

What Is Therapy, and Can It Help Me?



Are you wondering exactly what therapy is, and whether it could be helpful for you? Perhaps you are finding life tough right now and would like a space where you can talk about and process what is happening for you, or maybe you have noticed patterns in how you relate to others that you would like to explore and try to understand more about.

There can be all sorts of reasons why people seek therapy. Therapy can offer you a space to speak about your experiences, thoughts and feelings with someone who is trained to listen and respond to you in a particular way. The focus of therapy will be on you and your experiences. Unlike conversations you might have with family members or friends, your therapist is there to hold the space for you both, and to listen and respond to you in a way that

isn't so impacted by what might be happening for them. They are trained to self-reflect and process what is happening in the therapeutic space as they engage with you. This can help the space feel safe for you to voice what you are experiencing, without so many of the concerns about the other person that you may experience in other types of relationship.

The relationship that you build with your therapist can be important in different ways. It may help to shine a light on some of the ways you relate to others, and your therapist can help you to make sense of these relational dynamics. It can also be reparative. Having someone listen to you and truly validate your experience may be something you have not had before and could enable you to feel more self-acceptance. There may be emotions that come up for you that you have not felt safe to express until now, because you were taught that those emotions are not acceptable or helpful. For example, anger may have been seen as bad within your family of origin. Perhaps you were taught that it isn't kind to get angry with people, so you learnt to suppress your feelings of anger. Your therapist can work with you to help you reclaim these emotions and parts of yourself that may have felt unsafe for you to experience previously.

If you are considering therapy, it may be daunting to think about where to start. What kind of therapy should you choose? How does it all work? There are many different types of talking therapy. Most talking therapies involve coming to therapy weekly (usually for fifty minutes), at the same time and place, but this is not always the case. If you would like to see your therapist every other week or would like some sessions online, for example, then you can ask the therapist about possible options before committing to seeing them. Many therapists offer a brief telephone call free of charge before the first session, and most therapists will not ask you to commit to more than a session or two in advance. Therapists often have a contract that they ask you to agree to before your first or second session, and this should set out their requirements as well as their commitment to you around practical matters such as taking breaks and terminating the therapy. It's important that any

therapist you are considering seeing is willing to respond to any questions you may have as well about the process as well.

There are lots of different types of talking therapies, so it might be good to take some time doing a little research on what type you think would work best for you. An integrative therapist, for example, will have trained in various approaches and will likely draw on those that they feel work best for each client. This type of therapy will likely be far less structured than Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, for example, which can involve some homework and tends to be more short-term. It might also help you to know that the terms counsellor, therapist and psychotherapist are often used interchangeably, so if you think that you would benefit from longer term therapy, do not be put off by the term counsellor, as most counsellors work with clients both long and short term. You can enquire about this with them before you begin.

This is a short article about some of the benefits of therapy and how it works. If you are considering therapy, you can obtain further information from the British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy (BACP), the UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP), or one of the other major accrediting bodies in the UK, who will have a wealth of information on their websites.

Lastly, it is worth knowing that it can take time for you to find the right therapist for you. If you don't feel comfortable with any therapist you choose to see, you can make a choice to leave and seek someone new. You may not feel that the first therapist you choose to see is the right fit for you, and that's OK. All the best on your therapeutic journey!

Karlene Golding