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Psychotherapy



Definition

Psychotherapy is a general term for treating mental health problems by talking with a psychiatrist, psychologist or other mental health provider.

During psychotherapy, you learn about your condition and your moods, feelings, thoughts and behaviors. Psychotherapy helps you learn how to take control of your life and respond to challenging situations with healthy coping skills.

Why it's done

Psychotherapy can be helpful in treating most mental health problems, including:

- Anxiety disorders
- Mood disorders
- Addictions
- Eating disorders
- Personality disorders
- Schizophrenia or other disorders that cause detachment from reality (psychotic disorders)

Not everyone who benefits from psychotherapy is diagnosed with a mental illness. Psychotherapy can help with a number of life's stresses and conflicts that can affect anyone. For example, it may help you

- Resolve conflicts
- Relieve anxiety or stress
- Cope with major life changes
- Learn to manage unhealthy reactions
- Come to terms with an ongoing or serious physical health problem
- Recover from physical or sexual abuse
- Cope with sexual problems
- Sleep better, if you have trouble getting to sleep or staying asleep (insomnia)

In some cases, psychotherapy can be as effective as medications, such as antidepressants. However, depending on your specific situation, psychotherapy alone may not be enough to ease the symptoms of a mental health condition. You may also need medications or other treatments.

Risks

In general, there's little risk in having psychotherapy. But because it can explore painful feelings and experiences, you may feel emotionally uncomfortable at times.

What you can expect

Your first therapy session

Your first psychotherapy session is usually a time for the therapist to gather information about you and your needs. Make sure you understand:

- What type of therapy will be used
- The goals of your treatment
- The length of each session
- How many therapy sessions you may need

Starting psychotherapy

A therapist may have an office in a medical clinic or an office building or have a home office. You'll probably meet with your therapist once a week or every other week for a session that lasts 45 to 60 minutes. Psychotherapy, usually in a group session with a focus on safety and stabilization, also can take place in a hospital if you've been admitted for treatment.

Types of psychotherapy:

- *Cognitive behavioral therapy*, which helps you identify unhealthy, negative beliefs and behaviors and replace them with healthy, positive ones
- *Dialectical behavior therapy*, a type of cognitive behavioral therapy that teaches behavioral skills to help you handle stress, manage your emotions and improve your relationships with others
- *Acceptance and commitment therapy*, which helps you become aware of and accept your thoughts and feelings and commit to making changes, increasing your ability to cope with and adjust to situations
- *Psychodynamic and psychoanalysis therapies*, which focus on increasing your awareness of unconscious thoughts and behaviors, developing new insights into your motivations, and resolving conflicts
- *Interpersonal psychotherapy*, which focuses on addressing problems with your current relationships with other people to improve your interpersonal skills — how you relate to others, such as family, friends and colleagues
- *Supportive psychotherapy*, which reinforces your ability to cope with stress and difficult situations

Psychotherapy is offered in different formats, including individual, couple, family or group therapy sessions, and it can be effective for all age groups.

Your therapist will consider your particular situation and preferences to determine which approach may be best for you.

During psychotherapy

For most types of psychotherapy, your therapist encourages you to talk about your thoughts and feelings and what's troubling you. Don't worry if you find it hard to open up about your feelings. Your therapist can help you gain more confidence and comfort as time goes on.

Because psychotherapy sometimes involves intense emotional discussions, you may find yourself crying, upset or even having an angry outburst during a session. Some people may feel physically exhausted after a session. Your therapist is there to help you cope with such feelings and emotions.

Your therapist may ask you to do "homework" — activities or practices that build on what you learn during your regular therapy sessions. Over time, discussing your concerns can help improve your mood, change the way you think and feel about yourself, and improve your ability to cope with problems.

Confidentiality

Except in very specific circumstances, conversations with your therapist are confidential. However, a therapist may break confidentiality if there is an immediate threat to safety or when required by state or federal law to report concerns to authorities. These situations include:

- Threatening to immediately or soon (imminently) harm yourself or commit suicide
- Threatening to immediately or soon (imminently) harm or take the life of another person
- Abusing a child or a vulnerable adult (someone older than age 18 who is hospitalized or made vulnerable by a disability)
- Being unable to safely care for yourself

Length of psychotherapy

The number of psychotherapy sessions you need — and how frequently you need to see your therapist — depends on such factors as:

- Your particular mental illness or situation
- Severity of your symptoms
- How long you've had symptoms or have been dealing with your situation
- How quickly you make progress
- How much stress you're experiencing
- How much your mental health concerns interfere with day-to-day life
- How much support you receive from family members and others
- Cost and insurance limitations

It may take only weeks to help you cope with a short-term situation. Or, treatment may last a year or longer if you have a long-term mental illness or other long-term concerns.

Results

Psychotherapy may not cure your condition or make an unpleasant situation go away. But it can give you the power to cope in a healthy way and to feel better about yourself and your life.

Getting the most out of psychotherapy

Take steps to get the most out of your therapy and help make it a success.

- Make sure you feel comfortable with your therapist.
- Approach therapy as a partnership.
- Be open and honest.
- Stick to your treatment plan.
- Don't expect instant results.
- Do your homework between sessions.
- If psychotherapy isn't helping, talk to your therapist.

Counseling Vs Psychotherapy:

Although used interchangeably psychotherapy and counseling actually differ on many aspects.

Psychotherapy is generally concerned with some degree of personality change where counseling is concerned with helping the individuals utilize their full coping potential.

One of the major distinctions between counseling and psychotherapy is the focus. In counseling, the counselor will focus on the here and now, reality situations. During psychotherapy, the therapist often focuses on the unconscious or past.

Length of treatment also differs between counseling and psychotherapy.

Counseling is shorter in duration than psychotherapy. The time spent in counseling is determined by goals set by the client and the counselor. Once these goals are met the client should then be able to go back on their own.

A counseling session usually takes place in a non medical setting such as an office. Psychotherapy is often carried out in a medical setting such as a clinic or hospital.

You along with your doctor or the psychologist should decide upon the duration and nature of counseling/ psychotherapy in advance.