How to Get the Most Out of Counseling

You’ve made your counseling appointment; now what?
Although every counseling experience is unique, these guidelines will help you to make the most of your counseling experience.

**Identify your goals.** Think about what is contributing to your current concerns and talk with your counselor about what you want to accomplish in counseling. Consider the following:
- What are your expectations for counseling?
- How will you know when you are ready to stop coming to counseling?
- What will your life look like when your counseling is complete?
Together you can work out a plan to address your concerns and work toward your counseling goals.

**Make counseling a priority.** Commit to attending and being on time for your appointments. If you find yourself skipping or arriving late to your sessions, talk with your counselor about what might be going on for you. Is there something that is uncomfortable or painful that you are avoiding? Do you truly not have the time or energy for counseling right now? Exploring the reasoning can not only help improve your counseling experience, but it could also reveal another concern in your life.

**Be open with your counselor about your experience.** Each person is unique; therefore, counseling is tailored to each person. Counseling is most helpful when you are willing to make changes in your life, and willing to be open and honest with your counselor. It is natural to feel uncertain and be somewhat reserved at first; however, you should find yourself becoming more comfortable as your counseling progresses. If you find that your discomfort persists or you are frequently holding back in your sessions, talk about it with your counselor. Share what your hesitation is, what works for you/has worked in the past, what doesn’t work for you, etc. When your counselor receives this feedback, your counseling treatment can be adjusted to be best suited for you. If you are too uncomfortable to have that discussion with your counselor, let the clinical supervisor or director know and we can try and find a better match for you. It is not unheard of to have a counselor that you feel you don’t “click” with. For counseling to work, it is important that you feel your relationship with your counselor is a comfortable and safe one.

**Be patient and put in the time and effort.** Change takes time and hard work; it doesn’t necessarily happen overnight. Be patient with yourself and your counseling experience. Counseling requires you to actively work in and out of sessions. It is important to follow through with any referrals and/or recommendations from your counselor, including any techniques that are suggested. Set aside time to think about what you have experienced and learned in your sessions and try to apply that outside of session; and then talk with your counselor about how it worked (or didn’t) in your next session.

**Know that your well-being is important.** You may believe that your problems are too small for counseling. Know that counseling is more helpful if you start before your concerns become unmanageable. Remember that, regardless of the magnitude, your concerns are real and you don’t have to be in crisis for you to benefit from working with a professional counselor.