

Does this make asking for help and accessing support harder?

In the wake of the Black Lives Matters movement, I've been reflecting on my experiences of counselling and why, in the past, I found it difficult to talk about issues around my racial and cultural identity, in the counselling room.

I believe that this was down to the lack of open dialogue around issues such as gender, sexuality, race, colour, heritage and culture; my upbringing where this was "just stuff you have to accept and deal with" and also because of my assumption, that unless my counsellor had the same heritage as me they wouldn't understand the issues I'd struggled with and that white privilege might get in the way of them understanding what I was talking about.

Now this awareness has come to light for me, I wonder if you feel the same?

Perhaps you find yourself thinking that there's no point in asking for support or talking to a counsellor because there's no way they'll understand. This is a really easy assumption to make, particularly if:

- you're worried that you'll be judged by others
- there's been a lack of understanding and sensitivity from others in the past
- you feel embarrassed, ashamed or guilty...all difficult feelings that are hard to admit to
- you're worried that your anxiety will get in the way when you try to talk about your feelings.

All of these thoughts act as blocks or barriers to getting support.

Stigma around mental health is another block to accessing support and maybe counselling and talking outside of your community is frowned upon by other people who're important to you? Or it could be that talking about your issues feels disrespectful or disloyal to others?

Alternatively, the pressure to conform to the expectations that your label brings might have become all-consuming leaving no time or space for you to explore the aspects of yourself that are important to you.

You may have experienced one, some or all of these issues when it comes to thinking about counselling and it's important to recognise that these thoughts are there to keep us safe, particularly if others haven't reacted in the way that you wanted to in the past. Its more than likely, that you'll feel anxious in trying to talk to someone about these feelings again.

Consequences of not talking

The consequence of "not sharing the load" is that your thoughts and feelings remain buried (if its too hard to think about) or unprocessed within yourself. This can lead to feelings of aloneness, anxiety, isolation and you might think "why me" as you find yourself carrying these difficult thoughts. Relationship issues might also arise.

This feels really important to me right now, as there's been a massive amount of loss in lives, livelihoods, lifestyles and cultural identities and I know that restrictions and isolation can magnify all of these difficult feelings, particularly if you belong to a small, minority and/or marginalised community.

And then there's the Black Lives Movement and all the feelings, often difficult to talk about and process, that that might have been stirred up and added in to the mix.

How do you overcome that block or barrier?

If you find yourself wanting to talk to someone but afraid that you won't be understood, I would say, do a bit of research (there's some links to well reputed directories that you might find helpful below) and if you come across a counsellor profile you like the sound of, get in touch.

If the initial contact doesn't feel helpful, you don't have to go any further.

But if they're the right counsellor for you what you might find, is:

- a counsellor that's respectful, sensitive and able to see and feel the world as you're seeing and feeling it.
- a place of safety and belonging.

They'll ensure that they're well informed (without you having to educate them), willing and open to learning about identities different to their own. They'll be able to fully explore all the issues that you bring (even the blocks and barriers that you've experienced in coming to counselling) in an impartial and non-judgmental way. They'll provide you with the empathic understanding and empowerment that results, that each and every one of us is entitled to.

"Let me hold the door for you. I may have never walked a mile in your shoes, but I can see that your soles are worn and your strength is torn under the weight of a story I have never lived before. So let me hold the door for you. After all you've walked through, it's the least I can do."

Morgan Harper Nichols

So, what's stopping you?

Get in touch if you'd like to speak to someone experienced in working with blocks and barriers or if you'd like to know more about the culturally sensitive counselling without stereotype that I offer.

07484 160971 info@anjali-leverton.co.uk

May 20, 2021