

The First Session in Counselling

The first session in counselling is of paramount importance because it is the time when the foundations of a good therapeutic process are laid: warmth, trust, and understanding. These three pillars determine a relationship where thoughts, feelings, and reactions can be expressed freely and lead to the fulfillment of the therapeutic goals.

Pablo Martinez was a European Leadership Forum steering committee member for more than 10 years. He currently works as a psychiatrist at a private practice in Barcelona. He has also developed a wide ministry as a counsellor and itinerant speaker. He has been a plenary Bible teacher in more than 30 countries. He served as one of the vice-presidents of the International Christian Medical and Dental Association (ICMDA). He filled the role of President of the Spanish Evangelical Alliance (1999-2009) and Professor of Pastoral Psychology at the Spanish Theological Seminary for seven years. His books have been published in 14 languages. His most recent works (to be launched in summer 2018) are *Mad or God?: Jesus, the Healthiest Mind of All* (Inter-Varsity Press, England, co-authored with Prof. Andrew Sims) and *Take Care of Yourself: Survive and Thrive in Ministry* (Hendrickson Publishers & Lausanne Movement). For more information see <http://www.christian-thought.org>

I. “What can I do for you?”

A. The key value of the opening sentences:

1. The first words give us a clue of the counsellee’s problems and motivation
2. The first words of the counsellor set the right emotional background

B. Pitfalls to avoid: Some questions which are not helpful to start with

C. Words that help: Some questions which are indeed helpful

II. “I feel that you understand me”

A. Establishing a good rapport is the main goal of the first session

B. Warmth and empathy: setting an atmosphere of trust

C. Listening a lot helps a lot. ”I felt understood”:

D. “A secret is a secret”. Reassuring confidentiality

III. “What is happening to me?”

- A. Defining the basic needs/problems
- B. Describe provisional therapeutic goals
- C. Avoid psychological or medical “labels” as much as possible
- D. Don’t rush to get conclusions: We will go step by step (“progressive revelation” and progressive learning)

IV. “Where do we want to go?”

- A. Explaining the therapeutic process as a journey together
- B. Some illustrations that help
- C. Anticipating wrong expectations: what the counsellee can expect from the counsellor and what he/she should not expect

V. The baggage needed for the journey:

- A. Honesty: be ready to tell yourself the truth
- B. Courage: be ready to change things
- C. Motivation: be ready to work
- D. Vision: do not miss the goal (growth)