

Can Psychotherapy Help Me?

Who Comes for Therapy?

People from all cultures experience forms of anguish and distress, emotional difficulties and problems of everyday living. Your ethnic, racial, cultural economic, social, educational background does not stand in the way of being helped by psychotherapy, although therapy has tended to be accessed largely by people from Western European backgrounds. I have worked with people from all over the world with a wide range of socio-economic and ethno-cultural backgrounds: Black, Asian, White, Gay & Straight, Jewish, Muslim, Christian and atheist, youth and retired. I have concluded that regardless of the background, these people have had issues that could be and were discussed and addressed in therapy. Psychotherapy is a mode of working that cuts across our differences and uncovers, in the process, our common humanity.

What Do They Come For?

The issues people bring vary from relationships, marriage/couple difficulties, family conflict, anxiety over social, career and health, depression (lack of interest in life), sexual orientation, lack of self-esteem, infertility, concentration (ADD), obsession with pornography, cross-cultural adaptation, and youth coping with parents and peer pressure. Some have symptoms, and others less so, but all are distressed by their difficulties which they find are interrupting their daily lives of work, school, love and self-acceptance. Some are on medication. In this case, the client can ask the therapist to work in coordination with your medical doctor.

What kinds of problems can therapy address?

People seek psychotherapy for many reasons. Some want help with specific emotional problems, like depression, anxiety, or stress, or are seeking to come to terms with a painful or traumatic personal history. Others may feel stuck in distressing patterns that prevent them from feeling satisfied, from connecting with others, or from finding meaning in their lives. Many people simply desire a deeper self-understanding or greater creativity in their personal lives.*

*The Tapestry of Psychoanalysis: A Textured Human Relationship, APA Brochure.

How Can Psychotherapy Help Me?

For most people the most profound help that psychotherapy offers is to be heard by another person, perhaps heard in a way or ways they have never been heard before. Immediate relief is not uncommon knowing some is dedicating time to listen to them. When we know someone else is there to hear us, to respond to our questions about ourselves and to reflect back who we are, we have an opportunity to begin to listen to ourselves in a new way.

How does Psychotherapy work?

Therapy works in part because of confidentiality. The therapist will not reveal to anyone what goes on in the session. This makes therapy a very valuable opportunity as many people need a place to bring forth their feelings and thoughts in a place where they won't be judged, but rather where someone is trying to understand them. People needing help for emotional and relationship issues are often perplexed by their feelings and thoughts and they simply need another person to sound them out. A therapist gives them a chance to 'speak their mind' without them worrying that someone will find out about their innermost thoughts.

As well, therapy works because people know there is time for them to express themselves. In the therapist's room, they are allowed to feel their feelings, no matter what they are. They are protected. There is no one they need to impress or care for. They can relax and look inward to what goes on in their heart, in their mind, in their psyche. This is often liberating, as we often feel constrained in life, worrying that our thoughts and feelings will overwhelm either ourselves or others the consequence being that we bury them deep within. And yet, these buried feelings and thoughts still find a way out, a way to upset us, to throw us off-balance. And so the opportunity to reveal our inner most thoughts and feelings can be life-changing.

Furthermore, therapy works because the client begins to feel the therapist is reliable. They know the therapist will be there each week at the appointed time. This makes people feel safe and helps them to go deeper into their personal therapeutic journey. They know someone is accompanying them, someone who can be trusted to be there when and after both pleasant and unpleasant matters are spoken. This can be a significant factor for many people who, perhaps, may feel they have not been properly listened to.

Over time, a relationship grows. Client and therapist get to know each other. The client begins to realize they can trust me to be there, to listen to them. Out of the relationship there arises an understanding of themselves, they haven't had before.

How Are Therapy Sessions Structured?

The therapeutic process depends on the establishment of a safe, confidential, and collaborative therapeutic relationship. The frequency of sessions is normally once per week, but can be adjusted per need. Decisions about the duration of treatment, and frequency of sessions are reached jointly between the client and the therapist. The client and therapist work together to attempt to understand the meaning of the client's emotional reactions, thoughts, memories, fantasies, dreams, images and sensations in an effort to address personal suffering and to expand the capacity for vitality in work, love and creativity.*

*The Tapestry of Psychoanalysis: A Textured Human Relationship, APA Brochure.

Why should I see a therapist?

Some brief vignettes as to why people see therapists

You have a dream that won't go away, something that has been troubling you since you were a youth. You don't really understand it although you've spoken to many friends about it and even done reading about dreams. You feel there's something in it for you, something that might be valuable for you for your self-understanding, but you're not sure how to approach it. You may also feel frightened about working on it alone.

You experience anxiety in a given situation – it could be social as at parties or simply riding in an elevator or driving a car. The problem has been with you for years, but recently it has begun to get worse. Medication has not been effective. It has begun to affect your relationships or your work.

You find yourself to be compelled to always be in control. While this characteristic can have its useful aspects at work, you find that several women that you have dated do not feel comfortable with you. Consequently, you've not been able to have an on-going relationship with women who are equal to you. You are reluctant to address the issue because you don't want to give up control of your life, especially your emotions. And yet you find yourself unhappy and discontented with the direction your life is taking you.

As a child you were physically or sexually abused. You have never spoken to family members about it as no one would believe this could have happened to you. You long to open up about the pain you went through, but you know that you have spent years and years covering it up. At times you don't even believe yourself any longer. The self-doubt is terribly disturbing to you. You feel unsure about looking back at this demon, but another part of you feels convinced that avoiding it will never get rid of it.

Your child plays video games incessantly. You want to help him/her, but don't know if they would be willing to get help. You have tried to speak to them, but he/she is reluctant to open up.

The stress of your work has made your marriage/relationship very difficult. You don't talk to your spouse the way you used to and feel both of you drifting apart. You wonder if your spouse/partner has been unfaithful but don't know how to bring the matter up. You feel guilty over putting in long hours but see no way out of your circumstances. Your spouse does not want to go for therapy and you feel afraid of what changes you might have to make if you begin addressing the demands of your job let alone looking inward.

You are an immigrant or were raised by parents who were. Your father or husband does not want you to get employment after you complete your education because culturally you should be satisfied with a traditional life at home. Whether or not there is a financial

need for you to work, this is your goal. However, your father or husband and your cultural traditions stand in the way of you taking on the life you want. You feel increasingly constricted. The male members of your family are unwilling bend to your wishes.