

Participant Information Sheet for Clients (03/2026; v3.3)

[FOR USE WITH STANDARD PRIVACY NOTICE FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS]

Name of department: **Strathclyde Counselling & Psychotherapy Research Clinic**

Title of the study: **Practice-Based Study Phase 3**

Introduction

The Strathclyde Counselling and Psychotherapy Research Clinic ('the research clinic') is part of the Counselling Unit within the School of Psychological Sciences & Health. This practice-based research study has been running since 2007 and makes an essential contribution to our professional training of counsellors and counselling researchers. Dr Susan Stephen is the current Director of the research clinic and Chief Investigator of this study. You can contact Dr Stephen at susan.stephen@strath.ac.uk.

What is the purpose of this investigation?

The main goal of this practice-based research study is to improve our understanding of the effects of Person-Centred-Experiential (PCE) psychotherapies and what brings about those effects. In PCE therapies, counsellors work actively and respectfully with clients to help them explore their experiences; this enables them to make sense of these and to help them change what they wish to change. This therapy differs from others in that it refrains from giving advice or making interpretations. Other goals of this research are to improve the training and effectiveness of PCE counsellors by teaching them how to integrate research into counselling and to develop better ways of studying PCE counselling.

Do you have to take part?

No. The decision on whether you wish to take part in this study is voluntary. You are also entitled to stop participating at any time and can do this without giving a reason. Although you would not be able to continue counselling at the research clinic, this decision would not affect any other relationship that you have with the Counselling Unit or the University of Strathclyde.

Why have you been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part in this study because you have completed our online self-referral process, indicating:

- You are at least 18 years old;
- You may be interested in receiving counselling as part of this study, AND
- You may be willing to take part in the various research procedures involved in this study, described below.

You would not be able to take part in this study if you do not meet the criteria above or if you are currently in counselling or psychotherapy elsewhere or need a higher level of care than the research clinic is able to provide: for example, if you are currently going through severe substance misuse, are actively suicidal, have an active psychotic condition or are experiencing acute domestic abuse.

The place of useful learning

The University of Strathclyde is a charitable body, registered in Scotland, number SC015263

What will you do in this project?

If you decide to take part in this research project, you will be offered PCE psychotherapy from closely supervised postgraduate students and, in some cases, staff of the Research Clinic. These sessions will be offered free of charge, in exchange for you taking part in our research study.

You can participate in-person (in our dedicated rooms on the fifth floor of the Graham Hills building on the city centre campus of the University of Strathclyde) or online (using Teams). Please note online sessions via Teams will be audio recorded and transcribed.

This research project involves several stages:

1. First, an intake session with a member of our research team. The main purpose of the intake session is for us to make sure that the study is appropriate for you and for you to decide whether or not you want to participate.
 - We will ask you some questions about the kinds of problems you are having, first, to make sure that there is not some other difficulty that indicates the need for a different approach, and second, to help you develop a list of issues you want to work on with your counsellor. You will be asked to complete some short questionnaires using our clinic iPad (if meeting in person) or via a link (if meeting online).
 - You will have the chance to ask any questions that you have about this study. Please read over this information carefully and make sure you understand it; note anything that may be unclear or that may be of concern to you, so you can discuss it with the researcher; do not sign it yet.
 - If you decide you would like to participate and fit our guidelines, you will be asked to confirm that you have read this information sheet and to sign the consent form.
 - If you do not fit our guidelines or decide not to participate, we will assist you with a referral to another source of help, if you wish.
2. In the study, you will work with the counsellor assigned to you up to 4, 10, or 20 sessions; the specific amount will be determined in consultation between you and your counsellor.
 - You will meet with your counsellor once each week for 50 minutes. Each of these sessions will be audio recorded. If the session takes place online, it will also be transcribed in real time. Immediately before each session, you will be asked to fill out a brief questionnaire about how you are doing (2-5 minutes), and after each session you will be asked to complete a brief online questionnaire about your experience of what was helpful in the session, and, occasionally, about your views of the counselling relationship (10-15 minutes).
 - The counsellor working with you will do their best to arrive in good time and will not cancel sessions at short notice unless there are circumstances beyond their control.
 - In entering into a counselling contract, you will be asked to commit to attending sessions regularly and to avoid cancelling at short notice wherever possible. This is explained in more detail in our 'service policy' document.
3. After your tenth session, at the end of therapy, and 6- and 18-months after the end of

counselling, you will be contacted and asked to meet with a member of the research team. They will interview you about your experience of therapy and ask you to complete some additional questionnaires about how you are doing. This can take one to 1.5 hours each time. The interview can be arranged to take place instead of, or in addition to, your usual therapy session.

What are the potential risks to you in taking part?

Before you consent to take part in this study, we want you to know about the possible risks of doing so, and how you can reduce those risks.

- Self-consciousness about being recorded. Although most people in the past have been able to disregard the audio recorder, a few have felt inhibited or self-conscious and have found it difficult to talk about deeply personal matters. If you think being recorded will interfere with your experience of therapy, please do not volunteer for this study.
- Self-consciousness about transcription during online sessions and interviews. Some people may feel self-conscious about their sessions and research interviews being automatically transcribed. If you feel that this is the case for you, you can opt to have your sessions and interviews in person instead.
- Struggling with filling in questionnaires online. All of our research data is collected using electronic devices, and some people may find this difficult or frustrating. Please do not volunteer for this research if you hate interacting with technology!
- Getting worse. Some clients experience temporary emotional discomfort or distress during therapy, including strong emotions. The therapist or counsellor will work actively with you to help you deal with any painful emotions that may surface. If, however, you are seriously concerned about this, you may wish to reconsider volunteering for this study.
- Feeling pressured to do the research. The counselling that we offer is part of our research process. In order to take part in the study, you must agree to **both** the counselling and research aspects. This includes filling out questionnaires, being interviewed, and having your sessions recorded. If this sounds like too much of a commitment for you, then please do not volunteer for our study.
- Being frustrated by running out of sessions. You may find this frustrating or annoying. If you feel you need further counselling, you and your counsellor can discuss possible options. For example, they may offer you a referral to another counsellor, type of therapy, or agency. There is also an option to return six months later after a follow-up research interview and re-enter the study for a second and final time.
- Issues with technology and confidentiality if participating online. There are some potential risks when participating online. You might feel self-conscious due to seeing the small video thumbnail of yourself on screen. (Your counsellor/researcher will help you turn it off.) Your equipment (computer or mobile device) or internet service/mobile phone plan may not be adequate for carrying out video sessions. Your living situation may not allow you private, confidential space for sessions, which would prevent you from taking part. If your computer or phone is not password protected, someone else might be able to access confidential information about you or your counselling. For this reason, your counsellor will ask you to verify that you are who you say you are, that your connection is secure and that the space in which you are holding the session is

private.

Starting counselling can be challenging and we recognise that things can happen that make it seem difficult to carry on with therapy. You are free to leave at any stage. However, it can be helpful for you to take the chance to discuss any difficulties with your counsellor or one of the research team.

What are the potential benefits to you in taking part?

There may also be some direct and indirect benefits for you or other people if you choose to take part in this study:

- As a result of the counselling, you are likely to feel better and less bothered by the problems you have been having. Previous research suggests that the average client experiences significant improvement through this type of therapy.
- Previous clients have reported that completing the research questionnaires and interviews helped them to get more out of their counselling. These procedures may also help you learn things about yourself.
- Finally, you will be helping us better understand how PCE therapies work. This will help counsellors and psychotherapists develop better ways of helping other people and assist us in training our postgraduate students.

What information is collected in the study?

Some personal information that we ask you to give us during the self-referral process may be sensitive for you (for example, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability). Collecting this type of demographic information from you is necessary for research purposes because it enables us to anonymously describe the characteristics of the participants that take part in the study and to identify specific groups of participants within our data archive to be included in particular projects. It is not used for any other purpose.

During the study we will ask you to tell us about your life, your reasons for seeking counselling, your experience of the counselling process, and the impact that the counselling has (or does not have) on your life. This information will be collected through brief online questionnaires and interviews.

We also collect information from your counsellor during your counselling process. They complete forms that capture their perception of each session. They also complete brief online questionnaires at regular intervals about their perception of the counselling relationship.

Who will have access to the information collected from you?

During your counselling. Your counsellor will have access to the information that you provide during the self-referral process and at your intake interview but not what you tell us as part of the research activities during your counselling process. This is so you can be completely honest about your experience in counselling without worrying about your counsellor's reaction. Your researcher will monitor the brief questionnaires that you complete during the counselling process and will consult with the Chief Investigator or another member of the research clinic management if required.

There are some situations in which our duty of care towards you and others may override protecting your or others' confidentiality. For example, if you, or someone else, were at immediate risk of harm (by yourself or someone else), we would have to take action and disclose the necessary information to the relevant statutory authorities (such as police,

ambulance services). We would make every effort to fully discuss it with you beforehand before doing that. We will store the information that we collect from you during counselling on secure software called Pragmatic Tracker, which has been approved by the university and customised for our purpose. Occasionally, the software provider is required to access our system to provide technical support.

After your counselling has ended. The information collected from you during your counselling will be stored in our secure online data archive. It will be accessed in the future by researchers for purposes agreed by the Chief Investigator and approved by the University Ethics Committee.

How will the information collected from you (including session recordings) be used?

During your counselling. Your counsellor will have access to the recordings and transcriptions of your counselling sessions and is expected to review brief extracts in confidential settings as part of their training and ongoing development. Your counsellor will ensure that you cannot be identified in the extracts of recordings or transcriptions that they select for this purpose.

After your counselling has ended. The information (including recordings and transcriptions) collected during your research interviews and counselling sessions will be added to our secure online data archive and used to help us understand how therapy works and to further develop our counsellor training. Below are the typical ways in which we use the data in our archive.

Always

- Questionnaire scores are included in our large datasets and analysed using statistical analysis to investigate trends and to further develop the questionnaires that we use.

Regularly

- Small samples of research interviews are analysed to identify themes.
- Small samples of forms completed by clients at the end of counselling sessions are analysed to identify themes.
- Small samples of forms completed by counsellors at the end of counselling sessions are analysed to identify themes.

Occasionally

- All data collected during one client's counselling process is transcribed and analysed in the form of a case study to understand how therapy worked (or did not work) for them.
- Small samples of counselling sessions are analysed using a variety of methods to identify and explore specific interactions between client and counsellor that may have helped or hindered the counselling process.

The results of studies carried out using data from our archive may be presented by our researchers at professional conferences and training workshops and published in professional journals, PhD theses and Masters dissertations. Brief extracts from forms, transcripts or recordings may be included in presentations and publications.

These extracts will be carefully reviewed for personally identifying details and edited to ensure that the participants cannot be identified.

Where will the information be stored and how long will it be kept for?

All personal data will be processed in accordance with data protection legislation. Please read our [Privacy Notice for Research Participants](#) for more information about your rights under the legislation.

The information collected from you during this study will form part of a larger archive of data held in the Research Clinic for use in multiple studies that will be carried out over time. The data archive is stored securely in line with the [University Information Security Policy](#).

We will take several precautions to protect your confidentiality:

- During the counselling process, your data (except recordings and transcriptions) will be stored on a secure and encrypted online system called Pragmatic Tracker. Once you have finished your counselling sessions, we will close the case and transfer your data to our secure online data archive. Access is restricted so that only the current research clinic team and approved researchers can access the data.
- Recordings (and transcriptions of online sessions or interviews) are stored immediately in our secure online data archive using codes instead of names to identify them.
- If your data is used as part of a particular study, we edit out your name and any other information that might identify you, other people, or places that you mention in recordings and any transcripts that we might make, or have been made automatically, of recordings of your research interviews or counselling sessions.
- Your data will be kept for at least five years or as long as it is considered to be of scientific use by the Chief Investigator. We consider your data to be of ongoing scientific use if it could reasonably be included in a future study. All questionnaires, recordings, and transcriptions will be destroyed when there is no longer any scientific use for these data.

You can request the withdrawal from the study of some personal information. You should do this by sending an email to the Chief Investigator (details below).

Whenever possible, the Chief Investigator will comply with your request. Anonymised data (i.e., data that do not identify you personally) cannot be withdrawn once they have been included in the data archive.

What happens next?

First, you will need to complete the online self-referral process. If you would like assistance with this, please contact our research team at counselling-research-clinic@strath.ac.uk.

Once you have completed the online self-referral process, one of our research team will contact you to confirm your interest in taking part in our study. You will be invited to attend an intake interview in person or online. We will let you know as soon as we can if you don't meet the inclusion criteria. In that event, we will do our best to signpost you an alternative service.

Please make sure that you read this *Participant Information Sheet*, and the *Consent Form for Clients* before your intake interview. We realise that it may be difficult to get through all the information and that some of it may be unclear to you or may raise questions.

Therefore, please mark anything you don't understand or have questions about on this information sheet and the consent form, so that you can review these with your researcher at the intake interview before consenting to take part.

Also, we would be happy for you to ask your counsellor or researcher questions about the research at any time by emailing counselling-research-clinic@strath.ac.uk. You are also welcome to contact the Chief Investigator, Dr Susan Stephen (contact details below).

If, having read this information sheet, you have decided not to participate in our study, we would like to thank you for taking time to find out about what we are doing at the Strathclyde Counselling and Psychotherapy Research Clinic.

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This research was granted ethical approval by the University of Strathclyde Ethics Committee.

If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the research, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed or further information may be sought from, please contact:

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