

Are you in need of counselling support?

Have you experienced something in the past, or are you presently experiencing situations that you find particularly difficult, threatening or overwhelming? Are these experiences making you feel very unhappy, unsafe or confused? Managing these situations all on your own can make you feel as though you are worthless, powerless to do anything and could even jeopardise your safety.

Feeling alone and isolated can often make things feel a lot worse. If you have migrated to Australia, you may be away from your usual support systems such as extended family and friends. Perhaps, back in your country you could share and talk with family and friends and this helped you to cope with difficult and upsetting experiences. But now that you are in Australia you may be finding it difficult to find someone that you can trust to talk about the things that are worrying and distressing you. Alternatively, it may be that although you have family and community here in Australia, there are things happening for you that you feel you cannot speak to them about.

There are many experiences and situations in which women feel that they need the support of someone that they can trust. Some women experience violence in their relationships or in their workplace. The grief of losing family and culture through resettlement in a new country can cause feelings of loss and sadness. Once in Australia, the experience of racism and oppression can be very distressing. If you are a refugee, you may have experiences of trauma and violence during war in your home country or during flight to Australia. You may just be feeling confused about a fight that you have had with one your children.

Counselling can be one way of finding someone that you can trust and to whom you can talk about how you are feeling and what has been happening in your life. This isn't always easy – particularly if, in your culture, it is not acceptable to talk with strangers about personal problems. It is important that you feel as though you can make your own decisions about whether or not you seek support. The following pamphlet will tell you a little bit about what counselling is so that you can make this decision.

What is counselling?

Counselling is the process of talking to a professional about things that are troubling you. It is common in Australia to seek help from a counsellor if you are feeling overwhelmed by things that are causing you stress and worry, and which make you feel unhappy and/or powerless. Family and friends can be helpful but sometimes they don't have time, may not want to hear what you have to say, or may give you inaccurate information. The role of the counsellor is to:

- Listen to what is causing you worry and concern,

- Help you to better understand these issues,
- Help you define clearly and understand what you are feeling,
- Explore options for resolving issues of concern,
- Provide information that will empower you to make your own informed choices about what is best for you.

Counselling can be beneficial when:

- You need to discuss an issue with someone to give you a new perspective,
- You are finding it difficult to make important decisions on your own,
- You feel as though you are not empowered to do things that are right for you,
- You are feeling bad about yourself, or very sad about something that has happened in your life,
- You are isolated from family and friends or your family and friends do not understand what is happening for you.

Many women find that they would like a counsellor to talk to if they have experienced domestic violence, sexual violence and/or harassment, or discrimination and abuse as a result of their ethnicity or cultural background.

What can you expect from a counsellor?

A good counsellor will:

- Listen to you,
- Believe in you,
- Provide you with information so that you can make informed choices about your life,
- Respect the choices you have made,
- Allow you to express your emotions,
- Acknowledge your life experiences and the pain they may have caused you,
- Acknowledge and value your strengths,
- Acknowledge the manner in which your outlook and decisions are impacted on by both your cultural and individual beliefs and values,
- Allow you to make your own life choices without pressure or judgements,
- Keep the information you share with them 'confidential' and fully explain the limits to this confidentiality.

During counselling, you have a right to:

- Be treated with care, respect and dignity,
- Have an interpreter present at the counselling session if needed,
- To specify the gender of your counsellor,

- Have your religious and cultural needs respected,
- Decide when to begin and end counselling or ask for a referral to another counsellor,
- Receive counselling that enhances your self esteem and encourages you to make your own decisions,
- Ask any questions about the counselling process and receive answers that you understand,
- Receive appropriate referrals to other support services,
- Receive counselling in a safe and private environment,
- Respect for your sexuality, gender, race, ethnic origin, class, religion, age, political, philosophical beliefs and other personal values and attitudes,
- Be treated as a unique individual,
- Fully informed choice as to whether to have students present or to be a part of experimental treatment or research,
- Expect that your counsellor will never undertake any kind of sexual relationship with you,
- Confidentiality – your counsellor should not give any information about you to others without your permission, except in the case where they have a legal and moral obligation to do so, through a court subpoena or where a counsellor becomes aware of a severe compromise of someone's safety. You should be informed of this decision.

Some other questions you might like answered:

- "What is the cost of counselling?"

Support services like Immigrant Women's Support Service offer free counselling. Others may have a small charge. Ask what the charge will be before making a counselling appointment.

- "I am unhappy with the service provided by my counsellor. What can I do?"

Sometimes a problem can occur with the counselling offered or with how a counsellor interacts with a client. If you are feeling uncomfortable with the service you have received from a counsellor, or you feel that your rights have not been upheld, it is OK to talk to your counsellor about this. If you are not able to do so, or if doing this makes you feel frightened, ask for or find a different counsellor. You can also make a formal complaint to the counselling service where the counsellor is employed or to the Health Rights Commission.

- "I think I would like some counselling. Where do I go?"
Look in your local telephone directory for community or women's counselling services. Women from non-English speaking backgrounds can contact Immigrant Women's Support Service to find out where to go to get the type of counselling that they are looking for.

- "Why do counsellors take notes of what I say? What happens to these notes?"

Counsellors often take notes of what is said in counselling sessions. They do this so that they have a record of the issues that have arisen for you and it helps them to remember appropriate details of your experience. These notes will be kept in a secure place and it should never be shown to anyone else without your permission. However, it is very important to remember that the Criminal Court can ask for these notes to be provided for their proceedings. While they remain the property of the counsellor/counselling service, you have a right to see what is written in these notes.

Immigrant Women's Support Service

The Immigrant Women's Support Service (IWSS) provides support to women and children of non-English speaking backgrounds who have experienced domestic violence and/or sexual assault. IWSS also helps women from non-English speaking backgrounds to access services that are appropriate to their needs. IWSS has professionally qualified, bilingual counsellors and support workers who provide counselling, referral, information, support and advocacy with related health and legal matters. *Professional interpreters are also available if needed.* IWSS services are provided free of charge.

IWSS Sexual Assault Service (07) 3846 5400

IWSS Domestic Violence Service (07) 3846 3490

Website - www.iwss.org.au

Email - mail@iwss.org.au