

COUNSELLING

— An integral part of everyday life

Life can be a rocky road. The challenge is not to let it grind you to dust but to polish you into a brilliant gem — John Milton Fogg.

We spring clean our homes, we clear out our cupboards, we empty the refrigerator, we clear out garbage, we service our cars, we brush our teeth, we bathe our bodies. We do a lot of clearing and cleaning on a regular, daily basis. We keep our surroundings clean, tidy and liveable and that's wonderful. But do we ever think of cleaning our minds? How often do we indulge in mental housekeeping? Does it even occur to us to clear out old, unwanted, emotional baggage that we carry from the past? Perhaps not, and that's not unusual.

Our experiences in life are both positive and negative. While positive experiences help us move ahead, we have tons of stored negative emotions that hold us back. We need to use an active approach to release these emotions and stay mentally and emotionally fit.

In times of distress people say, "Time will heal". In reality it is not time by itself that causes healing. The events that occur over the passage of time superimpose new experiences and memories over the old ones. This creates an illusion of old wounds being healed and forgotten, while, in fact, they are hidden below the surface. Painful memories get buried deep inside as repressed emotions which we no longer consciously remember. Though not apparently visible, these hidden emotions remain lurking underneath forever, until we actively release them. Not expressed in their original form, they manifest in other

ways, as mental or emotional problems, or as physical illnesses. Depression, apathy, fears, anger, jealousy, shyness, withdrawal, poor self-esteem, difficulty in relationships, hypertension, ulcers, headaches, skin problems, allergies, diabetes and joint pains are some of the common manifestations.

Just as with the body, the mind too needs constant care and nourishment. "Counselling" helps with this. Counselling is a brilliant contribution of psychology towards healthy, whole and significant living.

Counselling has become an integral part of our high-stressed, competitive lives. Availing of this

Beginning a new column

specialised service is as vital to mental and emotional health, as medical attention is to physical health. It is to the mind as physical training or exercise is to the body. Counselling can reduce the impact of a challenge, build up resilience, and help maintain a healthy, active and agile mind.

Unfortunately, people have a misconception that availing of psychological assistance is an indication of weakness or mental imbalance or an inability to cope. In fact counselling is truly for anyone, at any age, to utilise and take advantage of, to bring out the best in themselves. It provides the opportunity for people to learn suitable coping skills so they can handle challenges with elan. It is a

wonderful facility that helps people tap into their inner potential. It guides people in the process of self-exploration and in their journey to personal growth. Counselling helps individuals achieve optimum development of their inner resources.

Informal counselling has been prevalent for centuries, with family, teachers and friends playing a supportive role. This certainly helps, but has its limitations in terms of ability, objectivity and professionalism. Although it makes a person feel temporarily better, it does not address the root cause.

Counselling is a highly sensitive psychological tool. Even a qualified counsellor needs specialised training with experienced practitioners before offering her services. Through a unique interaction between the counsellor and client, healing, change and growth occurs. The process, though formal, has its own form of intimacy and connection. It calls for deep levels of acceptance, empathy, love, belief, understanding, listening, connecting, trust, confidentiality as well as assertiveness and pragmatism. While psychological assistance is provided primarily in an individual setting, in certain situations group processes prove to be highly effective, with group dynamics playing a facilitating role.

Counselling is effective in both normal and dysfunctional situations. It is not restricted to a situation, age or gender. Areas of counselling include family, personal, children, marital, suicidal, terminally ill, geriatric, post-traumatic conditions and industrial settings.

'Therapeutic' counselling helps to heal and rehabilitate and reduces the duration of distress. It provides coping skills for clients to overcome behavioural problems and make the best possible adjustment in their current situation. It also builds confidence amongst family members to deal with mal-adaptive situations.

'Developmental' counselling focuses on empowerment of the individual. It is preventative and promotes positive health and well-being. It help people, "be more, do more and have more."

'Mind coaching' is an area gaining popularity. A qualified psychologist works with a limited number of clients with whom she/he has long-term interaction. It involves periodic assessment, goal-setting, identification and correction of inadequacies, and utilisation of strengths to achieve success and significance.

The key role of counselling is to dissipate mental fog, widen the perspective and create an open thinking style. It offers tools to help a person move easily along the rocky road, using challenges as stepping stones for growth.

So, readers use counselling as a bouncing board to help you reach your true potential. Shed your inhibitions and get the prescription to polish yourself into a brilliant gem. Include in your fitness regimen a few minutes of exercise and nourishment for the space between your ears and treat yourself to a lifetime of joyous, positive and peaceful living.

Have a great day.

—SAMPOORNA*

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