

Key Facts

3. What happens in your first session with your therapist

This information sheet uses the terms 'therapy' and 'therapist' to denote both counselling & psychotherapy

Introduction

So you have decided on a therapist who you think will be able to help you and you are going to meet together for the first time. It is sometimes possible to work with a counsellor on-line, by telephone or in a group, and most of the following information will be useful in these other settings too.

Therapists work in many settings and you may see them for example, in a GP surgery, at school, at your workplace or in private practice in a dedicated room either in the therapist's home or in rented offices.

What may happen at your first meeting?

Your first session will be about why you are looking for therapy; what you want to achieve from the therapy, and agreeing how you and your therapist are going to work together. Your therapist will probably ask you a number of questions to help you decide whether you will both be comfortable working together and to check that you can be offered the most appropriate support.

Perhaps, after discussion with the therapist, you might decide that you do not want to continue and if so, then you should be completely free to leave. Also your therapist may think that there may be a different and more appropriate therapy available and will, therefore, offer you a referral.

However, if you both feel that the therapy may be beneficial and you wish to continue, it is likely that you will discuss and agree on how you will work together, for example how often you will meet, the fees, etc, (see the list below), and you will make what your therapist will call a therapeutic contract, which may be written down.

It can be helpful to have a written agreement, because you can refer to this during the period of your therapy to refresh your memory as to what was agreed. This is helpful because new clients may feel nervous at the first session, and find it difficult to take in everything that you and the therapist talk about. Therapists work with clients in

many different ways and they will probably explain their ways of working to you, but if not, it is a good idea to ask them about this. You have the right to ask your therapist anything you want to know about their qualifications and experience and your therapy and to question anything you don't understand. Your therapist should encourage you to do this. Brief information about the different models of therapy is available from www.bacp.co.uk/crs/information/specialist-organisations.php T3 *Counselling and psychotherapy theoretical approaches* or in published copy on request from the BACP Customer Service: 01455 883300.

continued overleaf...



Some things you might want to discuss with your therapist are:

- ➔ How many sessions you will have. If you are seeing the therapist in an agency there may be a limit on the total number of sessions offered, so it is helpful to know how many there might be.
- ➔ How will you both decide whether the therapy is being helpful and how many sessions will you have before you will review this together and decide on further sessions?
- ➔ If you are seeing a private therapist, what payments will be and how these will be made eg, at the end of each session or after several sessions or monthly, by cheque or cash etc?
- ➔ Therapy is also provided free by the NHS and this will usually need a referral from your doctor.
- ➔ What will happen if you are unable to attend a session for example, is there a time by which you need to let the therapist know about this to avoid being charged?
- ➔ Will the therapy stop if you are unable to attend sessions for a certain period of time?
- ➔ What happens about holidays, and does the therapist require a period by which you need to let them know you won't be available?
- ➔ What happens when the therapist is on holiday?
- ➔ Will the therapy be confidential?
- ➔ If you are coming to therapy as a couple, how will confidentiality work with you both as clients?
- ➔ Does the therapist keep records and will you be allowed to see and/or discuss these together? Is anyone else likely to see these records?
- ➔ What happens to these records at the end of therapy?
- ➔ Can you contact the therapist outside the session? How will you do this? Are there restrictions on contact with the therapist out of hours?
- ➔ Can you text the therapist?
- ➔ Who will decide when therapy is to end? How will that decision be made?

It is important to remember that you are the client and that, for therapy to be helpful, you should feel able to raise anything you wish with your therapist. If anything confuses you or does not make sense to you during the sessions it is important to discuss this with your therapist.

Therapy is a very personal process and sometimes it is necessary to talk about painful feelings or difficult decisions, so you may go through a period of feeling worse than when you started. Research shows that this is common and natural. It is important to discuss this with the therapist if you are concerned. It can sometimes be difficult to continue but it is usually well worth the effort as you are helped to work through the problems. However if it really doesn't seem to be working for you and you have discussed this with your therapist you should feel free to end the therapy.

BACP has produced some helpful information sheets which give a fuller explanation of what might be expected during therapy and these may be found on the website at: www.bacpregister.org.uk/public

Or they can be sent out to you in a printed version on request.

Other helpful reading...

Key facts 1 – What do counsellors and psychotherapists do?

Key facts 2 – How do I choose a therapist?

Information sheet C1 – How to get the best out of your therapist

Information sheet C2 – What is counselling

Information sheet C3 – What to do if you are unhappy about your therapy

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