

What is Psychotherapy?

Psychotherapy is a process that many believe is shrouded in mystery, but it doesn't have to be that way. Therapists are normal people who usually chose their profession because they care about other people, they're good listeners, and they want to help.

What does a therapist actually do, and how can they help me?

- ✓ Therapists act as a neutral party who can listen and try to understand without judgment.
- ✓ Therapists help you learn about yourself by pointing out patterns and giving honest feedback.
- ✓ Therapists teach specific techniques and strategies to deal with problems.
- ✓ Therapists can refer you to additional resources in the community that might be helpful.
- ✓ Therapists provide a safe place to learn and practice social skills.

Types of Psychotherapy

There are many approaches to psychotherapy, all of which have their own strengths and weaknesses. Some situations call for a specific type of treatment, but sometimes it's just about preference. Here are a few of the most common approaches to psychotherapy:

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a common and well-supported treatment for many types of mental illness. The theory is based on the idea that a person's thoughts influence their feelings, which the individual can learn to control.

Psychoanalysis

The traditional image of a bushy-bearded psychotherapist with a couch and a notebook is based on early psychoanalysis. Although this form of treatment has become less popular, it can still be found. Psychoanalysis focuses on childhood experiences and unconscious drives.

Motivational Interviewing

Although typically used for the treatment of addictions, motivational interviewing is an intervention that can be used to help any person who wants to make changes in their life. When it comes to addiction, motivational interviewing has some of the best support.

Person-Centered Therapy

A person-centered therapist will focus on building a strong positive relationship with their client while providing an empathetic ear. The therapist will help their client find areas where their ideal self and actual self differ, and then encouraging change or acceptance.

Individual Therapy: One client meets with one therapist for traditional talk therapy.

Group Therapy: Clients meet in a group with a therapist leader. Clients usually share a similar problem.

Family and Couples Therapy: Clients will meet as a couple or a family with a therapist. These therapists may have special training, but it is not always required.

What is Psychotherapy?

Who can provide psychotherapy?

The answer to this question varies by region, but in most places psychotherapists must have at least a master's degree from an approved program. After receiving a degree, the therapist must practice for several years under the guidance of a supervisor before becoming licensed.



Mental Health Counselors

The label “mental health counselor” is usually applied to a person who has received a master's degree from an approved university and is licensed to provide psychotherapy. Titles vary by region, but they are usually denoted by acronyms such as LMHC or LPC.



Psychologists

The term “psychologist” typically refers to a person who has completed a doctoral degree in the field of psychology. They may or may not also be licensed as a psychotherapist. Psychologists often perform additional services such as psychological testing.



Psychiatrists

The difference between psychiatrists and psychologists is often a point of confusion. Psychiatrists are doctors that prescribe medication for mental illnesses. They are *not* therapists, and are usually not able to spend long periods of time talking with clients.



Social Workers

In most regions, licensed social workers possess a master's degree and training to provide psychotherapy and other services. Social workers have additional training in areas such as case management (linking clients with other agencies and programs).

What are the limitations of psychotherapy?

- ✓ Therapists should not tell you what to do or try to direct your life. Think of the proverb: “Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach him to fish, and you feed him for life.” Therapists will help you learn to solve your own problems, rather than solving them for you.
- ✓ Some mental illness cannot be managed by psychotherapy alone. If medication is recommended, it's probably important.
- ✓ Benefitting from psychotherapy does require work on your part. Speaking to a therapist for an hour a week, and then pushing it out of your mind, probably won't do you any good. Complete homework, practice your skills, and legitimately try the recommendations you are given.
- ✓ Therapists cannot be your friend after starting a therapeutic relationship. Therapists generally like their clients, and would love to get to know them better, but ethical rules prevent the formation of relationships outside of treatment. It isn't you, it's just that the therapist could lose their license!
- ✓ Therapists cannot read your mind. If you hide information, or are dishonest, you're wasting your own time and money.