

Making Referrals for Professional Counseling

When to Make Referrals

1. You have reached your limit in terms of
 - time
 - energy
 - training
 - knowledge (i.e. spousal or child abuse, addictions, psychotic behavior)
2. The needs go beyond your scope of resources.
 - A medical evaluation is needed to eliminate organic problems.
 - A psychiatric evaluation is needed to determine a specific diagnosis or severity of problem.
 - A financial crisis that requires consumer credit counseling.
 - Child abuse has occurred.
 - Substance abuse is a problem.
 - Legal help is needed.
3. You are strongly attracted either emotionally or sexually.
 - Counselee needs the help of a non-involved helper.
 - Pastor/lay leader needs counsel and accountability in dealing with the attraction.
4. You dislike the counselee.
5. You feel overwhelmed by the intensity of the person's need or the magnitude and complexity of problems presented. Some examples:
 - You are thinking, "This person is crazy."
 - You feel parental about wanting to do **so** much to help.
 - The counselee has multiple long-standing problems.
 - The counselee goes from church to church draining resources without improving.
6. You recognize specific serious mental health problems:
 - serious depression
 - panic attacks
 - hallucinations
 - thought disorders
 - paranoia
 - suicidality
 - severe phobias
 - homicidality

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How to Make Referrals

You can help your parishioner get a successful start in therapy by laying some groundwork when you refer.

1. Give the name and telephone number of the therapist and a positive comment about your confidence in that therapist. Knowing that you support and approve of psychotherapy will be important for the counselee. Use the therapist's business card if you have one.
2. Explain that all sessions will be confidential; the therapist will be able to discuss progress with you only if the client so desires and also signs an informed consent agreement.
3. Indicate that counseling takes time: problems that have developed over the years and that are well-established will take time and a commitment to hard work to make the necessary changes.
4. Explain that the therapist doesn't do all the work and has no mystical tools. Success will depend not just on attending sessions and the therapists' expertise, but also on **motivation** to change and a certain amount of **work** outside of the sessions as well. In addition, success will depend on the ability to take some **risks** to create the desired changes. New **skills** and **habits** also take time to learn and practice.
5. Therapy is usually painful or uncomfortable in the beginning. Often he/she will feel worse before feeling better. Painful feelings, situations, and truths that have been avoided in the past will now be faced. In time, as change occurs, the person will start to feel better.
6. Help the person to understand that working toward a healthier emotional/spiritual life is not selfish or self-centered. As healing occurs the person will be better equipped to give to others and will be a healthier counterpart in relationships.
7. Mention the ways you will be able to provide continued support in the future.
8. Encourage the person, when appropriate, to develop other support, such as is found in small home groups, discipleship-type relationships, or 12-step programs.