



Talking it over

Counselling for people affected
by sight loss

RNIB

supporting blind and
partially sighted people

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“Talking every week was really important and helped me more than anything else.”

“You’ve really helped me voice things I was holding inside that were preventing me from moving on.”

Counselling

Sight loss may be something you have been living with for a long time, or it may be something new. Either way, if you have lost or are losing your sight, you may be experiencing difficult thoughts and feelings.

Some of the things you may feel are shock, anger, fear, sadness or loss. You may worry about how you will cope or feel depressed about the changes you are facing. Whatever your feelings are, many people find some support useful.

People with sight loss often ask about counselling and this document offers some information and suggestions to help you:

- decide if counselling is for you
- understand how to go about finding a counsellor
- access other sources of help and advice.

What is counselling?

Counselling means talking things over with a skilled listener and it can help you understand your feelings and think about ways of coping with the changes in your life.

Counselling is not direct advice, but help to explore your situation so that you can work out what is right for you.

When you are going through a major life change it can be helpful to talk it through with someone who is outside your usual circle of friends and family. This can make it easier to share difficult thoughts and feelings.

This person need not be a counsellor, however trained counsellors should have knowledge and experience of helping people deal with change and loss. It may be important for you to check they are members of a professional organisation that sets standards for how they work.

Is counselling right for me?

Sight loss is different for everyone. Some people will want to get practical things sorted out before they can think about how they feel, whilst others will not be able to make use of practical support until they have begun to deal with their feelings. Some people will want to tackle both things together. (There is information on getting both practical and emotional support in the following section, until the end of the booklet).

Think about how you have coped with other major life events – what has worked best for you? This may help you decide whether – or when – counselling will work for you. Perhaps your usual way of coping is not working as well this time, in which case it might be time to try something different. However, counselling really only works if you have decided for yourself to try it – it is not something that someone else can decide for you.

Some practical information about how counselling works

Most counselling is based on seeing the same counsellor at the same time every week for a “50 minute hour”. It may be for a fixed number of sessions – say 6, 8 or 12 – or it may be open-ended so that you and the counsellor decide together when to finish. Some counsellors also work with couples or groups, or use the telephone or email rather than face-to-face sessions. A few counsellors can arrange to visit you at home if you have mobility difficulties, but most work from a fixed venue.



Counselling should be confidential and your counsellor should not share what is said in your sessions with anyone without your agreement. There are (rare) exceptions to this based on decisions about your safety or that of others, and these should be explained to you by the counsellor from the start.

Counsellors should be members of a professional body (examples are the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy or the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy) which has a code of conduct and a complaints system. They (or their agency) should also have professional indemnity insurance. A counsellor should give you information about their service, code of confidentiality and complaints system in a format that you prefer, for example in large print or on tape, if you request it.

Some counselling is free (for example on the NHS, or in the workplace) and some is charged for. Some charities offer low-cost or sliding scale charges based on income. Private fees vary according to the area you live and the experience of the counsellor. (As a rough guide, fees in 2011 can range between £30 and £65 per session.)

Finding a counsellor

How easy this is may depend on where you live and whether you are able to afford private or low-cost counselling. Few counsellors have experience of sight loss, but all are trained to support people who are going through changes and loss, and many of the feelings will be similar.

Remember you are likely to be talking about things that make you feel vulnerable and you need to feel comfortable with the counsellor. It can help to have an idea before you start of what you would like to get from it and how you hope things will have changed when counselling has finished.

Options to consider include:

- RNIB Emotional Support Service. We can help you find out what local counselling and support is available, or if appropriate, we can provide telephone counselling sessions from a qualified counsellor. The number of sessions available varies, but is usually up to 8. We also run “Seeing It Through” telephone support groups where a small group, facilitated by an RNIB counsellor, meet over the phone.

You can contact us directly by emailing ess@rnib.org.uk or telephoning the RNIB Helpline on 0303 123 9999 and ask to be referred to us. We aim to get back to you within 5 working days and our service is confidential. (Please let us know if it is ok for us to leave you a message).

- Some GP surgeries have a counsellor based at the practice or a contract to refer clients to a particular hospital or community-based service. Your GP should be able to tell you what is available locally through the NHS.
- The government have committed to a programme of talking therapies which began in 2008 and has been rolled out across the country. This will mainly be using a method called “cognitive behavioural therapy” which is aimed at helping people manage conditions like depression and anxiety. You may see a counsellor or other health professional for this, or be offered self-help materials such as books or computer programmes. (It is unclear whether accessible versions of these are readily available at the moment and it is important that this is taken into account when you are offered the service.) Ask your GP for more information.

- You can ask your local social services department for an assessment of your needs following sight loss, including your need for emotional support and counselling. The National Standards of Care for Visually Impaired Adults recommend that social services departments offer counselling and emotional support after a person has been diagnosed with sight loss. It also recommends that they should review this need from time to time.
- Some local societies for blind and partially sighted people offer counselling as one of their services. Other voluntary counselling organisations in your area may also be able to help.
- Counselling may be available through your workplace from Occupational Health or an Employee Assistance Programme. You could also find out if anything is on offer from your Trade Union or Professional Association.
- If you are a school, college or university student, there may be a counselling service (sometimes part of student welfare or advice services). Your local Connexions Service can tell you what is available. Telephone 0808 001 3219 for details of your local

service. Alternatively you can visit their website www.connexions-direct.com. Connexions is for all young people up to age 19 and young people with disabilities up to age 25.

- Many counselling services specialise in working with young people (up to age 20, or sometimes 25). You can find out what is available locally from www.youthaccess.org.uk or telephone number 020 8772 9900.
- The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy can send details of private counsellors in your area. All counsellors on their list are trained and are required to adhere to a code of ethics. Counsellors can specify areas of interest, and those who list “health related” or “disability” may have more relevant experience.

Telephone 01455 88 33 16 (client information helpdesk) or 01455 88 33 00 (general enquiries)

Email information@bacp.co.uk

Visit www.bacp.co.uk where you can search the “Find a Therapist” database. The website also gives useful background information on different styles of counselling.

- The United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy is another national organisation that can send you details of qualified and registered therapists in your area.

Telephone 020 7014 9955

Email info@ukcp.org.uk

Website www.ukcp.org.uk

- Relate is an organisation providing counselling that can help if you wish to talk over any relationship difficulties. They can see you with your partner or by yourself.

Telephone 0300 100 1234 for details of your local branch

Email enquiries@relate.org.uk

Website www.relate.org.uk

- If you are deafblind you can contact Signhealth who provide accessible counselling for the deaf community including those with both hearing and sight loss.

Telephone 01494 68 76 00

Textphone 01494 68 76 26

Text 07966 976 747

Email therapy@signhealth.org.uk

Website www.signhealth.org.uk

- The Macular Disease Society has a telephone counselling service for members, their friends, families and carers.

Telephone MDS Helpline 0845 241 2041

Email info@macularisease.org

Website www.macularisease.org.uk

- Saneline is a telephone helpline offering information and emotional support to anyone affected by mental health problems. Saneline has an information database of local and national mental health services, including “talking therapies”.

Telephone 0845 767 8000

Email sanemail@sane.org.uk

Website www.sane.org.uk



Are there any other sources of help?

Perhaps you do not feel counselling is for you but would still find it helpful to talk to someone. Or perhaps you would like to have contact with a group of others who may have similar experiences. If so you could try some of the following:

The RNIB Helpline offers support, advice and information. We'll help you to find out what's available in your area and beyond, both from RNIB and other organisations.

Whether you want to know more about your eye condition, buy a product from our shop, join our library, find out about possible benefit entitlements, be put in touch with the Emotional Support Service, or make a general enquiry, we're only a call away.

■ **RNIB Helpline**

Telephone: 0303 123 9999

Email: helpline@rnib.org.uk

■ **RNIB's Talk and Support Service** runs telephone groups where you can socialise, share information and get support from others with sight loss from the comfort of your own home.

Telephone 0845 330 3723 or 020 7874 1303

Email talkandsupport@rnib.org.uk

- **Local voluntary societies for the blind and partially sighted** will offer a range of services which may include information, befriending, or the chance to socialise.

Find out your local one from **RNIB's Helpline on 0303 123 9999**

- **Local voluntary groups** not specifically for people with sight loss may also offer social or befriending opportunities. (For instance many Age Concern branches have local activities for anyone over 50). Contact your local library or volunteer bureau, or check your local council's website for details of local groups of all kinds.
- **Hospital Eye Clinics** – some now provide an information or advice service on a regular basis, often run by the local voluntary society for/of the blind.
- **LOOK** (The National Federation of Families with Visually Impaired Children) can also offer support to families.

Telephone 0121 428 5038

Email jane@look-uk.org

Website www.look-uk.org

- **The National Blind Children's Society** also offers family support.

Telephone 01278 76 47 70

Email familysupport@nbcs.org.uk

Website www.nbcs.org.uk

- **Specialist interest groups.** There are a number of support groups for people with a particular eye condition, for example macular degeneration or glaucoma. Many of these run telephone helplines or have networks of self-help groups around the country. Contact the **RNIB Helpline on 0303 123 9999** to find out if there is an organisation covering your condition.

- **Samaritans** are available 24 hours a day to anyone experiencing distress for any reason.

Telephone 08457 90 90 90

Email jo@samaritans.org

www.samaritans.org

Telephone RNIB Helpline on 0303 123 9999

Email helpline@rnib.org.uk

Website www.rnib.org.uk

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