

# Therapy

People with mental health conditions often find psychotherapy-or "talk therapy"-very helpful. The type and length of your therapy will depend on your personal situation and insurance, and your therapy may be part of an overall treatment plan that includes medication or other treatment options.

Talking with a therapist or counselor can help you deal with thoughts, behaviors, symptoms, stresses, goals, past experiences and other areas that can promote your recovery. Of course, talking with a therapist about personal issues can be tough, but it can help you come to grips with problems in your life. It can also offer an emotional release and a sense of really being heard, understood and supported.

## Therapy can help you to:

- feel stronger in the face of challenges
- change behaviors that hold you back
- look at ways of thinking that affect how you feel
- heal pains from the past
- build relationship skills
- figure out your goals
- strengthen your self-confidence
- cope with symptoms
- handle strong emotions like fear, grief or anger
- enhance your problem solving skills

## Types of Therapy

There are many different types of therapy, including those that are most effective with families or groups of people. You can learn about your options by talking with people you trust, like your family doctor or clergy, with people who have experience with mental health conditions, or with staff at your local Mental Health America affiliate.

You might ask therapists you're considering if they use a particular type of therapy and how it works. You may get more out of therapy if you understand how the process usually works and how the therapist thinks it will help you. Some therapists will blend a few different approaches together to suit your particular needs. The following are a few common types of therapy:

- **Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT)** has two main aspects. The cognitive part works to develop helpful beliefs about your life. The behavioral side helps you learn to take healthier actions. CBT often works well for depression, anxiety and bipolar disorder.
- **Interpersonal therapy** focuses largely on improving relationships and helping a person express emotions in healthy ways. This approach often works well for depression.
- **Family therapy** helps family members communicate, handle conflicts and solve problems better. Forms of family therapy often are used for treating eating disorders and bipolar disorder.
- **Psychodynamic therapy** helps people develop a better understanding about their unconscious emotions and motivations that can affect their thoughts and actions.
- **Art therapy** can include using music, dance or other art forms to help express emotions and promote healing.
- **Psychoeducation** helps people understand mental health conditions and ways to promote recovery.

In addition to different types of therapy, each therapist has different amounts and types of training. For example, a psychiatrist is trained in therapy but also has a medical degree and can prescribe medication. A

pastoral counselor will include a religious or spiritual approach to treatment. Other therapists may be trained to deal with substance use issues.

## What to Expect

Depending on your situation, therapy can be fairly short or longer-term. Often, people see their therapists once a week for 50 minutes. Your first session will be different from future visits. The initial visit is more of a "getting to know you" session and will help your therapist get an idea of how to proceed with your treatment.

You have a right to feel safe and respected in therapy. If you're concerned, you can ask about confidentiality. Usually, though, it's understood that a therapist respects your privacy; and that group members do too, if you're meeting in a group. Therapy should address your needs, goals, concerns and desires. If you're going to be talking to someone about your most personal thoughts, you want to feel comfortable.

You can think about what traits might make you feel more comfortable with a therapist. For example, would you prefer to see:

- a man or woman
- someone older or younger
- someone from your cultural background
- someone with a style that's more formal or friendly

Therapy may not help you immediately. Over time, though, it can help you develop more coping skills, stronger relationships and a better sense of yourself.

## Getting the Most Out of Therapy

Therapy likely will work best if there is a partnership between you and the therapist. Take an active part in your sessions. You can strengthen your therapy in many ways.

- Tell your provider your goals for treatment. Think about whether there are certain behaviors or issues you care about most.
- Keep an open mind. Be willing to consider new ways of behaving and thinking that might improve the quality of your life. We all resist change, so don't be surprised if you are tempted to quit right before some real changes happen.
- If you think you're not making progress, you should tell your provider. A good therapist will want to work with you so you can get the most out of your sessions. After discussing your concerns, if you're still not comfortable, you might consider meeting with another therapist for advice and possibly switching.
- Be open and honest. Your therapist can't really help you if you don't share the whole picture. Don't say you're fine if you're not.
- Take your therapy home. You might consider keeping a journal or other ways to focus on what you've been discussing in therapy. Think about ways to use ideas from therapy in your daily life.

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