



The Benefits of Online Counseling

- Flexible Scheduling Options- Choose phone, email , chat, video or a combination!
- Convenient- Schedule and conduct a session from home!
- No Commute- Online counseling is green! Reduce your carbon footprint!
- Anonymity – While I know who you are and I verify your identity, text-based psychotherapy via phone, chat, email or video provides a sense of anonymity that may allow for easier disclosure.

These are but a few of the obvious benefits of online counseling. With ease in scheduling and the ability to conduct sessions from home, people who might not ordinarily seek out counseling can now benefit. For people with disabilities including mobility issues, online counseling is a perfect solution. For people with busy schedules and long days, online counseling offers an alternative. People who live in rural communities will find online counseling a beneficial resource. Now technology can provide people with access and choice.

Is Online Counseling Right for You?

Online counseling is not new. Other terms for online counseling include e-therapy, online therapy, cybertherapy, and internet counseling.

Professionals have worried that online counselors were trying to replace traditional face-to-face psychotherapy. Now many psychotherapists offer online counseling or at least use technology to enhance relationships with existing clients.

Wouldn't it be great to be able to obtain counseling without scheduling hassles or the commute? Many people are finding that engaging in online

counseling is easier, more convenient, and more cost effective. The idea of logging on from home or most anywhere with the convenience of wireless internet and a laptop is quite attractive.

So how is online counseling conducted? Email, chat and webcam are the most common methods of delivery. Some therapists are offering counseling in virtual worlds such as Second Life. But mostly, online counseling is text-based, meaning that the usual cues of hearing and seeing are not available. Some describe email therapy much like exchanging letters. Chat therapy is conversational in style and compares more readily to the process of traditional psychotherapy. With technological advances, webcams offer more resolute images than just a few years ago. Webcams introduce the audio and visual components back into the process. Any of these delivery methods can be used singularly or in conjunction with one another.

If you are interested in online counseling, be sure you choose a therapist who understands the importance of confidentiality and offers an alternative to traditional chat and email. Ideally, your communication should be secure and encrypted and a variety of free encryption options are available that are very user-friendly. Many therapists who practice online have additional education that ideally indicates a certain level of proficiency. Therapists who have received additional training will usually indicate the training on their website. Therapists may opt to become certified as a Distance Credentialed Counselor (DCC). This designation suggests a basic level of expertise and the certification is offered by through the Center for Credentialing Education and the National Board of Certified Counselors. In addition, you should be able to verify a therapist's other credentials. At a minimum, expect your therapist to be able to practice independently. In the United States, this is usually indicated by a state license.

Organizations that support professionalism in the field of online counseling include the International Society of Mental Health Online (ISMHO) ismho.org and the American Distance Counseling Association (ADCA) [<http://www.adca-online>].

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