



## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### BetterHelp – Online Counseling

#### **What is BetterHelp?**

BetterHelp is the largest online counseling platform worldwide. We change the way people get help with facing life's challenges by providing convenient, discreet and affordable access to a Texas-licensed counselor. BetterHelp makes professional counseling available anytime, anywhere, through a computer, tablet or smartphone.

#### **Who will be helping me?**

After you sign up, we will match you to an available counselor who fits your objectives, preferences, and the type of issues you are dealing with. Different counselors have different approaches and areas of focus, so it's important to find the right person who can achieve the best results for you. We have found that we are able to provide a successful match most of the time; however, if you start the process and you feel your counselor isn't a good fit for you, you may elect to be matched to a different counselor.

#### **Who are the counselors?**

Counselors on BetterHelp are Texas-licensed, trained, experienced, and accredited psychologists (PhD / PsyD), marriage and family therapists (LMFT), clinical social workers (LCSW / LMSW), or licensed professional counselors (LPC). All of them have a Masters Degree or a Doctorate Degree in their field. They have been qualified and certified by their state's professional board after successfully completing the necessary education, exams, training and practice. While their experience, expertise and background vary, they all possess at least 3 years and 2,000 hours of hands-on experience. Click [here](#) to learn more about the counselors.



## How are the counselors verified?

Our team ensures that every provider we bring to the platform is fully licensed in the state of Texas and in good standing. Providers who apply are required to provide proper licensure documentation, proof of identity, and references from other licensed practitioners who have worked with them. We then cross-check their licensure information with their respective state licensing board.

In addition to checking credentials, each potential provider needs to complete a case study exam by a licensed clinician and be evaluated in a video interview. The result of this rigorous 4-5 week process is that only about 15% of the counselors/therapists who apply to work through BetterHelp are accepted to the platform.

We also show the full licensing information for each provider to make it easy for you to do your own due diligence on your counselor.

## Is BetterHelp right for me?

BetterHelp may be right for you if you're looking to improve the quality of your life. Whenever there is anything that interferes with your happiness or prevents you from achieving your goals, we may be able to help. We also have counselors who are specialized in specific issues, such as stress, anxiety, relationships, parenting, depression, addictions, eating, sleeping, trauma, anger, family conflicts, LGBT matters, grief, religion, self-esteem and more.

BetterHelp is **not** the right solution for you if any of the following is true:

- You have thoughts of hurting yourself or others
- You are a minor or you are under the care of a legal guardian
- You are in an urgent crisis or an emergency situation
- You have been diagnosed with a severe mental illness, or if you have been advised to be in psychological supervision or psychiatric care



- You were required to undergo therapy or counseling either by a court order or by any other authority
- You do not have a device that can connect to the Internet or you do not have a reliable Internet connection

### **How much does it cost?**

The Bexar County Medical Society is making the **first month of counseling available free to all BCMS Members**. After this first month, if a member decides to continue counseling, the cost of counseling through BetterHelp will be \$45/week (billed monthly to your credit card or PayPal) and includes all your messaging, chats, and phone and video sessions. You can cancel your BetterHelp counseling service subscription at any time for any reason.

### **Can BetterHelp substitute for traditional face-to-face counseling?**

The professionals who work through BetterHelp are Texas-licensed and credentialed counselors and therapists who were certified by their state's board to provide therapy and counseling. However, while the service may have similar benefits, it's not capable of substituting for traditional face-to-face counseling/therapy in every case. Please note that your provider won't be able to make any official diagnosis to fulfill any court order or prescribe medication.

### **I signed up. How long until I'm matched with a counselor?**

It generally takes around 24 hours to be matched with a counselor, and on some occasions might take a little longer depending on which qualifications and expertise you prefer in a counselor.

### **How will I communicate with my counselor?**

You can get counseling in four ways:

- **Exchanging messages** with your counselor
- **Chatting live** with your counselor
- **Speaking over the phone** with your counselor



- **Video conferencing** with your counselor

You can use different ways at different times as you wish, based on your needs, availability and convenience.

### **How does messaging work?**

Once you are matched to a counselor, you and your counselor will get a dedicated “room”, which will be your private and secure place to communicate. In this room, you will write about yourself, the things going on in your life, ask questions and discuss the issues that trouble you. Your counselor will then read your messages, and respond with questions, feedback, insights and guidance.

You can exchange messages with your counselor at any time, from anywhere, using any Internet-connected device. The room is open 24/7 and since messaging is not in real-time it doesn’t require scheduling. Instead, you can choose whenever you want to write or respond to your counselor. You will get a notification by email when the counselor has sent you a message.

### **How do live chat sessions work?**

You will sometimes want to have a text conversation with your counselor in real-time. This way you can still enjoy the convenience and privacy of messaging but also enjoy a “live” interaction that allows instant response and feedback from your counselor.

To have a live chat session, you will first need to schedule a time with your counselor. At the scheduled time, log in to your account to start typing and chatting with your counselor.

### **How do live phone sessions work?**

Phone sessions are a great way to conveniently speak with your counselor by simply using your landline or cell phone, no matter where you are.

To talk with your counselor over the phone, you will need to schedule a time with your counselor and log in to your counseling room at that time. The counselor will prompt you to start the phone session and the system will ask you for your phone number. The system will then call you at that number and connect you with your



counselor to start the phone session. Please note that the phone number you enter will not be shared with the counselor.

### **How do live video sessions work?**

You can also have a video session with your counselor where you see each other and talk with each other in a virtual face-to-face setting (similar to Skype). To talk with your counselor via video, you will need to schedule a time with your counselor and log in to your counseling room at that time. Your counselor will then prompt you to start the video session. After you confirm, you will immediately begin video chatting with your counselor.

### **Can I go back and read the counselor's previous messages?**

Yes. You can always login to your account and read all the counselor's messages to you. This may help you in reflecting and remembering some of the guidance and input that you received. This is one of the main advantages of e-counseling.

### **How long can I use BetterHelp?**

This depends on your needs and varies a lot from one person to another. Some people feel they get most of the value after just one month, while others prefer to stick to the program for an extended period of time. This is completely up to you.

### **How will I pay for my BetterHelp subscription?**

Your membership payments will be charged to a credit card or PayPal on a recurring basis. If you accomplish your goals or if you find online counseling with BetterHelp to no longer be helpful for any reason, you can simply cancel the subscription.

### **Can I be reimbursed by my insurance?**

Services offered using this site are generally not covered by health insurance, Medicare or Medicaid.

Coverage and benefits for traditional therapy and counseling services change from one health insurance company to another and from plan to plan, but generally the following rules apply:



- With many health insurance plans, coverage can be partial or very limited.
- Even if your plan covers all your costs, the co-pay that you would be required to contribute may be higher than the entire cost of BetterHelp.
- In many cases, before you can get reimbursed by your insurance company, your counselor/therapist would have to diagnose you with a mental disorder or issue. This diagnosis would be sent to the insurance company and recorded in your medical file. In some cases the counselor/therapist would also have to provide additional clinical information to the insurance company, such as treatment plans, summaries or copies of the entire record.

If you consider using your health insurance, please check your coverage carefully by asking the following questions:

- Do I have mental health insurance benefits?
- What is my deductible and has it been met?
- How many sessions per year does my health insurance cover?
- What is the coverage amount per counseling/therapy session?
- Is approval required from my primary care physician?

Please note that BetterHelp offers very affordable pricing options which are typically comparable with the co-pays of most insurance plans.

### **What is the role of BetterHelp.com?**

The service is provided by independent providers who work directly with you. These providers are not employees of BetterHelp and the site doesn't oversee them professionally. Our mission is to build, maintain, and support a platform that lets users and counselors communicate effectively, and to facilitate this channel so they can get the most out of their interaction.



## **How can I be sure that this is an effective form of counseling?**

There are many studies that confirm the effectiveness of the online medium for making life changes.

A study published by JMIR Publications and conducted by researchers from University of Berkeley, UCSF, and the SF General Hospital, concluded that “users of BetterHelp experienced significantly reduced depression symptom severity after engaging with the platform.” You can read the full study [here](#).

Our confidence in the platform comes primarily from the [feedback and testimonials](#) we receive from users. Every day we are excited to hear from more people about the way this service helped them make a tremendous change in their lives.

## **How is my privacy protected?**

We are totally obsessed about securing your privacy and confidentiality. We have built a state-of-the-art technology, operation, and infrastructure with one thing in mind: protecting your privacy and safeguarding the information you provide. Our privacy and confidentiality standards are by far more advanced than what is required by law or regulations, so you can feel safe and comfortable.

- You don't need to identify yourself (see more about staying anonymous [here](#)).
- Everything you tell your counselor is protected by strict federal and state laws.
- We don't cooperate or work with any insurance companies or employers, so nothing needs to be shared, reported or filed with them.
- You can always click the “Shred” button next to each message that you've sent so it will no longer show in your account.
- All the messages between you and your counselor are secured and encrypted by banking-grade 256-bit encryption.



- Our servers are hosted in an “A Grade” facility, ensuring the best-in-class security and protection.
- Our browsing encryption system (SSL) follows modern best practices, providing world class online security and encryption.
- Our databases are encrypted and scrambled so they essentially become useless in the very unlikely event that they are being stolen or inappropriately used.

If you wish for any of your information or records to be released to a third party, please let your counselor know. Your counselor will send you an authorization form that you will need to fill and sign before your information can be released.

### **Can I stay anonymous?**

When you sign up we do not ask you for your full name or contact information. You may pick any “nick name” which will identify you in the system. When you decide to start the counseling process, we will ask you for emergency contact information which is kept safe in the system so it can be used if your counselor believes that you or someone else might be in danger.