



GHANA PSYCHOLOGY COUNCIL

WHAT IS COUNSELLING?

Counselling can be a confusing term for many people.

It often has different meanings for different people.

Counselling in an everyday term is advice giving, consultation, discussion and exchange of ideas. Thus in counselling, pieces of advice given to some people help them to know what to do and how to do certain things well and in the right way, or giving someone advice on how to do something or get out of a problem.

The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (9th Edition) gives at least two definitions of counselling, which appear to be conflicting, adding to potential confusion:

“give advice to (a person) on social or personal problems, especially professionally.” AND

“the process of assisting and guiding clients, especially by a trained person on a professional basis, to resolve especially personal, social, or psychological problems and difficulties.”

There are a number of things that it is generally agreed that counselling is, and a number of others that it is **not**.

Counselling is not:

- Giving advice
- Confrontation
- Being judgemental.
- Getting emotionally involved with the client.
- Attempting to sort out the problems of the client.

- Looking at a client's problems from your own perspective, based on your own value system.
- Expecting or encouraging a client to behave as the counsellor would if confronted with a similar problem in his or her own life.

NOTE! *Untrained and unskilled helpers, regardless of their best intentions, cannot duplicate the functions of the professional counsellor.*

Trained counsellors help improve one's ability to do things in the best way possible. The trained counsellor's skills and knowledge provide the appropriate framework and direction that maximizes the client's potential for positive results.

WHAT IS COUNSELLING?

Counseling is *a process* by which a counselor assists the counselee (client) in making choices, plans, adjustments or decisions with regard to his situation. It takes place in a professional setting and is initiated and maintained as a means of facilitating changes in the behaviour of the client. Counselling therefore is a learning – oriented process of helping one to explore his or her thoughts, feelings and behaviour, gain clearer understanding of self and then use own resources to cope more effectively with life by making appropriate, right and meaningful decisions.

Counselling is also intentional, systematic and replicable, skill-based interactive process with the goal of client growth towards improved psychological health, the purpose of facilitating that goals and specific focal, ethical and logistics parameters (*Vonda Olson Long, 1996*)

- a. Focal parameters = the growth of the client
 - b. Ethical guidelines = adherence to the GPC's guidelines
 - c. Logical parameters = specific meeting time and place, fee structure, referral system, expectations and goals
- **The process that occurs** when a client and counsellor set aside time to explore difficulties, which may include the stressful or emotional feelings of the client.

- **The act of helping the client to see things more clearly**, possibly from a different viewpoint. This can enable the client to focus on feelings, experiences or behaviour, with a goal of facilitating positive change.
- **A relationship of trust.** Confidentiality is paramount to successful counselling. Professional counsellors will usually explain their policy on confidentiality. They may, however, be required by law to disclose information if they believe that there is a risk to life.

(Vonda Olson Long, 1996)

DO YOU WANT TO BE A COUNSELLOR?

WHO IS A COUNSELLOR?

The term Counsellor most often is used to describe someone who is a psychotherapist or a professional counsellor. Counselling and psychotherapy are umbrella terms that cover a range of talking therapies. Psychotherapy and Counselling are very similar, but not exactly the same. They both describe a process of helping someone to come to terms with and work out solutions to their problems but vary in the approaches used and underpinning theories, model and assumptions. Trained practitioners who work with people over a short or long term to help them bring about effective change or enhance their wellbeing deliver both Counselling and or psychotherapy.

THE ROLE OF A COUNSELLOR

Professional Counsellors are aware that no two people are alike nor understand the same language in the same way. We differ in our understanding because they are linked to their personal experience of the world. The role of the counsellor, therefore, is to help the client to develop their own understanding of their situation.

Counselling should reduce the client's confusion, allowing them to make effective decisions leading to positive changes in their attitude and or behaviour. The ultimate aim of counselling is to enable the client to make their own choices, reach their own decisions and act upon them.

Counselling psychologists are a class of professional applied psychologists concerned with the integration of psychological theory and research with therapeutic practice. The practice of Counselling Psychology requires a high level of self-awareness and competence in relating the skills and knowledge of personal and interpersonal dynamics to the therapeutic context.

Key tasks of Counselling psychologists include:

- Assessment, including assessment of mental health needs, risk assessment and psychometric testing (depending on the context);
- Formulation; i.e. a psychological explanation of the genesis and maintenance of the psychological problems;
- Planning and implementation of therapy;
- Report writing and record keeping;
- Evaluation of the outcome of therapy;
- Supervision and training of other counselling psychologists, applied psychologists, assistant psychologists and related professionals;
- Multi-disciplinary team work and team facilitation;
- Service and organisational development;
- Audit and evaluation;
- Research and development;
- Management of services.

Counselling psychologists bring many aspects of themselves to the shared enterprise of professional practice, derived from both their training and their wider knowledge. An understanding and acceptance of one's personal history is combined with an explicit use of psychological theories to analyse the process of a particular therapy, or counselling situation. This partly differentiates the practice of counselling psychologists from that of psychological therapists from other professional backgrounds such as nursing or social work.

WHERE DO COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGISTS WORK?

Counselling psychologists work almost anywhere there are people. They can be employed in:

- All levels of education: Primary, Secondary and Tertiary
- Prison Service
- Hospitals and Clinics: Counselling psychologists can also work in hospitals and clinic and in social care settings where provide HIV/AIDS Counselling and Genetic Counselling.
- Religious Organizations
- NOGs
- Industry
- Commerce
- Other career paths can be found in teaching and research for academic bodies.

Counselling psychologists can also practice privately as organisational consultants.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

With reference to the Part V of Health Professions Regulatory Bodies Act, 857 of 2013 the qualification and training of Counselling Psychologists and other counselling programmes are to satisfy the following criteria before they can be licensed to practice in Ghana.

The first is to have a GPC-accredited first degree in psychology. This will have provided a fundamental knowledge of the discipline of psychology; for example of human development, biological aspects of behaviour, cognitive and social psychology and research methods and skills. The second stage requires two - three years full-time postgraduate training and study. This is training in more than two models of psychological therapy; an emphasis on the therapeutic relationship and on ethical and professional considerations; training in research methods and skills; supervised placements in at least two different settings and personal psychological therapy.

A candidate without first degree in psychology (without selected subjects in psychology) or mature entrants who have prior trainings in related areas may be admitted to undertake selected first degree core psychology courses (a bespoke package of approved courses) may be admitted to pursue the postgraduate programme on Counselling psychology.

Postgraduate training should also be undertaken at an institutions which offer Counselling Psychology Programmes accredited by the GPC or by an appropriately accredited institution overseas. This accredited programme in Counselling Psychology confer eligibility for Counselling Psychologist status and lead to the acquisition of equivalent competencies.

Thus, the duration for the training of the counselling psychologists is five to six years (5-8 years) of training (at a Master's Degree or PhD levels respectively) at an accredited training institution, plus least one (1) year of practicum training in an accredited institution (internship).

After that one then qualifies to write the Council's licensure examination and if successful are granted permanent license (full registration) with Personal Identification Number (PIN) which is renewable every year. To qualify for renewal of PIN, the professional will have to acquire a specified Credit Points of Continuous Professional Development. Interns are granted provisional registration.

PSYCHOLOGIST ASSISTANT

A person hold first degree in psychology or social work or sociology or related courses from an accredited institution approved by the Council shall be registered as a **psychologist assistant**.

PARA-PROFESSIONAL COUNSELLOR

A persons who hold first degree or diploma in general counselling, pastoral counselling, career counselling, guidance and counselling, marriage counselling, family therapy, relationship counselling and cognitive behaviour therapy and so on, shall be registered as a **para-professional counsellor**.

LAY PRACTITIONER (LAY COUNSELLOR)

A persons who hold certificate in general counselling, pastoral counselling, career counselling, guidance and counselling, marriage counselling, family therapy, relationship counselling and cognitive behaviour therapy and so on, shall be registered as a **lay practitioner**.

A person who hold first degree /diploma or certificate in general counselling, marriage counselling, family therapy and cognitive behaviour therapy and so on **DO NOT qualify to register as counselling psychologist.**

PSYCHOLOGIST

A person does not qualify to be registered as a psychologists including counselling psychologist) unless that person holds a primary qualification a first degree in psychology. In addition, the person should hold a postgraduate qualification in applied psychology (**PhD or Psych. D. or an M. Phil; MA or MSc in psychology**) from an accredited psychology programme or from an institution recognised by the Board; has completed specified contact hours of practicum or internship, and at least 1 – 2years of supervised professional experience in one’s chosen specialism. The person must pass or be exempted from the prescribed examination for Professional Practice in psychology conducted by the Council.

To become a psychologist (including counselling psychologist), you will need to complete:

- 3-4years first degree in psychology or acceptable foundation programme of general psychology
- At least two (2) years of core training in applied psychology including practicum
- 1-2years of supervised professional experience in the person’s chosen specialism.
- Passes of exempted from the prescribed examination for Professional Practice in psychology conducted by the Council.

A person who is otherwise qualified but is not registered as a psychologist, therapist or lay practitioner with GPC shall not provide any form of psychological services.

OFFENSE:

Unregistered Practitioner:

A person who acts contrary to above commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of not less than five hundred penalty units and not more than five thousand penalty units or to a term of imprisonment of not more than ten years or to both.

And in the case of a continuing offense to a further fine of ten penalty units for each day during which the offense continues after written notice has been served on the offender by the Council. **(Act 857 Section 140 (g)).**

Compliance: Act 587 of 2013 and its regulations, holds employers responsible for employing qualified professionals. By appointing an appropriately registered person, the employer not only takes appropriate action aimed at safeguarding the public, but is also complying with statutory requirements.

Statutory Empowerment: The Health Professionals Act, 2013, (Act 587 of 2013) as well as other Acts such as the Domestic Violence Act, 2007 and Mental Health Act 2012 provide for the reservation of work of psychologists and provision of psychological services for the exclusive performance by registered psychologists.

To apply for Licenses or Registration go to www.ghanapsychologicalcouncil.org.gh

The Ghana Psychology Council shall appreciate it, if matters concerning the above matters are referred to the Council for action. For further information, please contact us on 050 302 7254, 054 229 3014, or 024 641 6527 or write to us on info@ghanapsychologycouncil.org.gh or ghanapsychologicalcouncil@gmail.com.