

Therapist & Client

What To Expect In Therapy

The therapist/client relationship is unique. In therapy, the focus is always on the needs of the client; the therapist is concerned solely with facilitating the client's growth and development.

With this in mind, we can understand why our friends, spouses, or relatives cannot act as therapists for us. In these relationships, the caring, understanding and patience are reciprocal. In therapy, the therapist receives only money in exchange for his/her time, expertise and total attention.

Therapy works towards the client's goals, but not always by the route we expect. In order to overcome depression, for example, clients often must first deal with their difficulty expressing anger; angry people may have to learn to admit feelings of insecurity or fear before their anger and hostility decrease.

Therapeutic change is not always obvious
While crisis resolution may be quite dramatic, accompanied by tears, anger or immediate feelings of relief, the majority of therapeutic change is accomplished in steps so small that they often go unnoticed at the time.

Just as we don't notice our children growing until their clothes are suddenly too small for them, so we may overlook the subtle changes in ourselves that lead up to major life changes. Often therapy clients do not realize how much they've changed until their friends comment that they're calmer or warmer.

Since therapy works to heal the causes of problems, not just to remove symptoms, the path of therapy often leads back into childhood where unresolved pain or anger lies waiting for expression.

The child we once were lives on in all of us however much the rest of our personality matures. Our beliefs about life and what we can expect from it are formed by what we learn growing up in the microcosm of our family.

As adults, we will treat ourselves in much the same way our parents treated us as children. For example, if our parents told us not to whine, so we will tend not to express our emotional distress as adults.

Therapeutic changes affect our careers as well as our personal lives. Many therapists comment that their clients' incomes rise as emotional conflicts are resolved in therapy and the psychic energy that once went into coping with emotional turmoil becomes available for career achievement. Therapy also builds self-confidence and helps develop the interpersonal skills that are essential for success in any field.

How to help

For Friends And Family

Living with someone who is in therapy is not always easy. They may often be irritable or withdrawn and their mood may change abruptly as they react to issues being dealt with in therapy. They will almost certainly be more sensitive than usual and may be more critical as well.

It is often hard for friends and family to know how to respond. They want to be helpful but don't know what to do or say and worry that they will inadvertently "make things worse."

What you *can* do is to express your caring and ask how you can help. Offer to talk but be prepared to accept silence as well. Realize that the moodiness or irritability are not directed towards you and probably have much more to do with the client's internal emotional conflicts than with his or her feelings about you.

Feel free to call upon the therapist for feedback or guidance to help you live with the client. Often, it is helpful for family members to come for occasional joint sessions with the client. ■

Facts & Fallacies

Myths About Therapy

Myth: You must be weak or crazy if you go to therapy.

Fact: It takes a good deal of emotional strength to be willing to confront problems and take responsibility for your life...and there's nothing crazy about wanting a better life and taking steps to get it.

Myth: I can take care of things by myself.

Fact: While you can achieve personal growth without therapy, the process is usually unnecessarily lengthy, more tedious and difficult than with therapy. You could use a bicycle for transportation, but it's certainly faster and easier to travel by car.

Myth: Therapy doesn't do any good.

Fact: Research has shown the typical therapy client to be better off psychologically than 75% of people not in therapy. In one study, therapy clients were 83% less anxious and their self-esteem improved 82% more than non-therapy clients.

Myth: A therapist is just going to tell you what's wrong with you.

Fact: The purpose of therapy is to define problems and find solutions, not to find fault or assign blame. Although we may be critical of ourselves, therapists are not.

Myth: No one's going to tell me what to do.

Fact: The therapist is a guide on the journey of self-discovery, not a dictator. The therapist may point out paths for exploration and choices along the way, but it is up to us to choose our destination and make the journey.

Myth: This is just the way I am; I can't change.

Fact: Most personality traits are learned, not inherited. Through imitation or reinforcement, we learn to act or feel a certain way in a given situation. With therapy, these patterns can be changed.

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