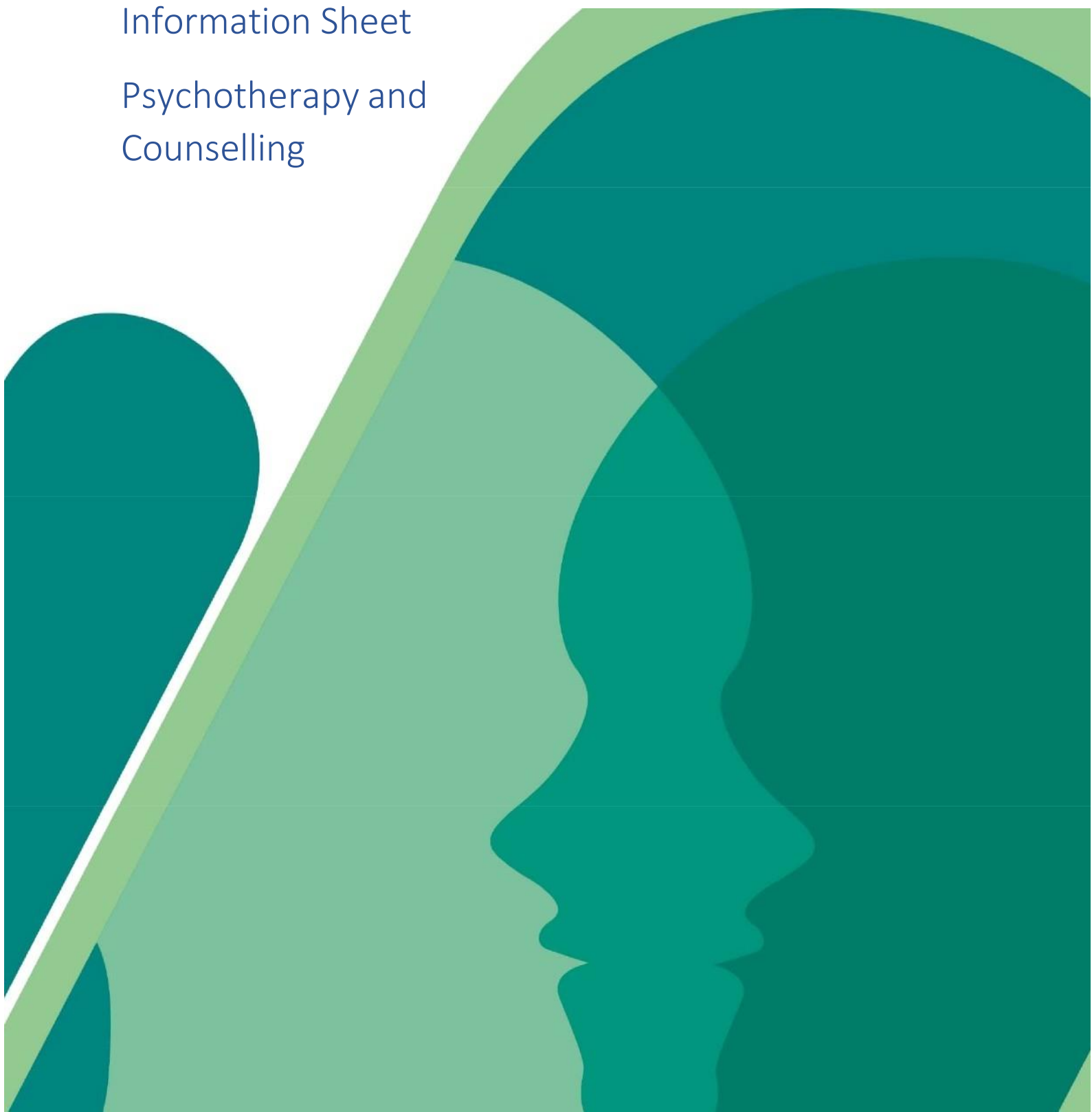




Information Sheet

Psychotherapy and
Counselling



Psychotherapy vs Counselling

The terms psychotherapy and Counselling are often used interchangeably. This means it can be difficult to understand what they are, or if they are actually different. Both refer to approaches to talking-based treatment for psychological and emotional issues. But there are important differences between psychotherapy and counselling.

Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy can be properly used to indicate long-term treatment where you deal with psychological issues that have built up over a long time. You'll tackle what is affecting you now by exploring your past, how experiences, patterns of thinking and behaviour affect the way your interaction with the world.

You'll try to find the root cause of issues, rather than trying to manage them. Sometimes you will focus on yourself a lot, looking at questions of identity and belief.

Counselling

Counselling on the other hand is most often used to refer to time-limited treatment focused on specific issues and behavioural patterns. You'll usually agree a set number of planned sessions at the outset of your therapy, with one or more set goals. Because there is a limit to the time, counselling will often be quite structured with sessions planned in advance.

When in counselling you might look at problem solving or learning techniques to cope with or avoid problem areas. Think of it as an approach that encourages the change of behaviour, looking at what is happening to you right now. For example, trying to tackle addiction or grief.

Key Differences

- Counselling is likely to be action and behaviour oriented.
- Counselling is likely to be time limited.
- Counselling is likely to focus on current rather than past issues.
- Psychotherapy tends to go on longer than a counselling programme.

- Psychotherapy is likely to be more in-depth than counselling.
- Psychotherapy can deal with problems and disorders that have developed over a long time.
- Psychotherapy is likely to explore the past as well as the present.
- Psychotherapy is more likely to explore root causes of issues rather than just behavioural patterns.

What Therapists Call Themselves

One complexity arises in how therapists themselves badge themselves. In the UK there is no legal regulation of counselling or psychotherapy. That means people can use job titles that they feel suits them or their situation, as opposed to, for example, titles such as Social Worker or Nurse which are protected under law.

A common belief is that psychotherapists have higher qualification and skills levels than counsellors. That is often the case, reflecting how four-year courses are often explicitly badged as psychotherapy training, whereas counselling training is often shorter. But it is also true that many therapists will choose to call themselves a counsellor, perhaps because the term is deemed more approachable by the public or they choose to provide counselling services.

It is therefore very important that you understand the way a therapist will work with you. Find out as much as you can from research and discussion, whether they will use short term counselling techniques, or whether they will look to work with you longer term in a psychotherapeutic relationship. Any therapist should be able to answer your questions on this and anything else. And you can use your assessment session at the beginning of therapy to get the confirmations you need.