



THIRST

THE INSTITUTE FOR RELATIONAL AND SEXUAL THERAPIES.

Foundation Diploma in Counselling (with a Psychosexual and Relationship Lens)

Course structure and curriculum

Course Philosophy

This two-year Foundation Diploma is designed to provide trainees with a solid grounding in counselling theory, skills, and professional practice. The course integrates **theory, skills practice, and personal development** in each weekend module, ensuring that learning is experiential, reflective, and immediately applicable. Trainees will develop the core competencies required for ethical, effective counselling practice, with a relational and psychosexual-informed lens.

Rationale for Course Structure and Running Order

Foundation Diploma in Counselling (with a Psychosexual and Relationship Lens)

The running order of this two-year Foundation Diploma is carefully sequenced to build competence incrementally, integrating theory, skills practice, and personal development in a spiral curriculum that deepens learning through repeated exposure at increasing levels of complexity.

Year 1 establishes the foundational pillars of therapeutic practice. The course opens with core counselling skills and ethical frameworks (Weekend 1), immediately followed by the therapeutic relationship and boundaries (Weekend 2), recognising that the relational container must precede technical intervention. Micro-skills are then systematically developed (Weekend 3) before introducing developmental theory (Weekend 4), ensuring trainees understand clients' presenting issues within a lifespan context.

The placement of psychodynamic concepts at Weekend 5 is strategic: transference and countertransference require established self-awareness and group safety, built through preceding weekends. The Probationary Skills Assessment at this juncture provides an early progression checkpoint, ensuring readiness for the increased complexity of couple's work (Weekends 6-7). Couple's modules are deliberately positioned after individual counselling foundations, acknowledging the additional layer of systemic dynamics.

Placement preparation, ethics, and safeguarding (Weekend 8) precede the introduction of CBT and humanistic approaches (Weekends 9-10), ensuring trainees enter placement with both a robust ethical framework and exposure to multiple modalities. Year 1 culminates in trainee presentations, consolidating learning through synthesis and articulation.

Year 2 moves from foundational competence to specialised application. Advanced communication skills (Weekend 11) build directly on Year 1 micro-skills, while assessment and formulation (Weekend 12) deepens the psychosexual lens that distinguishes this programme. Diversity and anti-oppressive practice (Weekend 13) is positioned mid-Year 2, when trainees have sufficient clinical experience to meaningfully engage with issues of power and identity.

Therapist wellbeing (Weekend 14) is intentionally placed before the demands of complex casework, recognising that sustainable practice requires prior attention to self-care. Supervision and research modules (Weekends 15-16) equip trainees for ongoing professional development, while trauma-informed practice (Weekend 17) builds on all prior learning to address complex presentations.

The final three weekends support integration and transition: developing personal therapeutic style (Weekend 18), advanced complex casework (Weekend 19), and capstone preparation for professional registration (Weekend 20). This structure ensures graduates leave not merely with theoretical knowledge, but with an embodied, ethically-grounded therapeutic identity and clear pathways into practice.

Throughout, the integration of pre-reading, skills triads, and personal development within each weekend reflects the course philosophy that the therapist is the primary instrument of change, requiring concurrent development of knowledge, capability, and self-awareness.

Weekly Structure (Each Training Weekend)

Each weekend follows this **integrated learning structure**:

- **Pre-Weekend:** Required reading and reflective preparation
- **Day 1:**
 - **Check-in G group grounding**
 - Theoretical input (morning)
 - Skills practice in triads (afternoon)
 - Theory reinforcement C group reflection
- **Day 2:**
 - **Check-in G reflection on Day 1 learning**
 - Advanced theory C application
 - Role-play, case studies, and integrative practice
 - **Personal development G group process (closing session)**

Year 1: Foundational Skills and Theoretical Integration

Weekend 1: Introduction to Counselling G Core Skills

- **Pre-reading:** Overview of counselling modalities; BACP/COSRT ethical frameworks
- **Theory:** What is counselling? Introduction to integrative practice; ethics C boundaries
- **Skills:** Active listening, empathy, basic contracting, self-awareness in the therapeutic role
- **Personal Development/Group Process:** Building trust, confidentiality, group agreements, and personal therapeutic stance

Weekend 2: The Therapeutic Relationship G Boundaries

- **Pre-reading:** Attachment theory; therapeutic alliance literature
- **Theory:** Building rapport, boundary management, therapeutic presence
- **Skills:** Role-play with focus on contracting, boundary setting, and managing relational dynamics
- **Personal Development/Group Process:** Exploring personal boundaries and relational patterns

Weekend 3: Core Counselling Skills in Practice

- **Pre-reading:** Microskills models (e.g., Erskin)
- **Theory:** Questioning, reflecting, paraphrasing, summarising, non-verbal communication
- **Skills:** Triad work with observer feedback; focus on non-verbal communication
- **Personal Development/Group Process:** Self-reflection on communication style and impact

Weekend 4: Human Development G Lifespan Perspectives

- **Pre-reading:** Attachment theory, Erikson, developmental psychology
- **Theory:** Understanding human development from childhood to adulthood
- **Skills:** Linking developmental theory to client presentation in role-plays
- **Personal Development/Group Process:** Exploring own developmental influences

Weekend 5: Transference, Countertransference G Psychodynamic Foundations

- **Pre-reading:** Freud, object relations, contemporary psychodynamic thinking
- **Theory:** Unconscious processes, defence mechanisms, transference C countertransference in the therapeutic relationship
- **Skills:**
 - Identifying and working with transference/countertransference in role-plays
 - **Probationary Skills Assessment:** Observed skills assessment to evaluate readiness to continue in the programme
- **Personal Development/Group Process:** Exploring personal triggers and unconscious material

Weekend 6: Working with Couples – Foundational Skills (Part 1)

- **Pre-reading:** Systemic theory basics; couples counselling models
- **Theory:** Couples dynamics, neutrality, managing conflict in sessions, introduction to psychosexual themes in couples work, contracting, risk assessment
- **Skills:** Triad work with couples role-play (therapist, couple, observer)
- **Personal Development/Group Process:** Exploring personal beliefs about relationships and intimacy

Weekend 7: Working with Couples – Advanced Skills (Part 2)

- **Pre-reading:** Advanced systemic interventions; psychosexual issues in couples
- **Theory:** Advanced questioning, reframing, working with high conflict, sexual issues in couples
- **Skills:** Advanced couples role-play with complex presentations
- **Personal Development/Group Process:** Self-reflection on comfort with sexual topics and conflict

Weekend 8: Placement Preparation, Ethics & Safeguarding

- **Pre-reading:** COSRT/BACP ethics codes; safeguarding legislation; placement guidelines
- **Theory:** Confidentiality, duty of care, reporting obligations, GDPR, preparing for placement
- **Skills:**
 - Ethical dilemma role-plays; safeguarding decision-making; mock placement interviews
 - **Presentation Preparation Workshop (Half-Day):** Structured time to prepare for End of Year Presentations
- **Personal Development/Group Process:** Personal ethical stance and readiness for placement

Weekend 9: Cognitive Behavioural Approaches

- **Pre-reading:** CBT principles, cognitive restructuring, behavioural experiments
- **Theory:** Thought-feeling-behaviour cycle, Socratic questioning, homework setting
- **Skills:** CBT techniques in triad practice, formulation development
- **Personal Development/Group Process:** Identifying and challenging personal cognitive distortions

Weekend 10: Humanistic & Integrative Approaches

- **Pre-reading:** Person-centred theory; integrative models
- **Theory:** Core conditions, TA concepts, integrating modalities
- **Skills:** Practicing unconditional positive regard, congruence, empathic responding
- **Day 2 Focus:**
 - **Trainees End of Year Presentations:** Each trainee delivers a 15-minute presentation integrating theory, skills, and personal learning from Year 1

- **Personal Development/Group Process:** Personal growth focus – “the therapist as instrument”
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Year 2: Application, Specialisation G Placement Readiness

Weekend 11: Advanced Communication G Difficult Conversations

- **Pre-reading:** Empathy; Compassion, conflict resolution models
- **Theory:** Managing resistance, challenging sensitively, crisis communication
- **Skills:** Triad work with “difficult” client scenarios
- **Personal Development/Group Process:** Personal responses to conflict and confrontation

Weekend 12: Assessment, Formulation G Psychosexual Themes

- **Pre-reading:** Assessment frameworks; psychosexual assessment tools
- **Theory:** Conducting assessments, Risk assessment, psychosexual formulation
- **Skills:** Intake interviews, risk assessment role-plays, using assessment tools
- **Personal Development/Group Process:** Self-reflection on attitudes toward sexuality and intimacy

Weekend 13: Working with Diversity G Anti-Oppressive Practice

- **Pre-reading:** Intersectionality, power, privilege, cultural humility
- **Theory:** Addressing discrimination, working across difference, inclusive practice
- **Skills:** Role-plays with diverse client presentations; exploring bias
- **Personal Development/Group Process:** Personal identity, privilege, and bias exploration

Weekend 14: Mindfulness, Self-Compassion G Therapist Wellbeing

- **Pre-reading:** Mindfulness research; compassion fatigue; self-care models
- **Theory:** Incorporating mindfulness into therapy; burnout prevention
- **Skills:** Mindfulness practices; self-compassion exercises; peer support modelling
- **Personal Development/Group Process:** Personal wellbeing check-in and support planning

Weekend 15: Supervision, Reflection G Professional Development

- **Pre-reading:** Supervision models; reflective practice frameworks
- **Theory:** Using supervision effectively; lifelong learning; portfolio development
- **Skills:** Peer supervision practice; reflective writing exercises
- **Personal Development/Group Process:** Sharing reflections on training journey so far

Weekend 16: Introduction to Research G Evidence-Based Practice

- **Pre-reading:** Research methods in counselling; outcome studies

- **Theory:** Evaluating evidence; applying research to practice; audit tools
- **Skills:** Critiquing a research paper; designing a small-scale audit/research question
- **Personal Development/Group Process:** Discussing personal stance on evidence-based practice

Weekend 17: Trauma-Informed Practice

- **Pre-reading:** Trauma theory, polyvagal theory, stabilisation techniques
- **Theory:** Understanding trauma impact, safety-first approach, vicarious trauma
- **Skills:** Grounding techniques, trauma-sensitive questioning, self-regulation
- **Personal Development/Group Process:** Vicarious trauma awareness and self-care planning

Weekend 18: Integrating Theory G Developing Personal Style

- **Pre-reading:** Integrative case formulation; therapeutic presence
- **Theory:** Developing a personal integrative model; ethical decision-making
- **Skills:** Triad work integrating multiple approaches; style feedback
- **Day 2 Focus:**
 - **End of Year Assignment Preparation Workshop:** Structured time for researching, outlining, and drafting the final written assignment with tutor support
- **Personal Development/Group Process:** Articulating personal therapeutic philosophy

Weekend 1G: Advanced Practice G Complex Casework

- **Pre-reading:** Complex case studies; multi-modal intervention
- **Theory:** Working with complexity, risk management, multi-agency working
- **Skills:** Complex case role-plays; formulation and intervention planning
- **Personal Development/Group Process:** Confidence building and professional identity

Weekend 20: Capstone, Professional Registration G Next Steps

- **Pre-reading:** Professional registration requirements; career pathways
- **Theory:** Transition to practice; professional identity; ongoing development
- **Skills:** Mock registration interviews; case presentation practice
- **Personal Development/Group Process:** Closing reflections, celebration, and forward planning

Additional Course Elements

COSRT Membership

- Trainees must register as a **COSRT Student member** from the first day of training and must maintain continuous membership of COSRT for the duration of training.

Assessment

- **Formative:** Ongoing skills feedback, reflective journals, peer/tutor reviews
- **Summative:** Written assignments (APA referencing), case studies, observed skills assessments
- **Mid-Course Review (Weekend 5): Probationary Skills Assessment** – pass required to continue
- **End of Year 1:** Presentations (Weekend 10)
- **End of Year 2:** Final written assignment (due last day of term)

Assignment Timeline

- **Final Assignment Due:** Last day of term
- **Marking Period:** 4–6 weeks after submission
- **Result:** Final pass/fail decision communicated within 6 weeks of submission

Placement

- **100 hours** of supervised clinical practice (can start after Weekend 10)
- **70%** in person
- Minimum **10%** Psychosexual focus
- Supervision ratio **1:6**, up to 40% online
- Can not work independently in private practice to gain placement hours at this stage.

Progression

On successful completion, graduates may:

- Apply for **BACP Registered Membership**
- Progress to the **Diploma in Psychosexual Therapy**
- Begin work as a counsellor in placement or agency settings

Course Level G Fees

- **Foundation Diploma:** RQF Level 4/5
 - **Fees (Years 1 G 2):** £7,000 total
 - Deposit: £600
 - 24 monthly payments: £267
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Course Philosophy in Practice

Every weekend is designed to **bridge theory and practice**, with **triad skills work** and **structured personal development** embedded throughout. Trainees are expected to engage in **pre-reading, active participation, self-reflection, and peer feedback** as core components of their professional development.

This course lays a **strong, ethical, and skilled foundation** for future therapeutic practice and specialist training.