

Counselling is a demanding job and can be stressful. It is also wonderful: consistently challenging, inspiring and fulfilling. Supervision, lifelong learning and self-reflection are built in, and seeking your own counselling during times of difficulty is the norm. This acceptance of being human encourages a healthy balanced life so here are some of the lessons it teaches:

1) There is no shame in seeking support

In therapy having the support of a supervisor is a professional requirement as hiding doubts or denying limitations could put a client at risk. When looking after vulnerable people a willingness to acknowledge your own needs should be encouraged - how can you expect those you care for to do this if you can't? Being honest about your capabilities is also important for trust in the therapeutic relationship, people can sense anxiety. A helpful life lesson for anyone with responsibility for others, whether as a parent, carer or professional.

2) Looking after yourself benefits everyone

Caring for others in any form can take its toll on physical and mental health. In the counselling profession you quickly learn that if you don't take care of yourself you won't be able to help others to your best ability, so self-care is far from selfish as it benefits everyone. Time for rest, relaxation, exercise and recharging in your daily routine is essential.

3) Acknowledging vulnerability actually makes you stronger

Showing a stranger your vulnerability takes courage - seeing clients repeatedly face up to difficulty, learn, change and grow is inspiring. Counsellors have to be willing to do the same in times of challenge to ensure their work is not adversely affected by their own issues. This process brings increased confidence in your own strength and acceptance of your whole self - doing this routinely without shame is a very healthy thing.

4) Night is the time to let go

Hearing the people's most personal stories is an absolute privilege, but for it to be sustainable you have to develop the ability to compartmentalise or 'put away' issues. Strong boundaries around non-work time and completely 'letting go' at night are essential. A great way to manage stress at the end of work

is to make note of what you are going to do and when, or an appointment for support, then let it go. Having a strong sleep routine that supports your body and mind to wind down is also vital.

5) Strong boundaries make a healthy life

Seeing many clients a week makes holding boundaries an essential professional skill. A counsellor who worries about every individual between sessions won't last long. Routines for notetaking, planning for supervision, additional reading and reflection are all strategies that we use to cope, and rituals for literally locking these away at the end of a session helps with the move back into personal life. How can you make some separation between your caring and personal roles?

6) You can only do your best

Having the confidence to say 'I've done all I can' and knowing the limits of your responsibility are vital for a therapist. In any given situation we can only do our best and once that time has gone we must let go. We all have 'off days' and are rarely solely responsible for another person so knowing the limits of your role, being kind to yourself and letting go of a need to 'fix' others is a healthy attribute.

7) Switching off is a daily essential

Making space for activities that recharge and refocus you brings vital balance to the demands of therapy and life in general. Losing yourself in creative, active, relaxing or entertaining activities must be a routine part of life if you want to stay strong and able to focus when you are working or caring. Yes, that means actually scheduling time for you with equal importance to work or looking after others.

8) Accessing your own support network is an essential responsibility

Seeking peer support, monthly supervision and regular reflection are an integral part of a counsellor's job. This is unusual even among related professions, and it is a precious way to ensure your own wellbeing stays on the agenda. Getting used to valuing and taking care of yourself benefits your clients and is a great life lesson, modelling the self-awareness and acceptance of therapy.

9) Value yourself as you value others

Counsellors believe that we are just as human and potentially vulnerable as our clients rather than some superior being, and seek to work alongside people rather than lead them. This is underpinned by a belief in a positive human drive and unconditional positive regard for our fellow humans. Not applying the same care to yourself would be hypocritical.

10) Humans are resilient, adaptable and good

Working with people experiencing trauma, in great distress, learning to adapt to chronic illness, feeling suicidal, working on past abuse, overwhelmed with grief is surprisingly inspiring & uplifting - one of the best things is seeing every day the strength and basic good in people. This makes for a great experience in what can be a difficult world, keeping faith that we are part of something amazing and that we all deserve to be cared for and loved, and that includes you.