



Finding the right professional helper

‘Today I go to the clinic, about six on the staff, I believe. I don’t want a wowsler or some youngster just out of school. I hope I get a good, experienced one, someone I can respect, a sort of role model I suppose.’

IT IS SO VERY IMPORTANT for the helper and the person being helped to ‘click’. When we enter a counselling session, the counsellor must make it easy for rapport to develop, a respectful relationship with us, especially if we are initially reluctant to be a client. And there are so very many factors about a helper, or would-be helper, that may contribute to our attraction, hesitation, or even repulsion for this encounter. Factors such as the counsellor’s mood, beliefs and prejudices, appearance and gender, knowledge and experience of course, and even the sort of lifestyle that you know the counsellor leads. Also, counselling methods vary, so it is important that the style adopted by our helper is appropriate and acceptable to us as the client.

The ‘who’ matters as much as the ‘how’ in the process of helping, and there are many characteristics of the helper and the type of help being offered that might be important. Some characteristics will be attractive, some tolerable, some intolerable. Horses for courses, as they say. The helper may, of course, assess us, the client, in the same way! Good rapport is so important for clear, honest communication and effective helpfulness.

What kind of person is most likely to be helpful? Someone who:

- can really listen to us, tries to understand us and our concerns, is respectful, non-judgmental, positive and practical
- seems to have beliefs, values, ideals, attitudes and a lifestyle we are comfortable with
- has self-awareness, is not pompous, and seems emotionally stable and at peace
- is not authoritarian, does not moralise, and will not try to take control over us
- explores our options with and for us, offers suggestions and advice when we are ready for them, and generally helps us to help ourselves.

For the most part these factors would be considered subconsciously, instinctively. A reasonably good dovetailing of these appreciations is essential for a good working relationship.

If there is any niggling concern or hesitation about any item in the relationship, it can sometimes be helpful to reveal it, bring it into the open. This may lead to deeper rapport, better understanding and more confidence in the process.