

About Online Counseling

by

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Online counseling is a relatively new therapeutic service. There are many advantages over the traditional in-person face-to-face therapeutic sessions offered in just about every community. And, of course, there are some cons. As the technology has developed, online counseling has also grown expanding from simple email based therapeutic communication to also include chat, pc-to-pc telephone sessions and even web-cam based live video sessions. Online counseling is, obviously, dependent on the computer and the Internet.

Online counseling is also dependent upon Internet service providers as a computer attached to the Internet is useless without being connected to the phone or cable lines. With the ever decreasing cost of high end computers and the very reasonable cost of getting hooked up, more and more people are online. Shopping, banking, research, game playing and communication via computer are as common as driving to the local store. Increasingly, online counseling and therapy is also becoming a norm.

This article will outline some of the pros and cons of online counseling, also referred to as e-therapy or distance learning. But first, a little bit about how it works.

Basic online counseling entails a client writing out their problem, whatever it might be, and sending that information through email to an online counselor or therapist who then replies within a day or two. That is generally considered one session. Fee structures vary; however an online session usually costs between \$30 and \$50. Chat and telephone sessions are generally offered at the rate of \$1.00/minute. Open Mind Counseling has taken the unique approach of offering a risk free, no fee policy asking instead for clients to voluntarily submit a monetary gift, of any amount, if they so choose, at the completion of a session. This approach removes one of the more significant cons of online counseling listed below.

The Pros

- The greatest advantage of online counseling is the convenience. Traditional therapy requires that the client go to an office. Appointments are generally during working hours which means a person must leave their work, drive to another location in the town or city, find a place to park, attend the session and then return to their work. Although the therapy session may only last 50 minutes, the total time may be a couple of hours, or more. Online counseling takes place in the comfort of one's own home on one's own schedule. With wireless technology now available, online counseling can take place just about anywhere.
- Online counseling is generally less expensive than traditional in-person face-to-face counseling. Regular counseling or therapy sessions can cost anywhere from \$65 to \$120 or more per hour.

- Another significant advantage of online counseling is anonymity. Clients can be much more forthcoming knowing they are not being observed and scrutinized. Self disclosure and honesty tends to occur more rapidly in online counseling because of anonymity.
- Individuals who are shy, have social anxieties or have transportation limitations can comfortably access therapeutic intervention via online counseling.
- Some people express themselves much better in writing than they do in person. For such people, online email based counseling offers a perfect avenue for discussing their problems with a professional counselor.
- Online counseling emails can be read and re-read allowing for review weeks or even months after the actual session.

The Cons

- Online counseling is void of all visual cues and clues such as posture, gestures and facial expressions which often provide a great deal of information.
- Online counseling is also void of paraverbal elements such as rate, rhythm, tone, inflections and volume of speech which also provide the counselor with useful information.
- Online counseling requires a computer and Internet access as well as the ability to use a keyboard. Although reading is also an important requirement, there are software programs available which can translate the printed word into the spoken word.
- Online counseling services often require payment in advance for an intangible service from an unknown professional who may not meet the client's needs. Open Mind Counseling has circumvented this problem by allowing clients to evaluate the worth of a session and pay accordingly, voluntarily.
- Online counseling cannot address certain issues such as crisis or severe mental illness.
- Online counselors are unfamiliar with the client's community and the local resources available.

Clearly, online counseling can be a useful therapeutic resource for some people. It is certainly a service which will continue to expand along with technology. As people's lives become increasingly complex and harried, the need for counseling will likely also increase. The many pros of online counseling make it a very appealing alternative to traditional therapy. For further information about online counseling, visit www.openmindcounseling.com