

A FREE GUIDE FOR ANYONE CONSIDERING COUNSELING

Why Some Counseling Changes Lives

and some wastes your time

The difference between managing symptoms and real healing. What the counseling industry doesn't advertise, and how to tell the difference before you spend a dollar or a single hour.

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Read this before you book your first session.

If you're thinking about counseling, something in your life is asking for more than another self-help book. Maybe it's anxiety that won't loosen its grip. A marriage stuck on repeat. A wound you've prayed about, journaled about, and white-knuckled through, and it's still there.

So you start looking. And every website says roughly the same thing: *licensed, compassionate, evidence-based*. How on earth are you supposed to tell the difference?

Here's what two decades in this field have taught me: **two very different things are being sold under the same name**. One helps you cope with your problems. The other actually heals what's driving them. They can look identical from the outside. They are not remotely the same experience, and they do not produce the same life.

This short guide will show you the difference. You'll learn why the counseling industry drifted toward the lesser version (it's a money story, not a character flaw), why the most effective counselors usually aren't in your insurance network, and exactly what to ask before you trust anyone with your story.

One promise before we start. At the end, I'll tell you plainly what we've built at MyCounselor.Online and why. We're not the only place to find excellent counseling, and I won't pretend otherwise. But by the time you finish these pages, you'll know excellent when you see it. Anywhere.

"My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life."

JESUS, IN JOHN 10:10 (NLT)

Hold onto that as you read. Feeling less bad is a mercy. It is not the life you were made for.

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Two very different things called “counseling”

Walk into ten counseling offices and you'll hear the same word used for two profoundly different kinds of care.

The first is symptom management.

You learn to breathe through the panic. You catch the negative thought and argue with it. You pick up communication scripts and better habits. None of that is bad. Sometimes it's exactly what a hard season calls for, the way a cast stabilizes a broken bone.

But here's the catch. If coping skills are all that ever happens, counseling becomes a treadmill. You get slightly better at managing the same pain, month after month. The alarm gets quieter while the fire keeps burning underneath. **You feel a little better. You never actually get well.**

The second is healing and transformation.

This kind of counseling doesn't stop at helping you manage what hurts. It goes after *why* it hurts: the wounds and gaps underneath the anxiety, the anger, the distance in your marriage. And when healing happens at the root, something remarkable follows. The old pain stops firing. The change holds without white-knuckling, because the thing generating the symptoms has actually been repaired.

In Jesus' parable of the barren fig tree, the gardener's plan isn't to tie fruit onto the branches. It's to dig around the roots and tend the soil (Luke 13:8, NLT). **When you heal the root, you change the fruit.**

	SYMPTOM MANAGEMENT	HEALING & TRANSFORMATION
THE GOAL	Help you feel less bad	Help you get well
WHERE IT WORKS	The surface: thoughts and behaviors	The root: the wounds and gaps underneath
THE SESSIONS	Talking about problems, learning skills	Guided healing experiences, plus skills
HOW CHANGE HOLDS	Constant effort to maintain	Holds on its own, because the root changed

Both have a place, and stabilizing matters. Just never trade real healing for a quieter set of symptoms.

Your brain was built to heal

This isn't wishful thinking. It's neuroscience. God wired two distinct change pathways into your brain, and once you see them, you'll understand why some counseling transforms and some just recirculates.

PATHWAY 1 · BUILDING

Rewiring new habits

Practice a new response often enough and it becomes the well-worn path, while the old rut fades from disuse. Scientists call it *competitive neuroplasticity*. It's how skills grow and habits change, and like months in the gym, it's real change that takes repetition.

PATHWAY 2 · HEALING

Rewriting old wounds

Here's the astonishing one. When an old painful memory is gently brought into the present, it briefly becomes editable. If, in that window, you have a vivid experience that contradicts what the pain taught you, the brain saves the memory back with new meaning. Scientists call it *memory reconsolidation*.

Picture it. Your nervous system braces for one outcome and receives another. *I expected rejection, and I was met with kindness. I expected to be alone, and someone stayed.* When that contradiction lands as a felt experience, not just a nice idea, the old wound stops firing. Not because you're managing it better. Because it's been changed at the source. And unlike habit-building, this change can be rapid and lasting.

Your nervous system doesn't update through explanation. It updates through experience.

That one sentence explains a lot. It's why another book, another sermon, or another list of tips hasn't fixed it. And it's why counseling that only *talks about* your problems rarely transforms them. Transformation requires a counselor trained to facilitate healing experiences right there in the session, not just conversations about your week.

"Let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think."

ROMANS 12:2 (NLT)

Paul described the renewal two thousand years before neuroscientists found one of the mechanisms. The Author of Scripture and the Designer of your nervous system are the same person.

How counseling got stuck on the treadmill

If healing is possible, why does so much counseling settle for coping? Follow the money. Here's the short version of a forty-year story.

MID-1980S

Managed care takes the wheel

Insurance companies take control of what mental health care gets paid for. Their goal is containment: keep problems from escalating into more expensive care, like hospitalization. Lasting healing and life transformation were never the assignment.

THE SQUEEZE

Six to twelve sessions, and keep it brief

Coverage narrows to roughly 6 to 12 sessions at most, reimbursement rates are set low, and insurers pay only for brief, symptom-focused models of therapy, because they're quick and cheap.

THE RIPPLE

Graduate school follows the money

Training programs, preparing students for insurance-paid jobs, teach mostly those same brief models. Generation after generation of counselors graduates equipped for symptom management and little else.

TODAY

Erosion and burnout

Counselors who entered the field to change lives find themselves on a hopeless hamster wheel of short-term symptom management. Burnout sweeps the profession, and the quality of care across the whole field quietly erodes, one insurance contract at a time.

Please hear the heart behind this. It's not that in-network counselors don't care. Most care deeply, and most entered this work for the same reason I did: to be part of real transformation in people's lives. **The people are good. The incentives are broken.** The system pays for coping, so coping is what most counselors were taught, and coping is what most were hired to deliver.

Insurance was designed to keep problems from getting more expensive. It was never designed to make people whole.

Which raises the obvious question: where did the deep work go?

Why the best counselors usually aren't in your network

The deep work didn't disappear. It moved.

Models of therapy that reliably produce healing and transformation do exist. In the secular world you'll find them in approaches like **AEDP, EFT, IFS, and AF-EMDR**. In the Christian world, in **Neuroscience Informed Christian Counseling® (NICC®)**. Here's what they all have in common: **none of them are taught in graduate school**. Each requires years of post-graduate training, supervision, and certification through the model's own institute, at the counselor's own expense, on the counselor's own time.

So which counselors make that investment? Almost by definition, the most committed ones. The counselors who refuse to spend a career handing out coping skills. The ones determined to work in ways that change people's lives for the long term.

And here's the economic reality: practices built around that caliber of training can't survive on insurance rates. Insurance pays poorly, caps the number of sessions, requires a diagnosis on your permanent health record, and dictates the approach. So the most extensively trained counselors work out-of-network and cash-pay, at higher fees, where nothing stands between you and the depth of care you actually need.

The uncomfortable takeaway: the counselor your insurance can get you is rarely the counselor who can change your life. Not because in-network counselors are bad people, but because the system quietly filters the most trained ones out of the network.

A little good news for your wallet: many out-of-network practices, ours included, are HSA/FSA eligible, and some insurance plans partially reimburse out-of-network care. So "cash-pay" doesn't always mean "entirely out of pocket."

The acronyms, decoded: AEDP (Accelerated Experiential Dynamic Psychotherapy) · EFT (Emotionally Focused Therapy) · IFS (Internal Family Systems) · AF-EMDR (Attachment-Focused Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing). Different maps, one conviction: people don't just need to cope. They can heal.

Your insurance card is a fine tool for strep throat. It's a poor compass for finding the person who will help you rewrite your story.

“But I already tried counseling.”

Maybe you're reading this with a knot in your stomach, because you *have* tried. Many of our clients arrive carrying one of three stories. See if any of them sound familiar.

1

The pastor's office

You met with your pastor, or went through biblical counseling at church, with kind and godly people who love you and love the Word. You learned what the Bible says about your situation, and that truth matters. But understanding truth and experiencing healing are two different events. Insight *about* God's love is not the same as a felt encounter *with* it, in the exact place you were wounded. Ministry care is a gift. It just wasn't built to facilitate that.

2

The insurance counselor

You waited weeks, maybe months, to get in. The counselor was pleasant. You talked about your week, got some worksheets, and felt vaguely like you were circling. Somewhere around session six, the coverage ran out, or the hope did.

3

The therapy app

You tried one of the big platforms, like BetterHelp. The texting felt good at first, like facilitated journaling, and journaling helps. But nobody's life gets transformed by text message. The video sessions were with a nice counselor trained, like most, in brief symptom management. And because those platforms pay counselors even less than insurance does, they struggle to attract and keep the field's most extensively trained clinicians.

Here's what those stories mean, and what they don't. They don't mean you're broken, beyond help, or bad at counseling. They mean you got the wrong kind of counseling for what you needed. Your story isn't finished. You just haven't experienced the right chapter yet.

“...a crown of beauty for ashes, a joyous blessing instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair.”

ISAIAH 61:3 (NLT)

That is the trade God loves to make. The right help exists, and the next page shows you how to find it.

Seven questions to ask before you choose a counselor

Keep this page. Whether you ever contact us or not, these seven questions will locate the life-changing counselors in any city and filter out the treadmills. A truly great counselor will love that you asked.

- 1 “What training do you have beyond your graduate degree?”**
Listen for a named, certification-based experiential model: AEDP, EFT, IFS, AF-EMDR, or NICC. A weekend webinar doesn't count. Years of supervised post-graduate training does.
- 2 “Will we mostly talk about my problems, or will you help me experience healing in session?”**
Talking about pain manages it. Guided emotional experiences transform it. You want a counselor who can do both, on purpose.
- 3 “Does anyone ever watch video of your actual sessions?”**
Ongoing video-based supervision is the gold standard of quality. Most counselors haven't had anyone observe their work since graduate school.
- 4 “How do you measure outcomes, and can I see the numbers?”**
Ask what percentage of clients succeed, and who gets counted. Data from every client tells the truth. A handful of testimonials doesn't.
- 5 “Are your counselors employees or independent contractors?”**
It sounds like fine print. It isn't. A practice can't train independent contractors to a model of care or supervise their sessions the way it can employees. Contractors work however they work, whatever the website implies. No consistency, no accountability, no quality assurance.
- 6 “How will you match me with the right counselor?”**
A real human who listens to your story before recommending someone? Or a form and an algorithm assigning whoever has an opening?
- 7 “Will my faith be welcome in the room?”**
For Christians, this is not a bonus feature. If your relationship with Jesus is the center of your life, healing that asks your faith to wait in the lobby isn't healing the whole you.

And one bonus question: “What happens if the first session isn't a good fit?” Practices that are confident in their people have a real answer.

What we built at MyCounselor.Online, and why

Years ago I started asking these same seven questions and hated the answers I found. So we built the practice we couldn't find. We're not the only place to receive excellent counseling. But when you run MyCounselor.Online through the questions, here's what you'll discover.

93.6%

of clients report a successful outcome, across all presenting issues (2024 outcome study of 1,211 clients)

97%

success rate among clients who attended six or more sessions

100%

of completing clients are counted in our outcome data. Everyone. Not a hand-picked sample.

4.8★

on Trustpilot, from 850+ verified reviews, more than 800 of them five stars

A model built for transformation, and proven to work

Neuroscience Informed Christian Counseling® (NICC®) is our proprietary model of care: Christ-centered, neuroscience-informed, and designed to heal wounds and fill gaps rather than just quiet symptoms. It's the model our 2024 outcome study measured.

Training most counselors never receive

Every MyCounselor.Online therapist is a full-time employee, never an independent contractor, who completes a two-year, 4,000-hour post-graduate residency in NICC and is certified on demonstrated competency. We hire roughly the top 2% of applicants.

We watch the tape

Any time a client has a less-than-five-star experience, it triggers a review: the counselor pulls the video of their last session, completes a self-audit, then sits down with their supervisor to watch it together and build a growth plan. Outcome reporting plus deliberate practice means our people keep getting better. That's how we get these results.

Reviews we can't cherry-pick

Our rating lives on Trustpilot, an independent third-party platform, and we post all our reviews, not just the good ones. For comparison, the largest online therapy platform sits around 3.9 stars there as of this writing.

To our knowledge, no other large-scale practice combines a proven proprietary model, an employee-only team, and systems like these to guarantee a consistently excellent experience, whichever counselor you're matched with.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Don't settle for a quieter version of the same pain

If you've read this far, you now know more than most people in the waiting room. So let me be direct about what working with us looks like, because you deserve straight answers.

STEP 1 · A REAL PERSON

Free Matching Meeting

A short call with a real human who listens to your story and helps you find the right counselor. Not therapy yet. Just guidance, with zero obligation.

STEP 2 · HONEST PRICING

\$350 per 4-week cycle

Includes two 45-minute sessions (or one 90-minute). HSA/FSA eligible. Cancel anytime. It's not pocket change. It's also not a subscription to coping. It's an investment in getting well.

STEP 3 · ZERO RISK

Our guarantee

Not thrilled with your first session? We'll cover the cost and match you with someone new. If online counseling isn't right for you, we'll refund every penny. No questions asked.

Ready for counseling that changes your story?

Christian counseling that brings together biblical truth and modern neuroscience for deep, lasting change. Real healing that lasts.

MyCounselor.Online/getmatched

or call 855-593-HELP (4357)

"He heals the brokenhearted and bandages their wounds."

PSALM 147:3 (NLT)

Whatever you decide, and wherever you go: don't spend another year managing what God is able to heal. Find help that believes healing is possible. You were built for it.

Outcome study: Spurlock, J. (2024). *Effectiveness of Neuroscience Informed Christian Counseling® (NICC) in online faith-based therapy: A one-year study*. MyCounselor.Online. Success was defined by client-reported satisfaction, goal achievement, and likelihood to recommend, collected from 100% of the 1,211 clients who completed care between December 2023 and December 2024. Trustpilot ratings as of August 2026 and subject to change.

This guide is educational. It is not counseling, a diagnosis, or a substitute for professional care. If you are in crisis or thinking about harming yourself, call or text 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline in the U.S.) or contact your local emergency number right away.

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