

CLIENT INFORMATION



At the PF Counselling Service, we offer a warm and supportive welcome to all our clients. We hope these notes will give the answers to common questions and will help you feel at home with the way we do things. Please read this carefully before you start your regular counselling at the PF, and let us know as soon as possible if anything is not clear.

Initial Appointment

When you request counselling, we will offer you an initial appointment, known as an assessment session. This is to assess together whether or not counselling at the PF is the right thing for you at this time. You will be able to discuss your reasons for wanting to come for counselling and we will give you information about what we can offer. This assessment session will take around 50 minutes and will usually be with a different counsellor from the person who will be your counsellor when you start regular sessions.

Waiting for a Regular Appointment

After you have had your assessment appointment, we will put your name on the waiting list for regular weekly counselling to begin as soon as possible. We will offer you an appointment at a time that you can manage, based on what you have told us. There can be a long waiting time for an evening appointment, but it is less for a day-time appointment. Details of the current waiting times can be found on our website.

While you are on our waiting list, please let us know as soon as possible if you can no longer come for counselling at the times you said you could, or if you change your email, address or phone number. This will help us to offer you regular counselling as soon as we can.

We will email or telephone you to offer you an appointment. If we leave you a message, please get back to us as soon as you can to let us know whether you are able to attend the appointment. If we do not hear from you by the date given, we will offer the appointment to another person and you will unfortunately have to go back onto the waiting list. Check your junk email folder regularly, in case our offer ends up there. **Please let us know if you change your mind and no longer wish to come for counselling.**

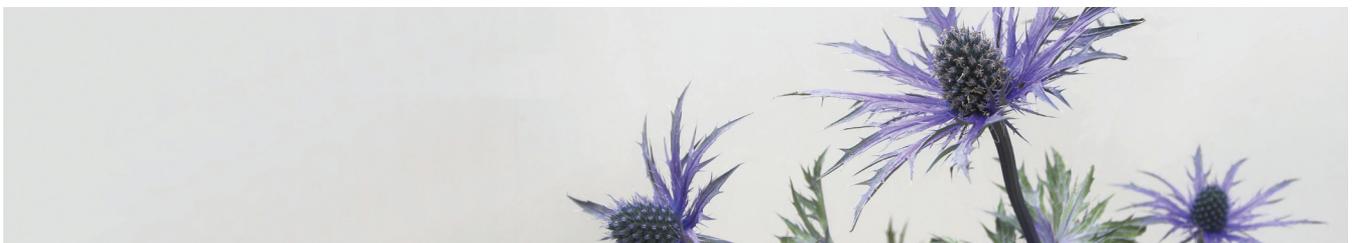
Regular Appointments

We will expect you to come for counselling at the same time on the same day each week on a regular basis. Each session lasts for 50 minutes and will always start at the same time unless agreed in advance with your counsellor. If you are not able to continue on that particular day or time, please discuss this with your counsellor, or let the office know as soon as possible.

We offer up to 12 sessions at first. If you and your counsellor feel that a longer period of counselling would be helpful for you, you can talk about this together in the sessions. It is sometimes possible to continue your counselling for up to two years.

Cancellations

If you are unable to attend your appointment, please try to let us know at least 24 hours in advance. If you give less than 24 hours notice, or if you do not attend one of your appointments without telling us, this may cause problems for both the PF and your counsellor. When this happens we feel it is fair to ask you to make your usual donation for the missed session. Your counsellor will ask you for this when you next come.



If two appointments in a row are missed and we have not heard from you, we will try to get in touch with you to ask you to confirm the next appointment. However, if we do not hear back from you after this, we will assume that you no longer wish to continue with counselling. If you have good reasons for missing your appointments, you should let us know as soon as possible, and discuss these with your counsellor when you next meet.

Correspondence

If you have given us your email address, we will use this as our main way of getting in touch with you unless you tell us otherwise. This is a confidential and cost-effective way for us to communicate with you, so please ensure that you check your email regularly. It is useful to add us to your list of 'safe senders' to avoid our emails going into junk.

Confidentiality

We offer a confidential counselling service. Under normal circumstances, no information about you will be passed to anyone outside the PF Counselling Service. This includes your initial enquiry, your attendance at counselling sessions, and anything that your counsellor has learned about you during the sessions.

However, in certain circumstances, the PF may pass on confidential information about you. This would only happen if:

- **you have asked a member of staff or your counsellor to share the information**
- **a member of staff or your counsellor would be at risk of prosecution if the information about you was not passed on**
- **a member of staff or your counsellor believes that you or another person is in serious danger.**

If any of these things were to happen, your counsellor would normally encourage you to pass on the information to the relevant person or agency yourself. However, if the situation is critical, the member of staff or counsellor may pass on the information directly. If it is at all possible, we will ask you first for your consent.



Record Keeping & Data Protection

Within our strict code of confidentiality at the PF, we need to keep your name, contact details, and statistical data on record in the office. We keep a record of all appointments offered, attended, and cancelled, and of the financial contributions made. We do this so that we can run an efficient appointments system and make sure that the premises are safe for everyone.

Your counsellor will also keep notes about your sessions. These notes will usually be short and factual, and will include things such as background information, key issues that have come up for you, and any concerns that your counsellor might have.

In accepting the PF's offer of counselling, it is understood that you have agreed to these records being kept.

Under the Data Protection Act, you have a right to see all of your notes and records. If you would like to see the information that we have about you, please speak first to your counsellor. He or she will be able to tell you more about what is in your file and why. This is often more helpful than simply seeing the notes. After that, if you would still like to go ahead, we would need one week's notice. You can also get in touch with the Director to ask about seeing your notes.

Data Security

All records and notes are kept securely locked within the PF Counselling Service building. The notes that we keep about you are anonymous, which means that your name will not be on them. Other information that we need to keep about you, such as your address and phone number, are kept separately within a locked cabinet and on a secure database. Only authorised members of office staff have access to these.

In line with best professional practice, counsellors' notes are kept for a period of three years after you finish counselling. After this time they are destroyed by shredding or secure deletion.

It is sometimes necessary for the PF or your counsellor to contact other people about your counselling, for example your GP or other Health or Social Services professional. In such cases, we will ask your permission in advance if possible, and agree with you what we are going to say. In the case of a letter or email, you will be asked to agree the wording and, wherever possible, read it before it is sent.



Donations

Counselling at the PF is offered to everyone on a voluntary donation basis. We are a registered charity whose aim is to provide quality counselling, available to all members of the community, and affordable to everyone. We always want to improve the service which we offer to our clients, and to widen access to counselling to everybody.

Our counsellors and receptionists provide their services on a voluntary basis, but we need donations to cover the running costs of the building, counselling supervision, office administration and training. The typical cost of a private counselling session in Edinburgh is currently £45 - £65, but at the PF we do not charge fees. However, we ask everyone receiving counselling at the PF to make a donation for each session, according to what they feel they can afford.

The amount you are able to offer will be agreed with you during your initial assessment appointment. You should then give your donation to your counsellor each week, in cash or by cheque. You can do this for a number of sessions in advance if you wish.

You can discuss and change your weekly donation (downwards or upwards) with your counsellor at any time. Circumstances can change, and we do not want you to stop coming for counselling because of financial worries. If you find that it is difficult to keep donating the amount that you first agreed, please discuss this with your counsellor. On the other hand, you may find work or have some other change of circumstance which means that you can make a larger donation - which would be much appreciated!

Gift Aid

The Government's Gift Aid scheme allows us to claim a refund of tax you have paid. It can add 25p to our income for every £1 you donate.

For example: If you donate £20 per session for 12 sessions, Gift Aid will add £60 to your total donation, at no additional cost to you.

If you would like to help in this way, please read and sign our Gift Aid Declaration Form, and return it to us as soon as possible. We can then reclaim tax that you have already paid. After signing the form, you do not need to do anything else. However, if for any reason you think that the amount you pay in tax may be less than the amount that is being claimed for your donations to your charities, please tell us.

Your form is kept securely by us for the sole purpose of providing a record of your declaration, so that we can claim Gift Aid. The information given on the form will not be used for any other purpose. If you would like any further information on the Gift Aid Scheme or have any questions, please speak to your counsellor, or to the staff in the office.

If you pay tax, we can claim Gift Aid!

Your Counsellor

The relationship that you have with your counsellor is very important to the success of the counselling work you do together. If you have difficulty with this relationship at any point, you should discuss it with your counsellor or, if necessary, with the Director of the PF. If the Director agrees, and if it is possible, you may be offered the opportunity to change to a different counsellor. However, there may be a delay in restarting your counselling until a new counsellor is available. It can be helpful to try to talk about any problems first with your counsellor to see if you can work together on what you are finding difficult.

When you decide that you would like to finish counselling, please discuss this with your counsellor before the appointment that you would like to be your final session. How counselling ends is important for both you and your counsellor.

As well as providing counselling to clients, the PF also supports the training of new counsellors. This means that some of our counsellors may be in the final stages of a Diploma or other professional training. They will usually have received at least two years training and are closely supervised by their training organisation as well as by the PF.

Professional Ethics

The PF is a COSCA (Counselling & Psychotherapy in Scotland) Recognised Organisation. Counsellors working at the PF adhere to the COSCA Statement of Ethics and Code of Practice (available from the COSCA website: www.cosca.org.uk).

Supervision

All our counsellors undertake professional supervision. The purpose of supervision is to help your counsellor think more deeply about the work that you are doing together. This offers extra support and safety for both you and your counsellor. In line with professional requirements and standards, counsellors may discuss their work with you within their own supervision. Supervision is confidential, which means that your counsellor will not share your identity.

Complaints

We hope that your counselling with us will be a very positive experience. However, if you are not happy with any part of our service, or if you have a complaint to make, please let us know. We will make every effort to sort out any problems as soon as possible. All complaints will be treated seriously and in confidence.

If you are attending counselling sessions, please talk about any concerns first with your counsellor. If you do not wish to do this, or if you have already done this and are not happy with the outcome, please put your complaint in writing to the Director. There is a copy of our formal Complaints Procedure on the PF website and in the waiting area of our premises, or you can ask for a copy from the Office.

Service Evaluation

The PF works hard to offer a high-quality, well-run, and effective service, and we welcome your feedback on any aspect of your experience with us. You can write to the Director or Business Manager at any time, or make an appointment to speak to them in person if you prefer.

We will invite you to fill in a short, simple Feedback Form a few weeks after you have ended counselling with us. This will be sent by email and it will be the only communication you receive from us after you have stopped being a client, unless you tell us that you would like to keep in touch. We would really appreciate you taking a few minutes to fill in this form, as your views are important to us.

Questions & Concerns

Please feel free to contact the PF office or the Director if you have any questions or concerns before counselling begins, or during the course of your time with us.

Useful Information and Contacts

The PF website has information, FAQs and resources which you may find useful before and during your counselling. This includes links to self-help materials, online CBT, and other services.

www.pfcounselling.org.uk

Edspace - edspace.org.uk

Information & Resource Centre covering a wide range of mental health and wellbeing topics

It's Good To Talk - itsgoodtotalk.org.uk

An easy introduction to counselling and psychotherapy from the UK governing body, BACP.

Edinburgh Crisis Centre - 0808 801 0414

Practical and emotional support for people experiencing crisis, available 24/7.

Samaritans - 0131 221 9999

Telephone listening service available 24 hours.

GetSelfHelp - www.get.gg

CBT self-help information, resources and downloadable worksheets and audio files.

Action on Depression - actionondepression.org

Information and support about depression and related issues. Includes a short online course based on cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).



The PF Counselling Service is the operating name of the Pastoral Foundation Ltd, a Scottish registered charity (SC008875) and company limited by guarantee (SC122762)

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