



Rosemary in the private garden
at Baring Crescent

STEP OUT OF LINE

Forget the classic shrink's couch. An Exeter-based counsellor explains why therapy really can be a stroll in the park...

By ROSEMARY PELL

The sights, sounds and scents outside in the fresh air with nature can be very calming. For many years, I have noticed this positive effect on me, and wondered if giving clients the opportunity to discuss their issues without the constraints of the counselling room would also benefit them. Although this approach is not suitable for everyone, those who have attended 'walk and talk' therapy with me have reported that using the outdoors environment can definitely promote a feeling of well-being.

Our brains and bodies enjoy being in a natural environment and there can be a sense of escaping to the outdoors with birdsong,

sunlight and fresh air – all therapeutically pleasing to our senses. Endorphin and serotonin levels in the brain, that are activated by physical activity, improve mood, and clinical research has proved that going for a walk can be as effective as medication; or, in some cases, more so. Consequently, this less conventional form of counselling can particularly help with psychological health issues such as depression and anxiety.

I have noticed that some clients can quite happily walk in silence in a way that they can't sit in silence in my consulting room. Being beside one another can be, for some clients, less intense than face-to-face counselling when they may feel under scrutiny. This approach, however, is not without some challenges. Inevitably there are many more considerations when going out for a walk rather than remaining in the counselling room, which provides total privacy within four walls.

Prior to commencing this relatively new way of working together, I discuss with my clients practical considerations and all kinds of possible scenarios, particularly how we will react if either of us sees someone we know.

Being in Britain there's also the weather to consider! In this respect, I ensure I have a contingency plan and abort the walk if necessary. To date, the sessions have been in enclosed spaces of parks and gardens and on flat terrain.

What has been most evident to my clients and me, is that there has often been a different or unexpected insight into their internal world, which would not have been revealed in the same way in the confines of the therapy room. An example is the evoking of childhood memories of the freedom of outdoor play, and how this sense of fun, wonderment and zest for life has been lost, or diminished in adulthood.

We are all living in a constantly changing world and this gentle connection with nature can help their experience of therapy, healing emotional wounds and restoring a sense of well-being. **EL**

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Rosemary Pell has been a counsellor in Exeter for 18 years. 'Walk and talk' therapy is one of the counselling services she offers from her new premises in Baring Crescent that have access to a private garden. www.rosemarypell.co.uk