

A counselling case study

Every session is unique to the individuals concerned and the following fictitious account gives a flavour of the experience of a client's first session.

Christine – depression after the break-up

Christine lived a fairly normal life, now in her early forties and working as a nurse in the local hospital. She enjoyed her work and liked the colleagues and patients that she worked with. She lived with her two teenage children after a recent separation with her husband, Steve, whom she had been married to for 18 years. Recently she had started getting overwhelmed with a great sadness and anxiety which she attributed to the break-up but had been bottling it up for the last few months. An 'out of character' incident at work and a rapid deterioration in the relationship with her children landed her at the local GP who diagnosed depression, gave her an antidepressant prescription and advised that she may benefit from talking to someone.



The first session

Christine had a two week wait before getting to see a counsellor. Her symptoms had got worse and she was not sleeping. She now found herself sitting in front of her counsellor, a forty something male who seemed quite approachable. He began the session by talking about confidentiality and describing how counselling works. Christine wasn't too interested, she just knew she was really struggling and needed someone to talk to.

“So I don't know how much you've talked about your problems Christine, but I want to offer you this time to talk through whatever is on your mind” said the counsellor.

Christine nodded, although she didn't know what to say or how to start. She had only really talked to her friends and family who offered all sorts of advice. Although she was close to her children, things were tense at home and she didn't want to burden them with her problems. Now here she was, with time to talk to a listening 'professional' but didn't know what to say or where to begin! Although the counsellor was pleasant enough, she wasn't entirely sure about this counselling lark. How could talking to a complete stranger help?

“Erm, I don’t really know where to begin. I recently got divorced and, I guess, I haven’t been handling it too well. The GP says I am depressed and gave me this prescription and told me to go see a counsellor...so here I am. I guess I am quite confused as to what is happening to me.”

The counsellor nodded **“So not handling things too well and confusion about what is going on with you?”**

“Yes” said Christine, **“but I guess I’ll get by”**. Christine knew that was not how she really felt but it felt too uncomfortable to talk about it just yet.

The counsellor repeated **“but you’ll get by”** but slower than he had initially heard it.

“Yes....I guess...” Christine said as her voice began to break. Christine looked up and met the gaze of the counsellor and held eye contact for a few moments. Even now she was struggling to hold it together. After a period of silence the counsellor said **“Even though you’ve said that you’ll get by it seems like a really tough time for you at the moment and difficult to put into words.”**

“I guess I don’t know where to start” said Christine in response. There was so much in her head and her heart was pounding. **“I know I have to talk to someone as I am bottling it all up, but I just don’t know where to start...”**

“You want so much to say things but don’t know where to begin. I wonder what are the thoughts and feelings that you are struggling to make into words?”

Christine thought for a second and a voice in her head said ‘here we go’ and, with a deep sigh, said **“I just feel rubbish and that I’ve let my children down, myself and pretty much everyone else recently. It all feels so out of control, like I can’t get my life back on track or whatever that track should be...I’m stuck. I worry so much about being a good mother and now, what with the divorce, I wonder if I’ll ever find someone to replace Steve. To be honest my thoughts and feelings are all over the place!”**

“Feeling rubbish, really out of control yet at the same time ‘stuck’ and a sense of letting everyone down...and really unsure about the future. It sounds like it’s a really confusing place to be in, difficult to make any sense of it all, and...scary?”

The word ‘scary’ hit a nerve with Christine as that is exactly how it felt although she didn’t like to admit it. She had always been in control and the reliable, dependable type and not usually ‘scared’ of anything.

“Yes, I suppose scary is how it is” Christine said in a slow, deliberate way. “I’ve never been the scared type and never dared admit it to anyone over the past few weeks so it feels strange saying this to a complete stranger but I guess this is what you are here for....”

Christine felt oddly more at ease having said that and spent the rest of the session talking about how different her life was because of the recent events and how unsure the future would be from now on. She found herself emotional at times but was glad of the pace of the session and the fact the counsellor did not force her to say or do anything and went with her ‘flow’.

After agreeing the next session and thanking the counsellor, Christine went out into the cold evening air and got into the car. She was aware of feeling strangely calmer than before the session even though it had been emotionally draining. The counsellor had said she might feel a little disorientated after the session and the drive home gave her some time to mull over what was said in the session. “That was difficult” she thought to herself but also noted that she felt that some weight had been lifted and was glad to have finally got to speak to someone who just might be able to help.