



THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT FOR COUNSELLING

For the effective use of counselling skills, it is of paramount importance that the physical environment is prepared and set out correctly.

There are several factors to consider when discussing the physical environment for using counselling skills or for counselling practice. These are:

1. The building/room must be accessible to all individuals who may enter. It should have appropriate accessible facilities within it, such as ramps for individuals who are wheelchair users, or for those who have issues with mobility, vision, etc.
2. Counsellors/helpers need to consider organisational health, safety and fire/serious incident and evacuation procedures. It is also good practice to explain to clients fire evacuation routes at the first session.
3. The room needs to be both confidential and reasonably soundproofed, which will create an environment where clients can feel safe to share sensitive information.
4. In terms of decoration, the room should be laid out and furnished in a way that promotes a therapeutic environment. Having pictures of the counsellor's family or friends is strongly discouraged, as it may cause boundary issues and is insensitive to those who are attending counselling because of infertility issues.
5. Contracts and working agreements are a significant part of the counselling environment. Contracting, which includes limits to confidentiality, data protection, number of sessions and any fees structure, should be discussed at the commencement of the first session and agreed to by the client.

6. Some clients who present with trauma may request that the room does not have any specific objects. It is not unheard of for clients who have difficulty with body positivity to ask that the room contains no mirrors. Some clients may request that the room does not have specific colours as this may also be triggering. In cases like this, the counsellor/helper needs to consider if the room can meet the client's needs. (The room decoration may be in a colour that is triggering for the client. If this is the case, an alternative venue may be needed).

Finally, one can not underestimate what the counsellor/helper contributes to the physical environment.

A warm, welcoming and caring attitude underpinned by the core conditions of empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard, form the basis of a safe and facilitative environment.