

## **Training courses for social workers and counsellors**

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### **Starting point**

People turn to help-lines and information centres, if they do not know what to do anymore. Their reasons stretch across all different aspects of life (marriage, family, debts, work, addiction, AIDS, etc.). Generally advice and counselling is being offered with individual sessions, sometimes couple or family sessions are preferred. It can be assumed that quite a few people looking for counselling are suffering from a psychiatric disorder, especially depression. IN some cases, people looking for help from a counsellor require psychiatric support or psychotherapy. Counsellors are not specially trained to diagnose a psychological disorder. Many counsellors have been trained in communication skills and are extremely competent. Sometimes the different therapists (psychiatrists / psychologists) and counsellors are very critical and sceptical about each others treatment strategies.

Counsellors themselves often suffer from depression, too, thus they are familiar with the problems and symptoms out of their own experience.

### **Known deficits**

Most of the people working at a helpline are counsellors. During their training they develop skills to recognise a psychological disorder. However, it is still difficult to assess whether the emotions experienced by people calling up are still within the range of normal feelings or whether a psychological disorder is at hand. Some counsellors are totally fixed on social and psychiatric factors as far as the development of psychological disorders is concerned. The neurophysiological aspects are not taken into account. Thus they reject psychopharmacological drugs and treatments.

Some counsellors find it extremely strenuous to deal with highly depressed or suicidal people, consequently they try to avoid these conversations since they believe that they cannot be helpful anyway.

### **Aims of the training course**

The participants should gain an overview of the symptoms and treatment options of depressive disorders. They should learn to differentiate between a ‚normal‘ emotional upset and a psychological disorder. They should receive a list of local addresses to refer clients to a clinic if deemed necessary. They should be encouraged to have an open conversation about the current life situation of the client but on the other hand they need to be aware of their own limitations and should know when to request further help. Another training course on the subject „Dealing with suicidality in a counselling session.“ could be offered. The counsellors would practice conversations with suicidal people. This workshop would help counsellors to address suicidality openly and to refer people to appropriate places if required.

### **Practical advice**

Training courses for counsellors usually take place during the working hours of the participants and are initiated by the local help centre. The counsellors are usually very keen to take part in training courses. The willingness to learn depends on how the lecturer receives the participants initially, if the trainer recognises a high competency and good starting knowledge from the participants the training effect will be much higher as the trainer is accepted as someone who may teach the participants a lot. Role-plays and interactive parts are usually well known and can be implemented successfully.