

A Different Pathway

Palace Gate Counselling Service: Our Client-facing Service Ethos Statement Revised: 14 May 2015

As part of our ethical commitment to you, we want to share some information about how we work & what we offer. This is part of that. If you have any questions, or want to know more, please ask us!

Who are we?

Palace Gate Counselling Service has been working in the heart of Exeter for nearly 20 years.

We currently see around 160 clients a week. We have about 25 therapists working with us, & see ourselves as a community of therapists working collaboratively. Therapists mostly work here part-time, & have other roles in the therapeutic world & allied fields. Our therapists are amongst the most effective we know, & have decades of experience between them.

PGCS began in the 1990s, initially as a church-led project, then under the auspices of a charity, finally becoming independent in 2003. It is not now affiliated with any church. Some of our therapists belong to faiths and some do not. We think it would be true to say that most of us here acknowledge a spiritual dimension to human experience – whether that is expressed in terms of a faith, a more personal spiritual belief system or (for example) a connection to nature. Please ask us, if this aspect is important to you.

Our service is not-for-profit & ‘according to means’. We are self-funding (freeing us to run this service in ways our experience tells us are most helpful to you, our clients). In order to allow us to continue, our clients pay an agreed contribution for each session. People on good incomes choose to come & pay a full commercial rate. That allows us to make our service available to those on low incomes or benefit, at a reduced rate. This financial model works because we do not pay salaries. Everyone who works here is a volunteer, giving at least half a day to us because they value what we offer, & want high quality therapy to be available to everyone.

We are a person-centred service. This is a proven, effective way of working, begun by Carl Rogers about 70 years ago (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_Rogers). It’s very different from the medical model of ‘diagnosis’ & ‘treatment’. We think it is important for alternatives to exist. Research says all the main counselling models (including person-centred) are effective. The biggest factor is the relationship between therapist & client. So the key question is: ‘is your therapist right for YOU’.

We have well-developed processes from nearly 20 years’ service experience. However, as a person-centred organisation, we look at most things in a case-specific way, rather than using fixed rules.

Our commitment to you is to work with integrity, care, valuing of you and others, attention, empathy, openness & honesty – with whatever comes up.

What we are offering

We thought it might be useful to say a bit more about how we see things. We believe:-

1. That you have within yourself all you need to realize your full potential.
2. That you are unique, & so your therapy needs to be unique too.
3. That (although change and growth can be painful & demanding at times) if you are able to realize your potential, this will be enhancing & helpful for you, within your relationships, within your society/culture, in relation to the natural world, in all ways- i.e. your essential nature is loving.
4. That we are each affected by our experience, & this can get in the way of who we really are, and of realizing our unique potential. These blocks arise in fear & are expressed in behaviour driven by fear.
5. That how you see yourself, others & your world is based on your life experiences. This way of seeing makes sense based on your experiences – but can be partial & limiting.
6. That therapy can support you in working through your blocks & barriers, healing inner wounds & freeing yourself to realize your own unique potential.
7. That therapy does this through relationship. How effective the therapy is depends on the quality/strength of the relationship between you & your therapist.
8. That, in order for you to heal & grow effectively, you need to feel understood & valued, exactly as you are, & find your own way/answers – no-one else can give you these. We might make suggestions/observations. We will not diagnose you or give you advice or tell you what to do. We bring lots of qualities, knowledge & experience to sessions. You bring a lifetime's experience of being you. You are the only true 'expert' on you – & you may need help accessing this.
9. The key elements of therapy are: (a) You & your therapist show up & are able – at least some of the time – to be emotionally present with yourselves & each other; (b) Your therapist uses his/her quality of being, self-awareness & experience to offer you the conditions you need in order for you to be able to trust in the relationship, heal & grow; (c) These conditions are empathy, loving intent & congruence (congruence means authenticity/realness - your therapist has an awareness of what he/she is experiencing & behaves/speaks in line with that, rather than pretending, or thinking one thing/saying another).
10. The working alliance between you & your therapist will be specific to you – what helps one person differs from what helps another. There is no 'one size fits all' at PGCS. Your therapist will create a way of working with you, that is helpful to you. He/she will do this by listening to you, developing an understanding of how you see things, checking this understanding with you & using his/her therapeutic way of being/experience to support you in your therapy.
11. How long your sessions continue will vary according to your needs. For one person this might be 4 sessions, for another 40.

12. You are the client of your therapist, & also a client of this service. We work with your therapist to support them in offering you the therapeutic relationship you need. We do this by: (a) choosing our therapists carefully. We have around 10 applications for each space. We choose people we think are best able to offer a therapeutic relationship; (b) working closely with our therapists in our supervision process. This is a regular monthly exploration of their work (it does not usually involve identifying individual clients & is a confidential process between therapists). This allows us to stay in close contact with our clients & our therapists, & address issues that arise. It is a tried & trusted model that has worked well for many years. Our supervisors are senior, very experienced therapists; (c) giving central place & priority in both (a) & (b) to supporting our therapists in developing the qualities in themselves that will help them to be effective & trustworthy therapists: e.g. self-awareness & self-ownership, a well developed inward ethical sense, integrity, resilience, wisdom, humility & courage.

Changing therapists

We have lots of experience matching you with a therapist who can help. We know it's vital you are able to form a good relationship with your therapist. Very rarely, a relationship doesn't work. We don't see this in terms of fault or blame – it's more about 'fit'. If you think your therapist isn't the right 'fit' for you, we can re-allocate you. You can talk to your therapist about this. If you prefer to talk to someone else, please call & ask to speak to one of our supervisors (we have 4 in Exeter) or our assistant director (admin). There may be someone available at once. If not, we will call you back.

Conflict

Sometimes, issues can arise in therapy between therapist & client. For example, you might feel angry with your therapist or feel a conflict has arisen.

- Most often, therapist & client are able to work through this together – it's normal in any relationship from time to time, especially longer-lasting ones, & it can be extremely helpful/fruitful to work through such issues in therapy.
- If you cannot resolve this with your therapist, or if it does not feel okay for you to raise it with them, please call & ask to speak to one of our supervisors or our assistant director (admin).
- What happens next will depend on all sorts of factors, & we will talk about this with you. These situations rarely arise, and can often be quickly and easily resolved to everyone's satisfaction. If need be, we will explore the issues through a collaborative process. This might be: your therapist with their supervisor working with them; you with another experienced therapist/supervisor here working with you; a 3rd experienced therapist/supervisor to provide another perspective. We would meet/talk separately &/or together, as needed. We as a service would do our best to resolve matters & meet any concerns.
- We do not see this process as being about blame/punishment (we do not believe this is a helpful way for people to relate to each other). Instead we see it as a collaborative process aimed at exploring the circumstances, & finding a helpful way through. Less 'crime & punishment', more 'truth & reconciliation'. Ultimately our purpose is for you to get the help you are looking for in coming to therapy, in a way that works for you.

Counselling Regulation

Counselling is not state regulated in the UK. Various organisations exist offering voluntary places to be registered, & professional conduct processes. One of these is the BACP (British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy), and there are a number of others. The BACP, like others of its competitors, is essentially a private company operating as a membership association for therapists.

There is an ongoing debate in the therapeutic world between those who favour regulation & those who do not. There are lots of ethical, effective therapists who belong to one of these organisations, and lots of ethical, effective therapists who do not (just as there are ineffective and/or unethical counsellors in both camps). We suggest you are cautious about therapists with a flat, 'black & white' view of this complex question. Here are a few links, which offer some food for thought, if you want that:-

<http://matthewbowespsychotherapy.co.uk/emergence-state-endorsed-therapy/>

<http://www.nepenthe.org.uk/ethics/>

There is also a thoughtful and carefully considered exploration of this subject by Brian Thorne, who is well known and respected for his work in person-centered therapy. It features in his book: *Counselling and Spiritual Accompaniment: Bridging Faith and Person-Centred Therapy*, and was originally published as an article called 'A Collision of Worlds (2009)'. Please ask if you would like more details.

We belonged to the BACP as organisational members for over a decade. We never experienced a client complaint. We decided not to renew our membership when it came up for renewal in October 2013. This is not about the BACP Ethical Framework, which we think is a sensible and useful set of principles in its current form (although we have serious question marks about its *application*, and serious issues with the proposed revisions). However, we had increasing concerns about the 'fit' between us as a person-centred service, & the BACP as an organisation with a radically different world view & values. We have seen this gap widen over the years. We are also very concerned by the BACP's handling of a conflict arising between us & a couple of other therapists.

Plenty of our individual therapists do belong to the BACP or an alternative such as UKCP or the Association for Humanistic Psychology Practitioners. We are happy to support them in that choice (as we have for many years). If this subject feels important to you, please ask us & we will gladly discuss it further.

14 May 2015

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