

Frequently Asked Questions:

How long does counseling last?

Individual sessions range from an hour to two hours. The overall counseling process, once a counselor has been assigned, can range from a couple of sessions to as many as 20; however, the normal amount would be around 10-12 sessions.

Does Higher Ground Church's counseling ministry promise total confidentiality or, in other words, can I say anything and everything without anybody outside that room ever knowing what I said?

We are discreet but not confidential. The concept of total confidentiality is not biblical; however, information regarding a counselee/disciple will be handled with a high level of discretion. Carefully discerning how to share information is an important aspect of the counseling relationship and we will carefully guard any information entrusted to us. However, Hebrews 13:17 makes it clear that the leaders of the church, not the counselors, have the responsibility for caring for the souls of the church. Because of this, the appropriate staff and/or elders will be made aware of your situation. There are five other situations whereby we may be legally or religiously obligated to share certain information with others:

- When there is a clear indication of harm to him/herself or someone else
- When there is evidence or reasonable suspicion of abuse against a minor child, elderly person, or dependent adult
- In discussions with the pastor or elders of Higher Ground Church or previous counselor(s) for the purpose of gaining information for your care or to help in follow-up and after-care
- When a counselor is uncertain of how to address a particular problem and needs to seek advice and wisdom from the pastor or another elder. Even in these cases, we will try our best to keep the name/s out of it
- When a person persistently refuses to renounce a particular sin and it becomes necessary to seek the assistance of others in the church to encourage repentance and reconciliation (see Proverbs 15:22; 24:11, Matthew 18:15-20)

In all of these situations, we will make every effort to be sensitive to your situation and carefully guard your information. We will strive to help you resolve the difficult situations you are experiencing as discretely as possible.

As part of our mission to train and equip others in biblical counseling, we may have counselor(s)-in-training participate in the counseling with us. These individuals will abide by the same standards as outlined above. However, in highly sensitive situations we will consider if apprentices should be dismissed for a time. If you think your situation might require this you can let us know at the time you submit your paperwork.

What does the counselor expect from me?

- We expect counselees to come on time, having their homework completed. If the homework has not been completed, the counselor may ask that you reschedule your appointment. We begin on time and are not held to a clock.
- We will deal mainly with the here-and-now, not getting bogged down in the past and in blaming others.
- We will confront and deal with each other as honestly and objectively as we possibly can.
- We will operate on the premise that God's Word has the solution to our problems and seek to be obedient to it over and against our own conclusions.

What if I need to cancel an appointment?

Due to the increasing need for our counseling services, we ask that you cancel your appointment at least two days in advance in order that we can offer the time to someone on the waiting list. Having three cancellations without prior notice may forfeit future sessions.

Is childcare available?

We are not able to provide childcare for counselees with children.

Is there a Fee for Counseling?

Biblical counseling is offered *free of charge* for anyone who requests counseling. However, priority is given to members and regular attenders of Higher Ground Church.

Do you counsel minors?

We understand that there are situations where you as a parent desire to get your children some help. Here are some of the guidelines that we think are important considerations for you during this time.

For counseling initiated by you as a parent, we desire to meet first with you to assess the situation and the need for counseling for your child. We believe this is important as our desire is to support and come alongside you as the primary disciple maker in the home. Depending on the age of the child as well as the situation, we may ask for the child to be present during this initial session and will discern together with you if and when we will meet with your child for further counseling or if it would be wiser to meet with the parents instead.

If the child is in middle school or high school, we will likely want to bring the appropriate pastor or director in the loop of our conversations because the pastor or director will be around them for years to come on a very regular basis. If your child is part of another church, we strongly urge you to include the appropriate pastor of that church and to seek his counsel before ours.

Is there a list of medical professionals or other organizations that may be able to help people inside or outside of Higher Ground's congregation?

Occasionally, people will approach us and ask us about referrals. We want you to know up front that we do not officially endorse any one professional or organization. Though we may suggest possible options for your own review as appropriate for your need or struggle, these would only be suggestions. It is not part of our business to assess others' practices. Therefore, any advice we offer is of a personal, not a professional nature.

Biblical counseling is grounded in and focused on Christ and God's Word. That is why it is important to note that the care and counsel received from other places may not be consistent with or even contradictory to our counsel, which is why we might even steer you away from some outside agencies.

We do think it is important to understand however that there are occasions where we may collaborate and communicate with outside agencies, medical professionals, another church, etc. It would be our intention that this will only happen given that the person receiving care has given consent for such collaboration.

What do you believe about psychotropic medication and do you help people regulate medicines?

We believe that God designed us in such a way that the body and the soul are so closely woven together that spiritual issues can affect the body and vice versa. We believe there are occasions where medical or organic issues arise that need to be addressed by consulting medical professionals and medication may be necessary to allow someone to get better physically and/or mentally.

We recognize that total discouragement of psychotropic medication may prevent people from seeking treatments that are at times appropriate and necessary. However, we also would caution you to be a very careful consumer of medicines. Some medications are over-prescribed as a means of providing a "quick fix" rather than addressing the core issues, whether medical or otherwise. Other medicines have serious side effects and must be carefully considered. In any case, you want to be well informed about these things in order to make a holistic and beneficial decision.

So, should or should you not use medication? We would say that it is a matter of the conscience and wisdom. Careful consultation with medical professionals (getting second or third opinions if necessary) as well as gaining a thorough understanding about proposed diagnoses are important steps before making decisions for or against the use of psychotropic and other medication.

We advise all our counselors not to give counsel for or against taking medication. They will direct you to wisdom, Scripture about stewardship, and may help to educate you to have an informed decision but will not give medical advice. Please refer back to the medical professionals for advice on these matters.

Finally, our Father in heaven, creator of our bodies, knows what we need and what is going on and He should be the first stop in asking for both wisdom and healing. The examination of the heart (why are we taking medications and is it possibly numbing or subverting some spiritual growth) is of great importance for us to learn about what's going on and what a solution for godly and lasting change could be.
