

Is There Magic in Counseling?

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Although the field of professional counseling can boast of a long and strong existence, misconceptions continue to cloud the general public's understanding of what counseling is about and how it works. While the cloak of confidentiality that serves to shield clients from harm can, at times, cause us to wonder about what happens during the counseling process, much of what happens in counseling is simply problem solving.

Conflicts within us, between us and others, society and nature are an inevitable part of our complex world. Frequently, we tackle our daily dilemmas independently but at times, our struggles can be eased with some help. During especially difficult times or with situations where there are multiple and complex issues, accessing support can help us tap into our inner resources so that we continue to move forward.

While many of us prefer to avoid problems, they can, however, be important events in our lives. Dealing effectively with our problems can make life exciting, strengthen our self-confidence and hone our skills. Our uniquely creative way of handling problems reflects our personal beliefs and values and how we understand the world around us.

So where's the magic? The process of problem solving is a fairly sterile set of stages which include (1) problem exploration, (2) self-awareness, (3) understanding self in problem, (4) goal setting, (5) strategies/experimenting and (6) evaluation. There is no magic there. Personally and professionally I find it difficult to believe that 'magic' is an ingredient in the recipe for therapeutic change even though becoming involved in the dynamic lives of fellow human beings and witnessing them succeed on their life journeys can seem quite magical. If there were any one aspect of counseling that resembles magic, it would have to be the inherent power of listening to the client's story with a non-judgmental ear. Unconditionally accepting people as they are creates a *truly* safe environment where the common burden of preserving one's personal worth and integrity can be suspended and energy saved can be reclaimed and used toward the search for understanding self and others. It may not be magic but creating a safe place to explore the unknown can work like magic. If it was magic, it would not be the sole providence of counselors. It is magic that is available to all.