



## Navigating Your First Therapy Session: What to Expect

Welcome! Taking the step to begin therapy is a significant one, and it's natural to have questions about what lies ahead. This handout is designed to give you a brief overview of what to expect from the therapy process, particularly in our initial interactions. The goal is to help demystify therapy, address common myths, and reduce any anxiety you might feel, especially if this is your first time. For a video/audio version of this handout click here: <https://youtu.be/-7bcY6OYd2s>

### Before Your First Scheduled Session: Pre-Therapy Orientation

To help you feel more prepared, here's a little about what therapy generally involves:

- **What is Therapy?** Therapy is a collaborative process where you and your therapist work together to understand your experiences, thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. It's a confidential space for you to explore challenges, gain insights, and develop new coping strategies. The aim is to support your overall well-being and personal growth.
- **Debunking Common Myths about Therapy:**
  - **Myth 1: Therapy is only for "crazy" people or when you hit rock bottom.**
    - **Reality:** Therapy is for anyone who wants to improve their life, manage stress, navigate challenges, improve relationships, or simply understand themselves better. Seeking therapy is a sign of strength and self-awareness, not weakness. Many people seek therapy during times of acute crisis, but it can also be a proactive step for personal development.
  - **Myth 2: The therapist will just tell me what to do or give me all the answers.**
    - **Reality:** Therapy is a collaborative effort. While your therapist will offer guidance and strategies, they won't simply give advice or make decisions for you. The goal is to empower you to find your own solutions and build skills. Your autonomy is respected.



- **Myth 3: I'll have to lie on a couch and talk about my childhood.**
  - **Reality:** While understanding your past can sometimes be helpful, modern therapy takes many forms. The focus is typically on your current concerns and future goals. The setting is usually a comfortable conversation, and you won't be forced to discuss anything you're not ready for.
- **Myth 4: Therapy is endless, and I'll be stuck in it forever.**
  - **Reality:** The length of therapy varies greatly depending on your individual needs and goals. Some people benefit from short-term, solution-focused therapy, while others may engage in longer-term work. This is something you will discuss and decide collaboratively with your therapist.
- **Myth 5: Talking about my problems won't actually change anything.**
  - **Reality:** Therapy is more than just talking; it's about gaining new perspectives, learning coping mechanisms, and developing actionable strategies to make positive changes. The process of exploring issues with a trained professional can lead to significant shifts in how you think, feel, and behave.
- **What Can You Expect?**
  - **A Safe and Confidential Space:** Everything discussed in therapy is kept confidential, with a few legal and ethical exceptions that your therapist will explain. This is a place where you can speak openly and honestly without judgment.
  - **Focus on You:** Therapy is centered around your unique needs and goals. You'll have the opportunity to talk about what's important to you.
  - **Active Participation:** Therapy is not a passive experience. Your active involvement in sessions and sometimes between sessions (e.g., reflecting on discussions, trying new approaches) is key to making progress.



- **Roles in Therapy:**

- **Your Role (The Client):** Your role is to be as open and honest as you feel comfortable, to share your thoughts and feelings, to set goals for what you want to achieve, and to actively participate in the process. It's okay if you're not sure where to start; your therapist will help guide you.
- **The Therapist's Role:** Your therapist's role is to listen attentively and empathetically, to offer different perspectives, to help you identify patterns, to provide tools and strategies, and to support you in working towards your goals. They are there to guide and facilitate your journey.
- **Confidentiality:** Confidentiality is a cornerstone of therapy. What you share in your sessions will be kept private. Your therapist will explain the specific limits of confidentiality (e.g., situations where there's a risk of harm to yourself or others) during your first contact. This is to ensure you understand how your information is protected.

### **The Initial Contact & First Few Sessions: Exploration and Customization**

Our initial contact, including the first session and likely the next few, is an opportunity for us to get to know each other. It's a chance for you to see if therapy feels like a good fit and for the therapist to gain a thorough understanding of your concerns, strengths, and what you hope to achieve.

- **Exploratory Phase:** The first few sessions will likely be more exploratory. This allows your therapist to understand your specific needs and situation. This isn't about endlessly dwelling on problems, but rather about gathering the necessary information to develop the most effective and customized plan for you. We want to ensure the strategies we use are tailored to *you*.
- **Strategies Offered Throughout:** While this initial phase is about understanding, please know that practical strategies and insights will be offered throughout our work together, as they become relevant to your situation and goals. The aim is to provide you with tools and techniques you can use.

We understand that beginning therapy can bring up a mix of feelings. Our aim is to make this initial phase as comfortable, clear, and collaborative as possible. Please feel free to ask any questions you may have during our first contact or at any point throughout our work together.