

WHAT IS THERAPY?

How to explain therapy to a client, build your rapport, and ensure you have your ethical, legal, and professional discussions covered.

Therapy

The purpose of therapy is not to “fix” a person or tell them what to do. Instead, **therapy helps clients understand what is happening, identify patterns, process experiences, develop effective coping strategies, and make meaningful changes** that align with their goals and values.

Depending on the client's needs, therapy may focus on:

- Processing trauma, grief, or difficult life experiences
- Understanding thoughts, emotions, and behavioral patterns
- Developing healthy coping and emotion-regulation skills
- Improving relationships and communication
- Reducing symptoms of anxiety, depression, PTSD, or other concerns
- Building self-awareness, confidence, and a stronger sense of identity
- Developing problem-solving and decision-making skills
- Increasing resilience and ability to manage future stressors
- Creating meaningful and sustainable behavioral change

At its core, therapy is a collaborative process. The therapist brings clinical knowledge, training, and therapeutic interventions, while the client brings their lived experience, goals, perspectives, and willingness to engage in the process. The goal is to work together to create a treatment process that supports the client's individual needs.

For example, we may explain therapy as follows to a client:

“There are many different types of therapy, and each one approaches problems a little differently. Some focus more on thoughts and behaviors, some focus on emotions and relationships, and others focus on processing past experiences or trauma. There isn't necessarily one approach that works for everyone. Part of our job together is figuring out what fits your needs, goals, personality, and what you're comfortable with.”

Therapy can be effective because it provides a **structured, supportive environment where people can better understand their thoughts, emotions, behaviors, relationships, and past experiences**. With the support of a trained therapist, clients can identify patterns that may be contributing to distress, develop new ways of responding, process difficult experiences, and practice healthier coping strategies.

Therapy also provides something that can be difficult to achieve alone: **a safe relationship in which experiences can be explored without judgment**. Over time, this process can help people develop greater self-awareness, emotional regulation, resilience, and confidence in their ability to manage challenges.

What makes therapy work?

- 1. The therapeutic relationship:** A trusting relationship with a therapist can provide safety, validation, accountability, and a space to be honest about experiences that may be difficult to discuss elsewhere.
- 2. Increased self-awareness:** Therapy helps clients recognize connections between thoughts, emotions, behaviors, relationships, and past experiences. Understanding these patterns can create opportunities for change.
- 3. Processing difficult experiences:** Rather than continually avoiding painful experiences, therapy can help clients process them in a safe and structured way so they become more manageable.
- 4. Learning new skills:** Clients can develop practical skills for emotion regulation, communication, boundaries, distress tolerance, problem-solving, and coping with stress.
- 5. Changing patterns:** Therapy isn't only about understanding why something happens. It also helps clients practice responding differently and creating new patterns over time.
- 6. Building a different relationship with yourself:** Therapy can help people develop greater self-compassion, recognize their strengths, challenge shame or self-criticism, and develop a stronger sense of identity.

WHAT IS THERAPY?

How to explain therapy to a client, build your rapport, and ensure you have your ethical, legal, and professional discussions covered.

How to Introduce Interventions to a Client

When introducing an intervention, you can use these five questions:

1. What is it?

"CBT is a therapy that focuses on the relationship between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors."

2. What does it focus on?

"We'll pay attention to patterns in your thinking and how those patterns influence how you respond."

3. What does it actually look like?

"We might identify an unhelpful thought, examine the evidence for it, and practice developing a more balanced perspective."

4. Why might it help you?

"Based on what you're describing, this approach may help you recognize the patterns contributing to your anxiety."

5. What choices do you have?

"We can use this approach, another approach, or combine approaches depending on what feels appropriate and what we're seeing in treatment."

For Example:

CBT: "We look at the connection between your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and work on patterns that may be keeping you stuck."

DBT: "We focus on managing intense emotions, tolerating distress, improving relationships, and responding to situations more effectively."

EMDR: "We work with distressing memories or experiences in a structured way to help your brain process them differently so they become less emotionally overwhelming."

Trauma-focused interventions: "We focus on understanding and processing the impact that traumatic experiences have had on your emotions, behaviors, relationships, and sense of safety."

Play therapy: "For children, play can be a way of communicating and processing experiences when they don't yet have the words to explain everything they're feeling."

Exposure therapy: "We gradually and safely work toward facing things that create fear or avoidance so that you can develop a greater sense of control and learn that anxiety can decrease without avoidance."

Grief focused therapy: "We create space to process the loss, understand how grief is affecting you, and find ways to continue moving forward while maintaining a connection to what you've lost."

Parts work | IFS: "Parts Work helps us understand the different sides of ourselves and the roles they developed to help us cope, protect ourselves, or get our needs met."

BrainSpotting: "BrainSpotting helps us use the connection between your eyes, brain, and body to explore and process experiences that may feel stuck or difficult to put into words."

Trust Based Relational Intervention (TBRI): "TBRI helps us understand behavior through the lens of connection, safety, and unmet needs. We focus on helping children feel safe and understood while building skills for emotional and behavioral regulation."