

# Preparing for your first session

**QUESTION:**

I'm thinking about going to a counsellor but I have to admit, it's intimidating. Can you tell me what to expect?

**Answer:**

First of all, you might like to know that your feelings are normal. Most people experience some level of apprehension about seeing a therapist or counsellor for the first time. It can be hard to imagine revealing our personal thoughts and feelings to someone we have not yet met. Perhaps I can start with the practicalities of your first contact with counsellors and counselling to put your mind at ease.

Whether you decide to see a counsellor in private practice or in an agency, you will be asked to sign an agreement that you understand the limits of confidentiality (i.e. in what specific situations confidentiality can be broken by the counsellor). This refers first to suspected or confirmed child abuse or neglect, which is required by law to be reported to the Ministry of Children and Family Development; second, to any situation in which the client is a danger to him or herself, or others (i.e. is



suicidal, making threats or driving while intoxicated); and, third, to any court order for release of records or for testimony. You may also want to sign a consent to release information, which would allow the counsellor to talk to other individuals who you agree may discuss specific information in your file because it will be helpful to you.

Counsellors at all levels of experience, in private practice and in agencies, must ethically consult with a supervisor usually every three months on each case. This brings objectivity and sometimes a different perspective on how the counsellor is approaching the work with the client, and can bring to the counsellor's

attention blind spots in their thinking about the client's situation. Although supervision means that your file is being shared with other counsellors, confidentiality is strictly observed. The agreement you sign will also describe the counsellor's expertise and credentials, how you can make a complaint, and the fee and cancellation policy.

If you decide to go to an agency, your first contact will be with the intake worker, who will take some basic information, screen for mental health, trauma and addiction, and will assess which program is the best one to meet your needs. The intake worker may offer you the possibility, depending on the issues you want to work on, of being seen by a counsellor in a subsidized program. For example, at Family Services of the North Shore, there is a fully subsidized program for women who have experienced domestic violence or have been sexually abused in childhood, and another fully subsidized program for children and adolescents who have been sexually abused. As well, general individual, couple and family counselling is available to anyone falling

within the agency's catchment area between Lions Bay and Deep Cove. When the program is not fully subsidized, the intake worker will request a proof of income and will base your fee on the household income and the number of people supported by the income.

Your first session will give you an opportunity to assess for yourself whether you feel comfortable with the counsellor. It is perfectly acceptable to ask questions, for example, about how

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**health notes**

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at Lions Gate Hospital, 231 East 15th St., North Vancouver. No registration necessary. For more information, phone 604-984-5752

**Meditation 101:** Join Peggy Stortz, a North Shore writer, entertainer and educator to learn a variety of meditation techniques for grounding, protection, healing, visualization and more. Suitable for

See more page 18

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**LIVE**

# Columnist shows Karl an amazing day on the slopes

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mom Marie. Karl and his whole family were involved in a vehicle accident only three months ago when their minivan was struck from behind on Highway 1. Sitting in the backseat with his two brothers, Karl sustained a T4 spinal cord injury, which instantly caused him to lose his mobility below his chest. A tragedy in itself, Karl then had to cope with the loss of his brothers, Andrew and Matthew, who lost their lives in the accident.

"How in the world do you explain this kind of stuff to an eight-year-old kid?" was the only thought I could muster as they told me the story.

Incredibly though, Karl had a big smile plastered across his

face as we helped him from his wheelchair into the sno-limo. This was Karl's first time skiing and we were all lucky to share in his excitement. Marie joined us in the other sno-limo as we took off down the Cut ski run. Karl was initially a little nervous due to the high speeds and not being totally in control but a few eager "Awesomeness" comments from me as we skied down together had him wanting more by the end of it.

After a couple of runs I brought out the chocolate bars just before we entered the VASS course and I watched as Karl and his mom ripped up the race course. Karl was yahooping at the top of his lungs and he had both fists in the air as he crossed the finish line. I just watched him in awe.

After the race we made our way to Altitudes Bistro for an

amazing lunch, prizes and awards. The VASS program started more than 35 years ago on Grouse Mountain and thanks to these efforts, more and more disabled athletes are getting outside to enjoy our awesome playground.

Please support VASS by volunteering your time or making a donation to help buy more equipment for these inspiring athletes. Visit their website at [www.vass.ca](http://www.vass.ca) and check out my video of the event at [www.noronalife.com/vass](http://www.noronalife.com/vass).

Hope to see you out next year!

*Dave would like to thank YVR, Grouse Mountain Resort, Sno-Limo.com and all the amazing volunteers and incredible athletes involved with this year's event. You inspire me!*

## Counselling helps to resolve issues

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much experience the counsellor has had with the issues you want to resolve. You are also free to ask for referrals if it seems to you not to be a good enough fit. It does take some time however to develop a good therapeutic relationship, and the counsellor is aware of this. You will not be pushed to talk about things you do not feel ready to discuss, as you get to know each other. The first stage of counselling is building trust, as you explore your experience and narrow down what you want to change. The goal of a counselling process is to open up the possibility for

resolving the impact of difficult experiences, and to rediscover strengths and options for making life more manageable and enjoyable.

The experience of being with another, trusted person who sees others as they are, without judging, can help people feel more compassion toward themselves and more capable of solving their problems.

*Bea Donald, M.A., R.C.C., B.C.A.M.F.T., is program manager and clinical supervisor of the Family Counselling/Employee Assistance Program at Family Services of the North Shore. Questions? Write [onthecouch@familyservices.bc.ca](mailto:onthecouch@familyservices.bc.ca) or call 604-988-5281.*

## health notes

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beginners or long time meditators, Wednesday, March 11, 7 p.m. at the John Braithwaite Community Centre, 145 West First St., North Vancouver. Everyone welcome. Admission by donation. For more information, phone 604-987-6959 or visit [www.northwest-vancouver.cmha.bc.ca](http://www.northwest-vancouver.cmha.bc.ca).

**Stay Fit While You Sit Workshop:** March is national

Correct Posture Month. Chiropractic doctor Peter Ting is inviting those who suffer the aches and pains caused by the stress of sitting improperly for too long to learn how to reduce the strain put on the body and increase productivity Saturday, March 14 at noon, St. Stephens Church, 885 22nd St., West Vancouver. Cost: Free. Registration or for more information, phone 604-922-6690.

**Dementia Education Series:** Information on Alzheimer's disease and related demen-

tias, communication strategies, understanding changes in behaviors, future planning, advocacy, legal issues and taking care of yourself, four Saturdays beginning March 14. For registration and information call 604-984-8348 or e-mail [ksutherland@alzheim-erbc.org](mailto:ksutherland@alzheim-erbc.org).

— Compiled by Pamela Stone and Debbie Caldwell

E-mail information for your non-profit, by donation or nominal fee event to [listings@nsnews.com](mailto:listings@nsnews.com).

### Do you have a complaint about BC Government services or practices?

The Ombudsman's staff will be in **West Vancouver** on **March 11, 2009** from 10 am until 2 pm.

If you would like to meet with an Ombudsman Representative to discuss your concerns please book an appointment by calling toll-free at:

**1-800-567-3247**



## West Community Health Centre is moving.

Beginning Monday morning, March 16th, most of our services will be delivered from our clinics and meeting rooms in the new West Vancouver Community Centre.

**Our new address is:**  
2121 Marine Drive  
West Vancouver

Please call us at **604-904-6200** if you would like more information or to confirm the location of your appointment.

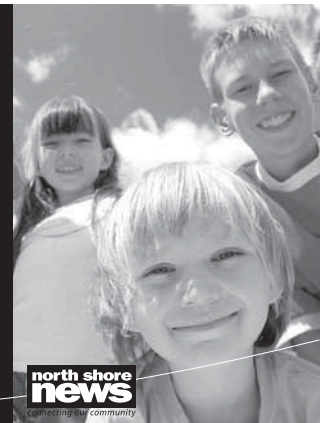
And please note that the West Vancouver Adult Day Centre and Stepping Stones program are not moving and will continue to operate from their current locations.



### KIDS BIZ

Spring Break is fast approaching!

Get ideas for keeping kids busy with this special section running Wednesday, March 11.



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