

UNDERSTANDING THE RISKS and BENEFITS OF COUNSELING

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Therapy of any kind, whether pastoral counseling, marriage and family therapy, psychotherapy, etc., is not easily described in general statements. It varies depending on the personalities of the therapist or counselor, counselees, couples and/or families being served, as well as upon the type of problem(s) being discussed. In short, there are many different methods I may use to help you with your issues, however please realize that the therapy experience is not like a visit to a medical doctor, rather it's more like a visit to the local gym or library where resources will be made available to you, but they'll only prove useful if you take a very active part in the entire process. That means you will have to "work on" things we talk about, putting forth effort both in and out of our session if therapy is to prove successful.

It's also important that you realize that **therapy can have both benefits and risks**. Since it often involves discussing unpleasant aspects of your life, you may experience feelings like sadness, guilt, anger, frustrating, loneliness and helplessness. You may make major life changes (such as leave a difficult relationship, change jobs, move away, etc) which, in turn, may cause major disruptions in your overall world. **These risks are very real and you need to know about them**. Yet, therapy has been shown to have many benefits, and can lead to improved living, relationships, real world solutions to specific problems, and significant reduction in feelings of distress. Along with risks and benefits, it's also it's important you understand **there are no guarantees** of what you will experience when you see a therapist, nor are there guarantees of specific outcome from our meetings, although we'll certainly strive to work toward your stated goals. In a word, then, therapy may be the catalyst which sparks major changes in your life, relationships, direction, goals and general outlook and while no one will "make you" make changes, you yourself may make decisions which could have lasting impact and so it's important that you realize all of these things as you enter into therapy.

As we meet, our first few sessions may involve an evaluation of your needs, situation, strengths, goals and personality. By the end of that evaluation -whether it occurs within the actual first session or after a few sessions- a general "diagnosis" or "assessment" will be discussed, along with your goals for meeting, your unique strengths and our "treatment plan" (crafted together) to help you get what you need out of our time together. You should carefully evaluate these interactions and decide if you feel comfortable with our working relationship because therapy involves a commitment of time, money, energy and a degree of risk, so it's important you are comfortable with the therapist you select. If you have any questions about procedures or policies, we need to discuss them prior to beginning our visits. If any doubts persist, you will be helped to set up a meeting with another therapist, should that be your desire. And if, in the course of our meetings, I believe you would be better helped by another person, we'll discuss appropriate "next steps" as we seek to do what is best for you. Please be sure to read the other papers prepared for you, doing so prior to beginning any therapy process with me.

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