



## Break free of the negative stigma surrounding Psychotherapy and Counselling

*Specialist in couple, marriage and family therapy, Dr Christina Pillai explains why seeking help from a psychiatrist isn't a sign of weakness*

The negative stigma that surrounds psychotherapy is a major deterrent for those seeking help. Despite a growing awareness of the benefits of counselling for people of all backgrounds and situations, this negative perception is why some are hesitant about giving counselling a try, which is a shame because it can help everyone and anyone.

**There is this misconception that you have to be crazy, weak, a failure or you harbour some strange problem if you need to see a therapist.** It is entirely normal to feel anxious, confused, lost or challenged by relationships, regardless of where the pressure comes from—be it from family, life or work—a therapist is there to help you without prejudice.

**By talking to a therapist who listens carefully over a period of time, you will come to a deeper understanding of how your mind works.** Patterns will start to emerge as well as a change in the way you approach relationships, and the way you look at questions such as: What am I afraid of? Why do I react the way I do? Why am I overwhelmed by certain feelings? These are the kind of conversations or questions that therapy will open up and hopefully help you find the answers to.

**People are curious about what goes on during a therapy session and they want to seek help but are worried about what others might think.** Such concerns are natural given our societal beliefs and stigmas attached to counselling. Unfortunately, as a result, many would choose not to pursue counselling despite experiencing significant emotional, physical or mental distress, which could lead to bigger issues down the line.

**People who initiate counselling do not have serious psychological illness.** However, they have serious life challenges or are going through difficult life transitions that may be taxing their current ability to cope. This in turn, takes a toll on their wellbeing and ability to function normally. Examples of serious life changes can be, but not limited

to: Dealing with work stressors, financial problems, career issues, health issues and relationship conflicts that may include friends, parents, spouses, children and siblings.

While, difficult life cycle transitions can be, but not limited to issues such as: The death of a loved one, the ending of a romantic relationship, getting married, separation and divorce. There are also the challenges of co-parenting, long-distance marital relationship, family changes to adopting a new child or a new addition to the family, caregiving for a loved one due to disability or illness, manoeuvring through various unexpected life changes, a lifetime accumulation of pain and disappointment, making major life decisions and decision-making challenges related to these choices in life to find meaning, fulfilment and creativity. These are just some of the decisions why people decide to seek counselling.

**If you are going through one or more of these challenges, know that you are not alone.** Counselling through these hard times can be helpful in providing support, stability and skills to better address these life challenges. It is an important step toward improving your quality of life.

**Concerns about how counselling is viewed should not deter you from taking an empowering step forward.** Opting for counselling is an invaluable investment in your emotional, physical and mental health, and no cultural stigma should stop you from wanting to improve your mental wellbeing. Taking that step to include a certified therapist to work out your issues with you is already a sign of courage (not weakness) and fortitude. It is something you can do for yourself and your loved ones for a better future.

