



Mental Health Association of Northern Kentucky

A LEADER IN PROVIDING ADVOCACY, EDUCATION, AND SERVICES THAT PROMOTE MENTAL WELLNESS

EDUCATION AND SCREENING OUTREACH PARTNER FOR THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH AND
NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

513 Madison Avenue, 3rd Floor Covington, KY 41011 859-431-1077 or www.mhanky.org

Is there a difference between Counseling and Therapy ?

Yes, there is. Although the terms “counseling” and “therapy” are almost interchangeable, they do refer to somewhat different experiences. Here are some descriptions of both counseling and therapy to help you see the difference :

Counseling

Usually deals with specific problems in the “here and now” through relatively brief one-on-one work. Problem areas might include : educational / career planning, marital problems, situational stress. Counseling might occur in the following settings : any school, college or university, Vocational Rehabilitation agencies, Counseling agencies, work place, and Community Mental Health Centers. The major goals of counseling include : improving coping skills and overall functioning, increasing the person’s ability to make rational decisions, and providing support during stressful times. Often counseling is used to help someone deal with a crisis. Once the crisis is resolved, counseling is usually terminated. However, it is not uncommon for a person to enter counseling because of a crisis and then continue seeing the professional for more long-term problems they have experienced. Therefore, it is possible for a person to begin receiving counseling and then move into therapy.

Therapy

Usually deals with more serious or long-term problems through somewhat extended one-on-one work. Problem areas might include : emotional difficulties such as anxiety or depression ; problematic behaviors such as addictions, phobias or compulsions ; relationship problems with family, spouse, children, etc. Therapy can occur in counseling agencies, hospitals, Community Mental Health Centers, private practice offices, etc. Major goals of therapy include : increased understanding of self and relationships with others as well as exploration of past experiences leading to insights and new perceptions. Therapy can last as long as a person wants (assuming they are able to pay), until all issues or problems are resolved.

Something to keep in mind : A person can enter counseling or therapy, going regularly for any period of time until they feel they have improved enough, and then return later if they experience another crisis or problem. It doesn’t have to be a one-time thing, help is always available.