

**The AIDS Committee of Toronto
offers a range of counselling
services. All are free of charge.**

ACT Hours

Monday – Thursday 10 a.m. – 9 p.m.

Friday, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Drop In

ACT has a “counsellor-on-call“ to deal with immediate issues. Ask to speak with the counsellor-on-call and he or she will see you that day, usually within 45 minutes. Please call ahead for on-call hours for the day.

One to One

ACT offers scheduled counselling sessions. We offer both peer support and counselling by staff who are experienced in HIV issues. You can make an appointment by calling and saying you'd like to see a counsellor. ACT counsellors can meet you at our offices, or in other locations (like a coffee shop).

Groups

At different times during the year, ACT offers a variety of support groups. Call us and say you'd like to speak with a counsellor about support groups.

Referral services

Information is available at ACT to help you locate counsellors, learn about different therapies, and link you with other services in Toronto. Visit us in person or online at www.actoronto.org/services



AIDS Committee of Toronto
399 Church Street, 4th floor
Toronto Ontario M5B 2J6
Wheelchair accessible.

Monday to Thursday
10 a.m. – 9 p.m.
Friday 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.

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choosing a counsellor



AIDS Committee of Toronto

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Choosing a Counsellor

Choosing a counsellor you feel comfortable with can take time and effort, but it is an important investment in your overall health.

We hope that this guide will give you some ideas and options to consider when you're looking for a counsellor.

Finding a Counsellor

The first step is to decide on the type of counsellor you want. Psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, therapists, counsellors, and some physicians all use the word "counselling" to describe their work. No one type of counsellor is best for everyone. Some will feel like a better fit than others.

Psychiatrists are medical doctors with special training in counselling, and they usually need a referral from your doctor. Your doctor may also be a trained counsellor. Only psychiatrists and medical doctors can prescribe medications. Their fees are covered by the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP).

Psychologists are trained counsellors who are not medical doctors, so their fees are not usually covered by OHIP, but some private insurance plans may pay all or part of their fees.

Social workers are also trained counsellors who are often associated with social service agencies, although some work independently. Private insurance plans may pay all or part of their fees.

Therapist and Counsellor are generic names that refer to someone who practices one of many different kinds of counselling. Very few private insurance plans will cover their fees. They may be trained in a particular kind of counselling, or may have developed expertise on their own.

Here are some things to consider that might play a part in your decision:

- Check your health insurance plan. Is counselling (or therapy, psychological services) covered under your plan? If so, what is covered, and for how long? What percentage of the fee is covered?

- Think about whom you'd feel most comfortable talking to. Is it important to you to have a counsellor of the same gender? Same sexual orientation? Same racial, ethnic, or cultural background?

When you've made some decisions, it's time to find some names. Check with your local AIDS service organization, your hospital or HIV clinic, or your doctor. They may offer counselling themselves, or be able to refer you to a counsellor.

Once you have the names of a few counsellors, call them to let them know you would like to see them for an initial interview. These interviews should be free of charge. Don't hesitate to ask about fees over the phone, and whether she or he has a sliding scale. (Psychiatrists' fees are covered by OHIP, but some may want you to pay for other tasks, such as writing letters or filling out forms.)

Interviewing the Counsellor

During your interview with the counsellor, ask her/him to describe in plain language, the kind of counselling he practices. For instance, not all psychiatrists take the same approach to counselling. Some will give you clear direction about how to deal with your problems and concerns, others will simply guide you with questions or comments. Some will concentrate on your dreams, others on your childhood – there are many different techniques. You'll find the same variety among psychologists, doctors, social workers and therapists/counsellors. Each approach works for some people, but again, some will feel like a better fit for you.

What background and experience does she/he have? Does she/he have any special training in HIV issues? Does the counsellor receive regular clinical supervision? Ask if she/he is a member of a professional association.

These may seem like challenging, and almost rude questions. But in Ontario, anyone can call him or herself a counsellor or therapist, and there is no single governing body which regulates the activities of counsellors. So it's very important to make sure you are satisfied with his or her qualifications. If the counsellor is threatened by your questions, then this is not the person for you.

What is the counsellor's cancellation policy? Will you be billed for missed appointments if you have to cancel at the last minute? If your insurance pays on your behalf, will the counsellor bill it directly?

You should expect that the counsellor will answer your questions without becoming defensive. Be wary of any counsellor who claims that his or her method of counselling is the only valid one.

Your Relationship with Your Counsellor

A counsellor should never encourage you to be her/his friend. As much as you may grow to like your counsellor, the relationship should remain professional at all times. Sexual advances by any counsellor is harassment and an abuse of the client/counsellor relationship. It should be reported to the counsellor's professional association, if she/he belongs to one.

See below for the colleges that regulate your counsellor. Only counsellors who are members of these bodies can be disciplined by them.

Profession/Governing Body

College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario:
416.967.2603

Ontario Psychological Association: 416.961.5552
Ontario Association of Social Workers: 416.923.4848

Ontario College of Social Workers and Social
Service Workers: 416.972.9882

Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario:
416.599.1925