isolation. Losing a job can also bring significant internal struggle and fears for the future.

There are other sources of distressed feelings, too. Traumatic events can be experienced secondhand. It could be that someone close to you is dealing with a significant health crisis or has been victimized in some way. Do not underestimate the impact that seeing or learning of such experiences can have on you. Or perhaps you suppressed something painful that happened during your childhood. Such traumas can be blocked out or brushed over only to resurface years later.

These are all issues a counselor can help you work through. A godly person who is trained in walking with people who have experienced these types of suffering can hold out a hope-filled perspective for the hardest of circumstances. Our God is the "Father of compassion and the God of all comfort" (2 Cor 1:3). He wants to comfort you. Counseling is one way he does this.

### **Are you reacting poorly to life's pressures?**

Life is full of pressures. In dealing with these challenges, there are both good and bad ways to respond. Some ways of coping are helpful and healthy. Appropriate exercise, time with friends, meditating on Scripture, praying, getting outdoors or creating a quiet space for yourself are all examples of constructive coping. But anxiety, irritability, and discouragement are common ways that people respond to stress and other pressures. Each of these reactions creates an opportunity to connect with God, and a wise counselor can help you do this. If you are coping with stress by abusing drugs

or alcohol, you definitely need to talk to someone. Don't delay. If you are experiencing outbursts of anger, you should strongly consider seeking help. Are you isolating yourself from people or using the internet, TV, or gaming as a means of escape? Reach out to someone today. There are always spiritual implications when we are not responding constructively. Does God seem distant in your struggle? Are Scripture's promises of God's help falling flat in the face of your circumstance? Are you feeling hopeless? These are all signs that you need help—and God often uses other people to bring his "very present help in trouble."

### **Have friends or family members voiced concerns?**

Are those who know you well asking, "Are you doing all right?" Other people often see us more clearly than we see ourselves. When friends and family voice concerns about you, don't ignore them. It can be hard for you to see how things are affecting you when the situation has become so much a part of your everyday life. If people who care about you say they have noticed things that concern them, humbly listen and reach out for help.

### **Is emotional stress causing you to have physical symptoms?**

When something is troubling our spirit it can lead to physical manifestations. This reminds us that we are embodied souls. Headaches, fatigue, digestive issues, or a racing heart rate are just a few symptoms that can be a result of stress or emotional strain.

A visit to your doctor is always a good idea when you begin to notice any negative physical symptoms or changes. If your doctor thinks stress may be the cause of your physical issues, counseling can be another means of caring for yourself. Meeting with a counselor can help you to refocus on spiritual truths while dealing with your physical challenges.

### **Are your relationships strained?**

Relationships are challenging. Even the best of friendships can take a turn in a difficult direction or challenge you in unexpected ways. Marriage and family are places where conflict can cycle around and around until you feel like you are stuck on a sickening carnival ride. Breaking destructive cycles in relationships requires focused effort. Having someone speak into these situations can be a great encouragement and can provide direction in find-

ing new ways of relating.

If you feel stuck in a conflict and cannot figure out how to solve it, this is a good time to seek counsel. Find a counselor who can connect the love of Christ and the wisdom of the Scriptures to the interpersonal struggles you face. The gospel is about relationship and God calls us to become ambassadors of reconciliation. Allow someone to help your relationships better reflect this truth.

**We all need help sometimes.**

Certainly there are many good reasons to seek counseling. Needing others is part of God's plan. Toughing it out or seeking to be independent is incompatible with living a life honestly before the Lord and others. Scripture tells us we are one body in Christ (Rom 12:5), and we are to help, strengthen, and encourage one another (1 Thess 5:11). This means we all need help sometimes. If any of the questions discussed here ring true for you, it is important to know that the earlier you reach out for help the better your experience can be in working through your struggles. Don't wait for things to come to a crisis point. Whether it is general perspective you need or new direction on a lifelong struggle, seeking out counseling may be what the Lord uses to help bring you healing and hope.

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