

Getting the most out of therapy

Whether you've had therapy or not, I'm hoping the following will help you to gain the most out of your therapeutic journey. I often find that clients can benefit from a little understanding before engaging in therapy, to help get a clearer picture of the process but also to ensure they are really getting what they need.

Sometimes it's hard to remember and ask all the questions we have during the sessions and often we may suppress some of our questions or wonderings thinking that it may not be appropriate or sound silly. I'm hoping that some of the guidance below will give some clarity and encourage you to really get the most out of your therapy journey.

Find out about therapy

There are lots of different types of therapy available, all of which are slightly different in emphasis. It may be a good idea to get a brief understanding of these different types to see what suits your needs.

Also each therapist has their own style and way of working that they often display on their website. If you have any questions, contact the therapist to get more information and if this does not fit for you, please do shop around. You may find that you will learn quite a bit about the different types of therapy before starting.

It's important that you feel comfortable with a therapist in order to engage with the work, trust your own judgement on this.

Be punctual & attend regularly

This is really important as the therapist can only help you if you turn up on time and come to regular appointments. Regular appointments are important to make progress. By keeping up with regular visits, this builds up momentum for change until you're sure you have enough support to make changes in your life.

Telling Others your having therapy

This is an area where many people feel worried or concerned. People feel there's little stigma when visiting the doctor, but when having therapy many people fear unfair misconceptions and assumptions about why they are going and that they must be crazy. Actually most people react positively and are supportive and it isn't unusual for people to find that their friends and family members open up in turn about problems they've had.

Occasionally well-meaning family members and partners or friends ask intrusive questions or try to suggest things for you to discuss in your therapy, If this happens tell your therapist and he/she will help you to explore how you can best deal with it.

Therapists giving advice

Generally, therapists rarely give advice around what you should do in any given situation. Therapy offers a space to explore options around the situation and support in choosing the right option for you.

Being open to change

Change can be hard and difficult. Although we want things to be different, we may struggle with implementing changes in our lives. It might sound obvious but to get the most out of therapy you need to put effort in to making changes.

This will require allowing time each day to do certain activities, it's this daily effort that will help you to change. There's a lot of research that shows that clients who put in this time and effort into changing, getting better outcomes in therapy.

Be open to the therapy process and be willing to experiment

Some therapists use techniques that can seem a little strange at first or you might feel self-conscious when you're doing something in the session. The technique would have been specifically chosen to help you with a problem or to make a particular change or maybe to find more about some aspect of yourself or your situation. It's worth having a go at the technique the therapist suggests and see what happens. Therapy can be considered a kind of laboratory where you can try things out or experiment in new ways of thinking, feeling or behaving.

Experimenting with new things can be a great way to use your time in the session.

Fear of changing for the worse

Sometimes people are concerned that therapy will change them into a horrible person or that it will drastically alter their personality – it won't. Therapy is designed to help you be the best person you can be.

Write things down

Many people find that writing things down that they learn in sessions helps them to remember their insights. Its fine for you to pause in session to write something down if you feel the need to. If you and your therapist discuss a particular course of action or your therapist suggests a development activity for you, it's a good idea to write it down in the session.

Also it can be useful to spend some time after the session to write down your overall reflections on the sessions. Most people find that during the week they think about things to discuss in their next therapy session, if this happens to you make a note of it and make a point of talking about it in the next session.

Be open to questions

Your therapist will probably ask you lots of questions, or may ask you to elaborate on something you've already mentioned. Sometimes these questions can seem a little weird or may mean you have to repeat something you've already told your therapist. In these cases the therapist is probably following a specific train of thought designed to help you explore something in more depth, or to connect different experiences. So, go with the flow and be open to their questions.

Be honest

It's important that you are frank and honest with your therapist. Some people struggle to discuss certain things because they feel embarrassed or concerned that the therapist will think less of them because of it. Experienced therapists would have heard many things in the course of their work and it is very unlikely that you'll say anything that they've not already heard before.

Therapists are trained to be non-judgemental and accepting of their clients.

Occasionally people feel negative feelings towards their therapists such as irritation or anger and they may suddenly feel like stopping therapy. If this happens to you, it's important to raise this in your next session. Usually these discussions are very productive and useful.

Allow yourself to open up and be vulnerable

Most people tend to feel a bit awkward or self-conscious in the early sessions, or find that they're reluctant to open up. For therapy to be effective you have to be willing to trust your therapist and open up to them. Let yourself be vulnerable in their presence and express your emotions, try not to hold back tears, or any other emotion, out of embarrassment, these are valuable and welcomed in therapy.

Therapy can sometimes be painful and embarrassing

Discussing our deepest darkest thoughts, feelings and experiences can feel painfully embarrassing, that's quite normal. Over time it will get easier, you just have to be willing to push through your discomfort. If at anytime you start to hold back on saying something, tell your therapist that there is something you want to say and that it feels awkward. They'll help you to explore and find away to talk about it that feels manageable

Prepare for the session

It's a good idea to spend some time before your session thinking about what you want to discuss or what you want to get out of the session. Reflecting how you're feeling and what feels emotionally important in your life right now can help you prepare yourself for the session. Please remember everything is important and relevant.

Feedback

Providing your therapist with regular feedback about the sessions is a really great thing to do. It's helpful to know what works and what doesn't, there's no one size fits all approach. This creates an open space for openness and honesty with the ability to create and experiment with different approaches that may be a better fit for you.

Summary

Be punctual, open and honest.

Put in an effort during and between sessions.

If you do these things, it's likely you'll have a good experience in therapy and you'll make all the changes that you want to.

(Mark Widdowson,2015)

(Adapted by J.Wynne, 2020)