

## **What to Expect From Therapy**

### **Who Receives Psychotherapy**

Most people, at one time or another need some help. For some, talking with a therapist helps them understand ways to improve their life.

Sometimes people seek therapy at the advice of a doctor or a health agency. Sometimes it is overwhelming life stress or a crisis that causes a person to decide to go to therapy. In addition, many times people enter therapy to gain insight and acceptance about themselves and to achieve personal growth. Psychotherapy is for anyone who is unhappy with the way he or she acts or feels, and wants to change.

### **What Is Psychotherapy?**

Psychotherapy is a relationship in which a person goes to a professional in order to bring about changes in his or her own feelings, thoughts, attitudes, and/or behavior. The task of the therapist, therefore, is to help individuals make the changes they wish to make. Sometimes the person entering therapy knows changes are needed but does not know what changes to make or how to go about making them. A psychotherapist helps the person figure this out.

Therapists help clients in many ways. It depends on their orientation (approach to therapy). This is the therapist's training and beliefs on how therapy should work. This will affect the therapist's style and focus. It will also affect the methods used in therapy. The most common therapy approaches are Behavior Therapy, Psychoanalytic or Psychodynamic Therapy, and Humanistic Therapy.

### **Behavior Therapy**

Behavior therapy involves the use of findings from behavior science research. It helps people to change in the way they would like to change. Behavior therapy places a strong emphasis on the principles of learning. It emphasizes how faulty learning may cause problems in a person's life.

There is an emphasis in behavior therapy on checking if the therapy is working. This is done by keeping an eye on and measuring the client's progress. Most behavior therapists believe that the current environment affects the person's present behavior. The methods used by behavior therapists are to improve the person's self-control. This is done by expanding the person's skills and abilities. Most behavior therapists assign homework. The practice of new behaviors is an important part of the therapy.

Another type of behavior therapy is cognitive behavior therapy or cognitive therapy. Cognitive therapists believe that problems come from thoughts, ideas, and beliefs that are not realistic. Often these thoughts make a person's life harder. These thoughts may affect a person's behavior and emotions. The goal of cognitive behavioral therapy is to change a client's way of thinking. This can then change behavior and emotions.

To do this, cognitive therapists often assign tasks to keep track of thought patterns. They also have clients perform experiments in every day life to see if the ideas or beliefs are actually correct.

### **Psychodynamic Therapy**

Psychoanalytic or psychodynamic therapists believe that many problems come from urges and conflicts. It is believed that clients are not aware of the urges and conflicts, which in childhood. Psychodynamic therapists attempt to help the client bring repressed feelings into awareness. They help them to figure out their problems. They also help them to see how the problems are affecting their current life and relationships. Some techniques used by psychodynamic therapists include interpretation and free association. Free association is where the unconscious is explored by having the client relax and say whatever comes to mind.

Interpretation is when the therapist attempts to explain how emotions and behavior are connected to the client's earlier childhood.

### **Humanistic Therapy**

Humanistic therapists focus on people's built in abilities to achieve happiness through their own efforts. Humanistic therapists try to help people grow in their self-awareness and self-acceptance. Humanistic therapists spend less time on past events. They focus more on the present. They help clients focus on feelings and thoughts that they are aware of. They do not focus on supposedly hidden or held back thoughts and feelings. Humanistic therapists use methods that encourage people to take responsibility for their actions and feelings. They do not try to get clients to look for and blame hidden motivations.

### **Choosing a Therapist**

You will probably want to ask potential therapists about their orientation. Ask them what this will mean for your therapy experience. Most therapists are not rigid in their orientations. Many are flexible. They use ideas, techniques, and methods from various orientations. This is also known as eclectic therapy.

You should also ask a potential therapist about use of evidence based practice. Ask them if they use methods that have been found to have evidence that they work for people like your self.

Therapy is provided in many ways. You can have individual and group therapy. Therapy can be for couples. It can be for working on relationships. Family therapy is also generally available. There are therapy groups for members working on a single interest or problem. These approaches to therapy can vary depending upon the therapist's orientation.

### **What Happens in Psychotherapy?**

The therapy process varies depending on the approach of the therapist. It also differs for each individual client. It depends on the client's situation. However, there are some common aspects of therapy that you are likely to experience when you enter a therapy relationship.

Your first session with a therapist should be a consultation session. This session does not commit you to working with the therapist. This session helps you to find out whether psychotherapy would be useful to you. In addition, you decide whether this particular therapist is likely to be helpful. During this session, you may want to discuss with the therapist any values that are particularly important to you. If your therapist's views are very different from yours, you may want to find a more like-minded therapist.

This first session is a time for you to decide if you will feel comfortable, confident, and motivated in working with this particular therapist. You should also feel that you can trust and respect your therapist. You should feel that your therapist understands your situation. This is also the time for the therapist to decide whether he or she is a good match for you. At times, a therapist may refer you to another therapist who may be able to work better with you.

After you have decided to work with a particular therapist, the next few sessions are usually to talk about what brought you to therapy. This is called an assessment. Generally, during this time, your therapist will ask specific questions about the concerns or problems causing your distress. You will be asked when and where they occur.

Assessment also can be done more formally with questionnaires or tests. A therapist can use a variety of methods in assessment. Initial assessments are used to get therapy started. A good therapist will continue to assess a client's problems throughout therapy and change the direction of therapy, if needed.

After the initial assessment stage, the rest of therapy is to help you gain insight and solve current problems. It can also help you alter the emotions, thoughts, and/or behaviors you want to change. The therapy process focuses on the goals you bring to therapy. How these goals

are met depends on the orientation of the therapist and the methods the therapist may use with you.

Some therapists may require more activity during therapy than just talking with you about particular issues. These activities may include such things as role-playing or homework assignments. This is where you practice some of the skills taught to you in therapy. Practice can be done in session and at home. This can be skills like relaxation skills or communication methods. Therapists also differ on how strongly they determine how therapy proceeds. Some therapists may take a role where they direct your therapy. Others have you direct the course of therapy.

The amount of therapy you receive will vary depending on the orientation of the therapist and the specific treatment plan used. Some therapies are relatively short. Others require a longer time commitment. Each session of therapy usually lasts about an hour. You generally meet with your therapist once a week. However, therapy time schedules are rarely rigid. The schedule may be changed to fit the needs of you and/or your therapist. It is a good idea to ask your therapist about the general methods he or she may use with you in therapy. Also, ask about the length and frequency of therapy you might expect.

Some therapists use other treatment in addition to talking therapy. These treatments may include drugs, other biomedical therapies, or physical health treatments. They may also use support groups.

After a period of time, you and your therapist may agree that therapy has been successful in helping you achieve your goals. This is when therapy is no longer needed. Even after therapy has ended, some therapists may ask you to come back several months later for follow-up visits to check on how you are doing.

If you have new problems or feel that past problems still are not better, you may choose to return to therapy. You can see the same therapist or a new therapist. One important thing to remember is that all types of therapy do not automatically work for everyone. You should always consider other treatments when a particular therapy is not working for you.

### **What Should Not Happen in Psychotherapy?**

The relationship between client and therapist is based on shared trust and respect. If either person violates this trust and respect, there may be good reasons to end therapy. Licensed therapists are expected to follow a code of ethics when seeing clients. They should not behave unethically or take advantage of you. You should not tolerate a therapist revealing your private information except under certain legal situations. The therapist should not violate your legal or civil rights. The therapist should not sexually harass you or have sexual relations with you. The therapist should not physically or verbally abuse you. If these situations happen, you should speak with your therapist about your concerns. If your therapist avoids your concerns or does not address them to your satisfaction, you should consider changing to another therapist. In addition, you can report the therapists' behavior to your local psychological or psychiatric association.

### **Conclusion**

Therapy can help you in many ways. Like most human activities, it needs time and motivation for the best outcomes. Finding the right therapy and the right therapy orientation for you is the best start.

### **What Is Cognitive Behavior Therapy?**

Behavior Therapy and Cognitive Behavior Therapy are types of treatment that are based firmly on research findings. These approaches aid people in achieving specific changes or goals.

Changes or Goals might involve:

- a way of acting - like smoking less or being more outgoing;
- a way of feeling - like helping a person be less scared, less depressed, or less anxious;
- a way of thinking - like learning to problem-solve or get rid of self-defeating thoughts;
- a way of dealing with physical or medical problems - like lessening back pain or helping a person stick to a doctor's suggestions; or
- a way of adjusting - like training developmentally disabled people to care for themselves or hold a job.

Behavior Therapists and Cognitive Behavior Therapists usually focus more on the current situation and its solution, rather than the past. They concentrate on a person's views and beliefs about their life, not on personality traits. Behavior Therapists and Cognitive Behavior Therapists treat individuals, parents, children, couples, and families. Replacing ways of living that do not work well, with ways of living that work, and giving people more control over their lives are common goals of behavior and cognitive behavior therapy.

The Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies (ABCT) is an interdisciplinary organization committed to the advancement of a scientific approach to the understanding and amelioration of problems of the human condition. These aims are achieved through the investigation and application of behavioral, cognitive, and other evidence-based principles to assessment, prevention, and treatment.

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