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**What is counselling?**

Counselling is a talking therapy and an opportunity to explore issues you are facing in your life in safe, confidential environment with a trained professional. Counselling can help you:

* Talk through and make sense of a life event, transition or crisis
* Become more conscious of, and change, relational patterns, thought processes and behaviours that may be keeping you stuck
* Increase your capacity to sit with and process difficult feelings and emotions
* Turn down the volume on your inner critic and increase self-compassion
* Work through unfinished business from the past including loss and trauma
* Increase your 'tool-box' of supportive strategies and resources you can draw on when our work is over.

Counselling highlights the importance of the therapeutic relationship between the counsellor and client and the transformative potential of helping you tap into your own inner resources and strengths.

**What counselling is not**

Because counselling believes that the person who knows you the best is yourself, your counsellor won’t have a ‘treatment’ plan for you, rather they’ll be alongside you to help you figure what the best way forward is for *you.*

Whilst you can talk about your gender and feelings of gender dysphoria in counselling, counsellors cannot diagnose clients. Instead we can support you in managing and exploring your feelings, along with signposting you to relevant resources. If you are seeking a diagnosis for Gender Dysphoria you must visit your GP, who can make a referral to a Gender Clinic. Diagnosis may also be obtained from Private Gender Clinics by self-referral.

Thoughts around suicide and self-harm are not uncommon when people are facing challenges in their lives and counselling can help you manage these and explore the underlying issues. However, if you’re currently in crisis it may be difficult to engage with talking therapies. Spectra may therefore suggest a referral for a different kind of support until you’re in the right place to come to counselling.

**What happens in the assessment?**

The assessment will feel a little different to a normal counselling session in that the assessor will ask you quite a lot of question about different aspects of your life. This is to help us make sure that counselling is the right kind of support for you at this time. There’s no pressure to share anything you don’t feel ready to talk about. Sometimes the outcome of the assessment will be onward referral for a different kind of support. Or we may need to ensure that you’re being helped in other ways in order to accept you into the service.

**What happens while I’m waiting for a regular slot?**

There is usually a three-month wait between being assessed and starting counselling. Spectra doesn’t accept clinical responsibility for clients until they’ve begun counselling with us so it’s important during this time that you seek other forms of support if you need them and/or maintain contact with any other professionals involved in your care. We may need you to continue being monitored or reviewed by these professionals whilst you’re receiving counselling from us. For some clients on the waiting list there may be the possibility of attending a six-week art therapy group centered around safety, stabilisation and self-care.

**And when I start counselling?**

Spectra provides up to 12 sessions of counselling and so this a short-term service. Whilst you can use the sessions to explore any aspect of yourself or your life, due to the limited number of sessions we recommend you prioritise one or two areas to focus on during the process. At the outset you may only have the vaguest sense of what you hope to get from counselling. However, your counsellor will be there to help you identify what the priorities might be and your goals should become clearer.

**And once I’m finished?**

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Spectra wants to make sure you’re properly supported, even once you’ve finished counselling with us. Your counsellor will discuss your options with you towards the end of your work together which might include a longer-term or a different kind of therapy elsewhere, support within other organisations for more practical issues or participation within Spectra’s peer mentoring programme, or attending one of our social groups.