

New to (or back in) therapy? Here's what you need to know

If you've never had therapy or counseling before, if it didn't work and you quit after a few sessions, if you've had a bad experience with it... the following information may help you get started or re-started on the right foot.

A better understanding of what is typically necessary to get the best results will make your investment of time and money more worthwhile and help ensure better outcomes.

1. **The first one-two sessions are more investigative than treatment-oriented**, as a thorough and intelligent assessment is necessary to understand your specific situation and issue. Expecting your counselor or therapist to jump immediately into giving you advice or pick a diagnosis and start a treatment right away is not realistic. Give yourself and your counselor the time necessary to get to know the problem and select the most appropriate treatment and you'll get better results.
2. **One of the most important success factors in therapy is the trust** between client and therapist. You must feel safe, trust that the therapist will not judge you negatively, feel that the therapist is listening to you and really hearing you, and that the right kind of help is being provided to you. The therapist must also trust you: feel that you are genuinely present, that you are fully participating, and that you are not holding back any important item of information.
3. **Your therapist understands that not everything about you can be revealed at once.** In the beginning, it is not unusual to keep some things about yourself private and not disclose them, however...
 - ...as the sessions continue, it would be counterproductive to edit or leave out things about yourself that could help the therapist understand the situation better,
 - ...the better your therapist understands you, the better advice or treatment you will receive.
4. **You can expect that, after the first couple of sessions, you may feel worse than when you started.** This is simply because you are talking about, bringing up and uncovering unpleasant, problematic things. This phenomenon is temporary and, in

fact, it indicates that you are indeed addressing what needs to be addressed. If the therapy leaves you indifferent, you don't give it a second thought after the sessions are over, and you feel perfectly fine, watch out! Chances are, you and your therapist haven't yet hit pay dirt.

5. **Typically, you will come to sessions once per week.** Therefore, much of your reflections, realizations, discoveries, or aha moments will happen outside the therapy hour. Here's a tip to ensure better results: be more aware of what is happening with you outside the therapy session, and make a note of thoughts, ideas, reflections that may unexpectedly come to you and bring those notes with you to the next session.
6. **In cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), it is a good practice to assign to the client some homework** to do in between sessions. Far from being just busy work, these assignments are generally very feasible, will not take up too much of your time, and can be very effective in meeting the objectives of your therapy. Do your homework with a good attitude, take it seriously, and the effort will pay off!
7. **Initially, you may wonder how long the therapy will last and how frequently you should come in** for a session. Here are a few guidelines that have been proven to work:
 - If you want lasting results and make your efforts and investment worthwhile, it is recommended that you see your therapist at least once a week, in particular during the first four to six sessions;
 - Every other week may also work, however be aware that this increases the possibility that focus, continuity and momentum may be negatively affected by long gaps in between each session.
 - If you are very distressed and find it difficult to function, it may be necessary to come in at least twice a week during the first month of treatment.
 - Tapering off will happen naturally after you have achieved your objectives. At that point you may require one or two additional "maintenance" and "tune up" sessions to ensure that the results are consolidated, spaced one or two months apart. You and your therapist will decide when you're done and can begin tapering off or ending your treatment.

If you have any questions prior to the start of your therapy or counseling, please do not hesitate to contact us at (678) 554-5632