

SUPPORT



CLARITY



GROWTH

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What to Expect in Your First Counselling Session

A Short Guide for Individuals





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Welcome



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**You don't have to
have it all figured out
to take the first step**

Starting counselling can feel like a big step. You might feel nervous, unsure, hopeful, overwhelmed, or even a mix of all of these. That is completely normal.

Your first counselling session is not about having everything figured out. It is a gentle starting point where you and your counsellor begin to understand what has brought you to counselling, what support you are looking for, and how counselling may be able to help.

This guide will walk you through what usually happens in a first individual counselling session, so you can feel more prepared and comfortable.



**There is no pressure to share anything that you
are not ready for, it is about going at your pace.**

01 The First Session Is About Getting to Know You

Your first session is usually focused on understanding your story, your current concerns, and what you would like support with..

Your counsellor may ask questions about:

- 1 What has brought you to counselling
- 2 What has been happening in your life recently
- 3 How you have been feeling emotionally
- 4 Any stress, relationship concerns, grief, anxiety, depression, trauma, life changes, or
- 5 personal challenges
- 6 What you have tried so far
- 7 What you hope might be different after counselling



You do not need to share everything at once. You are allowed to go at your own pace.

02 You Do Not Need to Know Where to Start

Many people come to counselling and say:

"I don't even know where to begin."

That is okay.

Your counsellor can help guide the conversation with gentle questions. You might begin with what feels most urgent, what has been on your mind lately, or simply what made you decide to book the appointment.



There is no perfect way to start.

03 Your Counsellor Will Explain Confidentiality

Early in the session, your counsellor will usually explain confidentiality. This means that what you share in counselling is private.



There are some limits to confidentiality, such as if there is a serious concern about your safety, someone else's safety, child protection concerns, or if information is required by law. Your counsellor will explain this clearly so you understand how your information is managed.



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You are welcome to ask questions about privacy at any time!

04 You Can Talk About Your Goals

You may already know what you want from counselling, or you may still be working that out.

Your goals might include:

- ✓ Feeling less anxious or overwhelmed
- ✓ Understanding yourself better
- ✓ Improving relationships
- ✓ Processing grief or trauma
- ✓ Managing stress
- ✓ Building confidence
- ✓ Making a difficult decision
- ✓ Having a safe space to talk
- ✓ Learning healthier coping strategies



Goals can change over time. The first session is simply a beginning.

05 Counselling Is a Conversation, Not a Test



“
You are not being
judged, assessed as a
person, or expected to
perform.”

Counselling is a supportive conversation where your counsellor listens carefully, helps you explore what is happening, and works with you to find ways forward.

You can pause, ask questions, say when something feels too much, or let your counsellor know if you are unsure.

06 You Are in Control of What You Share

You do not have to talk about anything before you feel ready.

Sometimes people worry that counselling means they must immediately discuss painful memories, difficult experiences, or private parts of their life. While counselling can involve deeper emotional work over time, this should happen at a pace that feels safe, respectful, and manageable for you.

In your first session, you can share as much or as little as you feel comfortable with. You might talk about what is happening now, how you have been feeling, or what made you decide to reach out for support. You do not need to explain every detail of your past for counselling to be helpful.

Your counsellor may ask gentle questions, but you are allowed to pause, slow down, or say, "I'm not ready to talk about that yet." A good counsellor will respect your boundaries and help create a sense of emotional safety.

You can also talk around an issue without going into the full details. For example, you might say, "Something from my past still affects me, but I want to take my time talking about it."

A good first counselling session creates safety, trust, and understanding. Over time, you may feel more comfortable exploring deeper parts of your story, but you remain in control of what you share and when.

07 Your Counsellor May Ask About Safety and Support

Your counsellor may ask questions about your wellbeing, including whether you have support around you or whether you have had thoughts of harming yourself.

These questions are not asked to judge you or make assumptions about you. They help your counsellor understand how you are coping, what support you already have, and whether there are any immediate concerns that need care and attention.

You do not need to have the “right” answer. You can be honest about how things have been feeling, even if it is hard to say out loud. Counselling is a space where difficult thoughts and feelings can be spoken about safely.

Your counsellor may also ask who you can turn to outside of counselling, such as friends, family, a GP, crisis support, or other professional services. This helps create a clearer picture of what support is available to you.



If you are struggling, counselling can be a place where you do not have to hold it alone. The aim is to make sure you feel supported, understood, and safe.

08 You Might Feel Different After the Session

After your first session, you may feel relieved, lighter, emotional, tired, thoughtful, or unsure. All of these responses can be normal.

Talking about personal things can bring up feelings, especially if you have been holding them in for a long time. You might leave the session feeling clearer, or you might find yourself still processing what was discussed.






It can be helpful to give yourself some space after the session if possible. This might mean going for a walk, having a quiet moment, journaling, listening to music, or doing something grounding.

There is no **“right”** way to feel after counselling. Your response is simply part of the process. Over time, counselling can help you better understand these feelings and what they may be telling you.

09 What Happens at the End of the Session?

Toward the end of the session, your counsellor may summarise what has been discussed and talk with you about possible next steps.

This might include:

-  Booking another session
-  Clarifying your goals
-  Discussing what you would like to focus on next time
-  Suggesting a small reflection or strategy to try between sessions
-  Talking about whether counselling feels like the right fit



“ _____
You are allowed to take time to
decide.”

10 Common Questions

1

What if I cry?

Crying is welcome in counselling. You do not need to apologise for having emotions.

2

What if I do not know what to say?

That is okay. Your counsellor can help guide the conversation.

3

Will I get advice?

Counselling is usually less about telling you what to do and more about helping you understand yourself, your choices, and your patterns more clearly.

4

What if I feel nervous?

Feeling nervous is very common. You can tell your counsellor that you feel nervous, and they can help slow things down.

5

What if I do not connect with the counsellor?

The relationship with your counsellor matters. If it does not feel like the right fit, it is okay to discuss this or try a different counsellor.

Final Thoughts



Your first counselling session is a starting point. You do not need to arrive with the right words, a clear plan, or all the answers.

You only need to arrive as you are.

Counselling is a space where you can be heard, supported, and gently helped to understand what is happening in your life. Over time, it can help you build insight, emotional strength, and new ways of moving forward.

Taking the first step is often one of the hardest parts and you have already begun.



A space to be heard, understood & supported

I offer compassionate, evidence-based counselling for individuals and couples across Frankston, Mornington, the Mornington Peninsula, Somerville, Hastings, Langwarrin and surrounding communities.

