

## Counselling

*(A resource for community advice offices and community-based paralegals brought to you by NADCAO, from the Paralegal Manual published by the Education and Training Unit and the Black Sash.)*

Sometimes people just want to talk to you about their problems and it may not be necessary for you to take any further action. It might be enough for you to counsel someone about ways to deal with a problem. For example, your client might have a problem with noisy neighbours who party through the night and keep her awake. You can suggest different ways to deal with the problem such as asking for a meeting with the neighbour to discuss the problem or getting a mediator in to help mediate between them.

Counselling is a skill used mainly by professional psychologists and social welfare workers. Where the issues raised by an advice seeker can have serious psychological consequences (for example, in the case of a child who has been abused, a person raped, etc) they will need deeper counselling. Paralegals are not trained to provide this service, so they should refer the person to a professional.

## Advice-giving and problem-solving skills

Sometimes people only need advice to help them with their problems. It is not necessary to take any other action. For example, someone comes to you for help with a grant-related problem. You can then advise her to go to the Department of Social Development for assistance.

As far as possible you should encourage people to try and sort out their problems on their own. Often this means that you give a person some advice and tell them to come back to you if they haven't managed to sort it out. This makes people less dependent on you to solve their problems and it encourages them to take responsibility for dealing with their own problems.

Always make careful notes of the advice you give, so that if the person comes back to you later, you can ask the person whether she or he did as you advised.