

Choosing the Right Counselor for You

Samuel T. Gladding
Kevin G. Alderson



AMERICAN COUNSELING
ASSOCIATION

6101 Stevenson Avenue, Suite 600 • Alexandria, VA 22304

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Choosing the Right Counselor for You



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Dedication



*In memory of Samuel Huntington Templeman,
the man for whom I was named,
in appreciation for his courage and altruism
and for his inspirational legacy of
leading a good and purposeful life.*

—Samuel T. Gladding

*I dedicate this book to the thousands of clients
I have seen over more than 30 years of practice.
You have taught me more than you know.
If I didn't help you enough, please forgive me.
I too am but a flower still waiting to fully blossom.*

—Kevin G. Alderson

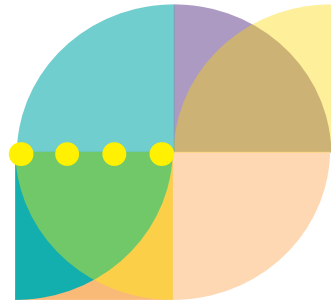


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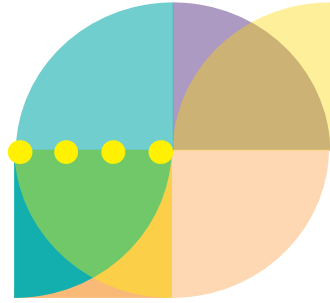
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About the Authors

Samuel T. Gladding, PhD, is a professor in the Department of Counseling at Wake Forest University. He is a fellow in the American Counseling Association (ACA) and its former president. He has also served as president of the American Association of State Counseling Boards, Chi Sigma Iota, and three ACA divisions: the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision, the Association for Specialists in Group Work, and the International Association of Marriage and Family Counselors. He is an Association for Specialists in Group Work fellow and the former editor of the *Journal for Specialists in Group Work*.

Dr. Gladding has authored numerous publications including books, scholarly articles, teaching videos, and poems. He was a mental health first responder to the 9/11 attack in New York and has twice been a Fulbright Specialist (Turkey and China). He is the recipient of ACA's Award for a Humanitarian and Caring Person, and the Association for Creativity in Counseling and ACA have each named awards in his honor.

Dr. Gladding received his degrees from Wake Forest University, Yale University, and University of North Carolina–Greensboro. Before becoming a counselor educator, he worked full-time as a

clinician in a rural mental health center and was a first lieutenant in the U.S. Army. He is married to Claire Tillson Gladding and the father of three grown children.

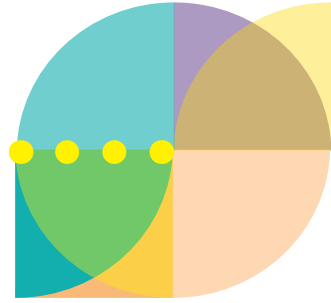


Kevin G. Alderson, PhD, is a retired professor of counseling psychology at the University of Calgary. He has been a counselor for 40 years and a registered psychologist since 1986. He is serving a 1-year term (September 2018–September 2019) as president of the College of Alberta Psychologists, the regulatory body for the profession of psychology in Alberta, Canada. He is a member of the American Counseling Association, the American Psychological Association, the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association, and the Canadian Psychological Association. Since 2008, Dr. Alderson has been the editor-in-chief of the *Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy*, which is the only national peer-reviewed journal in the counseling and psychotherapy field in Canada. He currently works half-time for Yorkville University as their interim director for a proposed online doctor of counseling and psychotherapy degree that will be the first of its kind in Canada.

Dr. Alderson has authored eight previous books and several scholarly articles and book chapters. He is currently writing a textbook for Sage Publications called *Addictions Counseling Today: Substances and Addictive Behaviors*. As a professor, he specialized in human sexuality and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues and psychology.

Dr. Alderson completed both a bachelor of arts in psychology and a master of science in clinical, school, and community psychology from the University of Calgary, and he completed a doctor of philosophy in counseling psychology at the University of Alberta. Dr. Alderson is married and is the father of two adult children. Outside of counseling, he enjoys racket sports, beach volleyball, dancing, hiking, camping, and weight training.





Introduction

*“The journey of a thousand miles
begins with the first step.”*

—Lao Tzu



Before we begin the journey into one of the noblest professions that exist, we want to start with a caveat about your current emotional and mental health. If you are currently in extreme crisis and perhaps even feeling suicidal, put this book down now and either get yourself to the emergency room of a nearby hospital or phone your local distress center or suicide prevention center and talk to someone. We both understand how bad a situation can be, and the highest priority in our discipline is to ensure your safety and the safety of others.

Assuming you are not in that state, please read on and let us tell you about what we know best: counseling and other forms of help for problems and issues that you are finding difficult to overcome on your own or with the help of others you already know. Where do you begin? If the answer was obvious, there would no need for this brief guide.

Our combined expertise in the counseling profession spans more than 60 years. Sam became a licensed professional counselor in 1984. He is known worldwide for his work and writing about counseling. Kevin has been a licensed counseling psychologist since 1986 and is recognized internationally for his work and writing in the counseling and psychotherapy field. Over the years, we have heard from many people who have lived unnecessarily with problems and issues for which counseling would be beneficial. All too often, we have listened to people believe or say variations of the following:

- “Only crazy people go to a counselor!”
- “They will judge me for my mistakes and faults.”
- “Most of them are quacks.”
- “No one can, or will, understand what I am experiencing.”
- “I won’t be able to find someone who validates and values my ethnicity, religious beliefs, affectional/sexual orientation, gender identity/orientation, etcetera.”
- “I have seen counselors before, but none of them have helped me.”
- “I saw my analyst for 11 months, and I only got one insight from him, which I already knew.”
- “She only repeated back what I said to her. I needed more direction than she could provide.”

What keeps people from coming to see us, and others like us, is usually fear or misunderstanding. Sometimes the barrier is a misplaced stigma about what it means to talk to one of us about their lives. Others feel an opposition to counseling because their culture believes a problem must be resolved within the family. We acknowledge and celebrate the attempts that people’s families and friends make to try to help them overcome their difficulties. Unfortunately, however, families and friends often cannot provide them with what they need.

Regardless of the reason for not seeking professional help, know that the pain in a person’s heart can lead to the suffering in a person’s soul. Many problems do not go away on their own and time does not heal every hurt. This book is intended to help you know when it is time to get help for yourself or others and what help looks like. We aim to demystify the counseling journey from beginning to end.

We remember a book that was first published in 1969 called *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex but Were Afraid to Ask* by David Reuben. Kevin was 13 years old, and, at his age, he was

more interested in the topic than he was in mathematics (a real understatement!). Little did he know that his interest would never end and that he would later become a sexologist. What made this book easy to read even for an overexcited teenager was that it was laid out in a question-and-answer format. You could jump to the questions and answers that were most pertinent while leaving the rest for another day.

Sam, who is not a sexologist but has three children, enjoyed Reuben's book as well. We decided to write *Choosing the Right Counselor for You* in the same format, so you can readily find what is most pertinent to you. We hope that you will read the entire book. It is brief (no *Moby Dick* or *War and Peace*). Although many of us lead exceptionally busy and stressful lives, this is an easy read. We want to give you the answers that you need right now as well as those that will be helpful to you in the future.

Where appropriate, we have tried to introduce a little humor. To ensure that you know when we are joking, our humor will generally appear in parentheses. Thanks to the work of Norman Cousins, a magazine editor who found humor helped him become healthier; Patch Adams, a physician who found his patients improved more when they laughed; and others like them, the beneficial effects of humor in our lives has been validated. When we can no longer laugh at ourselves and with other people, we are likely living in the danger zones of stress. A good belly laugh is as good as Buckley's cough syrup or a large tablespoon of castor oil but without the bad aftertaste! For example, a close family member of Kevin's got kicked out of a local college twice. He felt ashamed, and told his wife. She replied with, "Well, I know you've been kicked out of better places than that!" Hearing that made him laugh and realize that he too was just part of the human condition and his failure was a road that could lead toward his next success. Please know that in our attempt to be funny, we are not minimizing the importance of what you need to accomplish or the work of our predecessors in the counseling field.

We have also included information about ourselves in parentheses in several places. We want you to know that just because we are experts does not mean that we are perfect (you just have to look at the two of us to know that!). More important, most counselors use self-disclosure to help build the relationship with their clients. It builds bridges between us.

Like you, we are affected by world events and by the stress of everyday living. We hear and see the results of bullets that do not

ricochet off walls and fall harmlessly to the ground. In many cases, the stress and distorted thinking that those who take innocent lives must be experiencing could have been dealt with in the offices of counselors. Instead of shooting guns, these disturbed individuals could have shot off at the mouth and received the help they needed. We do not judge the human condition: We embrace it for what it is. Life is a challenge. But as M. Scott Peck wrote in his book *The Road Less Traveled*, there is a paradox in that once we accept that life is difficult, it begins to matter less, and we come to perceive it as not as difficult as we first thought.

The opioid crisis and rise in suicides that have recently plagued the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, and other parts of the world speak to the pain within the human psyche that can seem unbearable and overwhelming. In counseling, that pain can be lessened, and new ways of living can be generated. Self-destructive thinking and actions can be eliminated. We are excited to present to you the best of what we know in how to go about picking the best counselor for *you* (or someone you care about and love).

The book is divided into six chapters. The topics covered are in the following sequential order:

1. “When to Seek the Help of a Counselor,” which focuses on why and when an individual should seek help from a counselor
2. “The Types of Counseling Practice,” which describes individual, couples, group, and family counseling and explains the similarities and differences between them
3. “The Various Approaches to Counseling Practice,” which highlights 10 commonly used counseling approaches
4. “How to Choose a Counselor or Other Mental Health Clinician,” which looks at different helping professional specialties, terms related to counseling, licensure, and the best ways to find a counselor
5. “The Questions You Should Ask a Counselor Before Making Your First Appointment,” which, as the chapter title implies, examines important questions to ask a potential counselor regarding different types of counseling services and fees for service
6. “How to Assess Your Progress,” which explains how to measure your progress in counseling and when to end a counseling relationship

We desire to apply the best of what we know about helping so that you (or others you know) can live life without the mental and emotional pain or turmoil that brings a person to our office. If this book helps you, and only you, then we will know that this journey has been worth it. We hope you enjoy this book.

Let us now begin down the road of your healing journey. Turn the page to help clarify when you and those you love should seek the help of a counselor or an allied mental health professional.

