

What is Counselling?

Individual, Couples or Family Counselling

Counselling is a private and safe space where individuals, couples and families talk with a counsellor about issues and problems they are experiencing. Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV) counsellors are trained to provide confidential and non-judgemental counselling that assists you to explore options and make decisions that are right for you.

Process, Episode of Care and Fees

Episode of Care:

Assessment - Each person participating in the counselling process will take part in an individual assessment with the allocated counsellor. Assessment sessions will be 50 minutes long and do not count towards the number of counselling sessions offered.

Counselling sessions: After your assessment, if the allocated counsellor determines that counselling is appropriate, you will be offered a counselling appointment. Where counselling relates to couples in relationships or family counselling, the counsellor will explain their recommendations for the course of counselling to you (i.e. parties attending separately or jointly). A case review of your counselling sessions will take place in session 6, 12, 18 and on closure. All counselling processes (individual, couples, or families) may continue for up to 20 counselling sessions to a maximum of 12 months after your assessment date.

At the end of your episode of care, you may be provided with referral pathways or other options consistent with the closure plan established between you and the counsellor.

Missed Sessions: If you do not attend 3 sessions in total without prior notice to the service, your episode of care will be reviewed, and your counselling file may be closed.

Fees: Where applicable, associated fees and methods of payment will be discussed and agreed with the client prior to commencement of therapy.

Confidentiality and Disclosure

Your counsellor may take notes during sessions as part of their duty of care, to ensure best practice and to comply with organisational requirements. These notes and anything discussed in the counselling sessions are confidential. Relationships Australia does not provide written reports.

The limits to confidentiality of the counselling process are as follows.

- A court orders the counsellor to disclose.
- You (and any person you participate in counselling with) consent to the information being disclosed.
- The counsellor suspects that child abuse has occurred or there is risk of child abuse.
- There is a serious risk to you or others health life and / or safety.
- A lawyer independently represents a child's interests under an Order made under s68L of the Family Law Act 1975- to assist the lawyer to do so properly.

Evidence of anything said, or any admission made, by or in the company of a family counsellor conducting family counselling, is not generally admissible as evidence in any legal proceedings under the Family Law Act 1975. This also applies to anything said by, or in the company of a professional to whom you may be referred during the family counselling process.

However, if there is an admission by an adult or a disclosure by a child, that indicates that a child has been abused or is at risk of abuse, then that admission or disclosure may be admissible as evidence in legal proceedings under the Family Law Act.

Privacy and Storage of your Records

Client records/material are stored securely for a period of seven (7) years from the date of last contact with RAV, or in the case of a child up to the age of 18, until that person reaches the age of 25. After these specified periods, client records/materials (hard copy and electronic) are securely destroyed.

Obligations of the Counsellor

1. Ensure client privacy and confidentiality, and maintain a professional relationship at all times.
2. Will not enter a personal or sexual relationship with the client at any time.
3. Will not accept from or give gifts to clients (i.e. cards, flowers etc).

Obligations of the Client

1. Advise RAV of cancellation or reschedule requests 24 hours or as soon as reasonably practicable prior to their appointment.
2. While participating in video sessions will not intentionally disclose meeting passcodes/passwords to a third party without the consent of the Counsellor.
3. Will not record, take screen shots or photographs of sessions.
4. Will communicate with RAV staff respectfully.

Children on the Premises

RAV does not have an appropriate environment to care for children in the waiting areas. A responsible adult must accompany any child who attends our premises, as staff cannot take responsibility for children while parents are in a session.

Counselling for People who may be Affected by Separation

In discussions involving the welfare of children, the counsellor may, if appropriate to do so, provide a more advisory role to help clients keep the best interests of their child(ren) as their primary consideration, consistent with the principles of the *Family Law Act 1975 (Cth)*.

It is not the role of the practitioner to provide specific legal advice, but the practitioner may provide general legal information and information about parenting arrangements following separation.

Your counsellor will inform you that you should regard the best interests of the child as the

paramount consideration and encourage you to act in the child's best interest by applying the considerations set out in s60CC(2) and (3) of the *Family Law Act 1975 (Cth)*.

Complaints

If you are not satisfied with any aspect of the counselling service, you have received and wish to express a concern or make a complaint;

- Raise it with the counsellor if they are directly involved; or
- Raise it directly with the Centre Manager, either face to face or in writing.

If a complaint remains unresolved, you can make a complaint to RAV's Complaints and Feedback Officer who will review, investigate, and respond to the complaint or feedback (positive or negative) at: feedback@rav.org.au

Feedback and Suggestions

We also welcome any suggestions you may have to improve our service. Suggestions boxes are in the foyers of all our centres. We encourage you to share your feedback by completing one of our forms available at reception or in the waiting room.

Recordings and Observations

Recording of an appointment/session or any other communication with a RAV employee, using any form of electronic device, is not permitted unless:

- with your written consent, for professional supervision or related purposes after which all recordings are deleted once the supervision, reflection or feedback has occurred;
- you have the written approval of the counsellor;
- all persons being recorded have knowledge and provide consent before being recorded.

Telephone and Video Service

A condition of participation in both telephone and video counselling is that you will need to be in a private place so that conversations remain confidential and cannot be overheard by children or other adults.

Acknowledgement

We require clients to read and complete this statement before they commence their counselling sessions.

Related Documents

- RAV child safety documents available on our website at rav.org.au/about/child-safety/
 - o Our commitment to the safety of children and young people
 - o Children and Young People's Safety Code of Conduct
 - o How to make a complaint
- Family Law Act 1975
- Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)
- Health Records Act 2001 (Vic)