

# How To Start Therapy

Courtesy of Elevated Life Counseling

## How therapy works:

It's common to feel nervous about therapy before starting. A therapist's job is to work through that feeling with you. When you and your therapist or clinician are a good match, you'll develop a relationship to help you feel comfortable with your therapist. The more honest you can be, the better therapy will work.

## Beginning therapy:

### ● Think about what you want to get out of therapy.

This may seem obvious, but it will also be one of the first questions most therapists will ask you. Do you have general relationship issues you want to work on? Family stress? Work issues?

Whatever your goal is, narrowing in on it will help you and your therapist get to work. And don't worry — that goal can change and evolve over time. It's just a good starting place.

### ● Go to your first appointment with an open mind.

The first session of therapy can feel pretty awkward. The therapy relationship is likely a different dynamic than you've experienced before. Treat this as an opportunity for open-mindedness. This session is about laying the groundwork, getting to know each other, and beginning to make a plan.

Don't be surprised if you experience unexpectedly raw emotions. Many people cry in their first session just at the sheer relief of having someone to talk to. Let it out! That's what therapy is for.

### ● Talk about your next session.

Depending on how many therapy sessions you intend to have, whether short-term or long-term, it's practical to discuss what to expect for the next session. Your therapist may have specific areas they want you to report back on, or exercises they'd like you to try.

You can also use this time to say you'd like to reflect on your latest session before booking your next. Therapy should be a safe environment. If it doesn't feel that way, you are under no obligation to continue with that therapist so long as services rendered are paid for.

### ● Keep the dialogue open.

You and your therapist may set a goal in your first session about when you'd like to have your final session, or you may keep it open-ended. The important thing to remember is that this is a client service. If at any point you feel uncomfortable, have questions about your therapy, or want to switch goals, it is perfectly ok to bring them up.

## Tips to getting the most out of therapy:

### • Be your most authentic self.

- If you're struggling to describe or articulate how you really feel, say so. If the idea of being authentic is confusing or feels unnatural, tell your therapist. That is valuable information for the work ahead. Honesty is the best way to get to the root of what you're struggling with and how you're really feeling.

### • Don't keep things to yourself.

- If you're worried about feeling judged, remember that a good therapist isn't there to make judgments.

- Let your emotions show.
  - Therapy is the one place you don't have to bottle up your emotions. If something comes up that makes you angry or sad, let those emotions out. Every therapist has heard a variation of someone saying, "sorry, I don't know why I'm crying." Part of therapy is helping you navigate those emotions.
- Try not to focus solely on symptom relief.
  - As an example, say you want to stop having panic attacks. A therapist aids you in mitigating those attacks, but they also want to get to the root of why you're having those attacks in the first place. It's like taking ibuprofen for pain. It alleviates the pain, but you still need to figure out what's causing the pain in the first place.
- Expect to drag your feet sometimes.
  - Sometimes we just don't feel like going to therapy. You can cancel sessions in advance, but be cognizant of this feeling and why you may be feeling it. Is it time to find a different therapist? Or are you working through something really challenging?
  - Therapy is similar to exercising in that way: we might want to veg out instead of work out, but we usually feel better if we exercise.
- Don't worry about the clock.
  - Your therapist will be the one keeping an eye on the time. Do your best to turn off devices and be present. Try to dedicate therapy time to yourself.
- Do try to schedule therapy at a good time.
  - Sometimes we can't be choosy with the timing of our therapy hour, but if you can, it's best to schedule it when you can have some time to reflect after the session is over. It's easier to be fully emotionally available when you don't have to be back at work immediately after.
- Don't expect your therapist to tell you what to do.
  - Therapy is less about advice and more about helping you make decisions that serve you. It can be tempting to ask a therapist to just tell you what to do, but be wary of therapists who are quick to give advice. They may be serving their own agenda more than yours.
- **Be patient.**
  - Therapy is hard work. Positive changes take time. It can be frustrating, and that's ok. If you get frustrated, it's perfectly acceptable to talk about it with your therapist. If at any point you feel like you're not accomplishing anything in therapy, talk to your therapist about both the long and short-term plans.
  - Good therapy will often feel like work. Therapy is an investment in yourself and your future, and it should feel as such. A strong therapeutic relationship will make you feel safe and heard, and if you can put the work in, you'll see the benefits of therapy across every aspect of your life.