



Are You in Need of a Mental Tune-Up?

by Michelle Kelley, LCSW

Going to counseling is a gift you give to yourself and others. It is a mental tune-up. We take our cars in for tune-ups. We take our children to their doctor and dentist appointments to prevent future problems. So why not get a mental tune-up?

I am a counselor and I go to counseling. I am quick to say that I do not have all the answers to my life's challenges nor do I think I should just because I'm a therapist. I may need an attitude adjustment or help in viewing an emotional situation from a different angle. This not only helps me personally but it also helps me to be a better therapist. I know what it's like to sit on the other side.

What is Counseling?

Counseling is a place where you can benefit from professional and experienced helpers. A lot of people go to counseling to have a safe, private environment in which to work through their issues. Guess what? We all have issues. Learning to deal effectively with emotional and social issues increases a person's chances for success in school, career, relationships and life.

Why do people go to counseling?

Some common reasons people go to counseling are for academic problems (focusing and concentrating), anxiety, depression, grief, stress management or relationship concerns such as break-ups, parental divorce, sadness and loneliness.

Is counseling confidential?

All counseling is confidential. No information is released to anyone without your written consent. The rare exception is when information is revealed about current or future harm to self or others.

Common myths:

1. **Counseling is for "crazy" people.** Going to counseling doesn't mean you are crazy, but rather it is a sign of strength. It's not easy to take an honest look at yourself, your relationships, your life and then have the courage to make changes. I've often said that the ones who need it the most will never enter a therapist's office. But the ones who have to live with them often come in feeling desperate, confused, angry, sad or overwhelmed.

2. **Counseling doesn't work for me.** This is the equivalent of saying that exercise doesn't work for you. It can't not work. You may need to redefine your objective for counseling. Counseling doesn't change other people. It merely provides you with the opportunity

to gain insight into your thoughts, emotions and life situations. When we change our thinking, our world will begin to change. The problem is we may not like the change. It may be scary and difficult but change allows us to grow. I believe all personal growth is for our higher good. It is important to remember that the counseling process is different with each counselor, for each problem and at each time in your life. So if you've tried it once and didn't like it, try it again.

3. **Counseling is too expensive.** It really comes down to what you value and how proactive you are willing to be. I value good mental health. It allows me to have more peace and a higher quality of life. I also value good physical health and that is why I go to the doctor for regular check-ups, watch what I eat and exercise regularly. I can't tell you what should be important to you but I will strongly urge you to break through those invisible barriers which keep you from going to counseling. Don't wait until it's too late. I can't tell you how many people end up in my office when their marriage is falling apart. It is often too late to repair the damage and one or both parties want out. Come before you're one minute away from leaving. I am a big believer in pre-marital counseling. How can anyone think that they can walk into a marriage without any understanding or tools to deal with issues (some obvious, some not). When I have a couple in my office for pre-marital counseling, I am going to delve deep into their relationship and uncover patterns of behavior and attitude and talk about their roots (usually childhood). I would rather a couple address some of the tough stuff while they're still on speaking terms.

Many people use their insurance benefits to help reduce the costs of paying out of pocket for counseling. Don't be afraid to ask a counselor if they will negotiate a lower fee. I often do this to accommodate a person's financial needs.

My suggestion to you is to try some counseling. I did when I was in college and struggling. And I still go in occasionally for my mental tune-ups so why don't you? If the problems in your life keep repeating, then it's time for a mental tune-up. They say that the definition of crazy is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. Counseling can help get you out of your rut and out of your comfort zone at times; but it's all part of the process.

For more information about counseling or to discuss a particular concern, please contact me or another licensed counselor. If I can't help you, I will find someone who can.

Michelle Kelley, LCSW, is a licensed counselor in Warrenton. She works with individuals, children and couples to quickly identify the issues at hand, uncover the roots and then deliver strategies and tools for creating hope and change. "I believe that most people only need occasional mental tune-ups and I specialize in assessing a person's situation to determine whether they need a few sessions or possibly a referral for long-term issues. When working with a client, I always start with the current situation. A client will always leave a session with valuable insight and information and a feeling of hope". Michelle has two daughters and she understands the pressures of life, relationships and work. She is passionate about educating people on how to improve the quality of their lives and relationships.

"I'm not the type to just sit and listen. I get involved." For more information you can reach her at (540) 300-5879 or michelle@GirlsStandStrong.com