



Preparing for Your First Therapy Session

An explainer and first-session prep sheet · Created by Simar Gill Lowther, MACP, RP (CRPO)
© 2026 Insightful Journey Inc. All rights reserved. Free for personal use. Not for resale or redistribution.

At a glance

- Feeling nervous before your first session is completely normal.
- You don't need to know exactly what to say. Your therapist will guide the conversation.
- The relationship with your therapist is one of the strongest predictors of therapy working.

What to expect

1. Your therapist will review consent, confidentiality, and its limits.
2. They'll ask what brings you in and what you hope will change.
3. They may ask about your background, health, relationships, and support.
4. You'll have time to ask questions about their approach and experience.
5. Together, you'll start thinking about goals and next steps.

At Insightful Journey Inc., sessions are available in person in Oshawa and virtually across Ontario. There is no front desk, so you'll receive arrival instructions by email.

Finding the right fit

Research consistently shows that the relationship between you and your therapist, called the therapeutic alliance, matters as much as the specific technique. It's okay to ask questions, share what feels helpful or not, and even change therapists if the fit isn't right.

What the research says

The therapeutic alliance is one of the most consistent predictors of positive therapy outcomes across approaches (Flückiger et al., 2018).

Clear expectations and good preparation at the start of therapy are associated with lower dropout (Swift & Greenberg, 2012).

Tool: My First-Session Prep Sheet

What's bringing me to therapy right now:

How long has this been going on?

How it's affecting my life (sleep, work, relationships, mood):

What I hope will be different after therapy:

What I've tried before (including past therapy) and what helped:

Things that are important for my therapist to know (culture, faith, language, identity, health):

Questions I might ask my therapist

- ☐ What approaches do you use?
- ☐ How will we know if therapy is working?
- ☐ How often should we meet?
- ☐ What are your fees, and is direct billing available?
- ☐ What happens if I need to cancel?

Strategies to try

- **Be honest.** Share what feels true, even if it's messy.
- **It's okay to go slowly.** You don't have to share everything at once.
- **Give feedback.** Telling your therapist what helps and what doesn't makes therapy better.
- **Check your benefits.** Many workplace plans cover Registered Psychotherapists and social workers.
- **Plan some time after.** First sessions can bring up feelings. Give yourself a gentle hour afterward.

Strategies you may not have heard of

These less common, evidence-informed techniques go beyond the usual advice. Try one at a time and notice what works for you.

- **Write your "three things."** Write down the three things you most want your therapist to know. Hand it over if speaking feels hard.
- **Record a voice memo.** If writing isn't your thing, record yourself talking about what's going on before your session.
- **Share your preferences.** Tell your therapist how you like to work: gentle or direct, structured or open, homework or none.
- **Do a fit check afterward.** Ask yourself: Did I feel heard? Respected? Hopeful? It's okay to bring this up next session.

Journal prompts

Take your time with these. Write freely; there are no right answers.

How am I feeling about starting therapy?

What worries me most about the first session?

What would make me feel safe and comfortable with a therapist?

What would success look like for me?

When to reach out for support

Ready to begin? Book a free consultation to ask questions and find the right therapist for you. Simar can help match you with a clinician based on your needs and preferences.

Insightful Journey Inc. offers therapy in person in Oshawa and virtually across Ontario, in English, Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu. Direct billing available.

[Book a free consultation](#) · 647-982-2527 (call, text, or WhatsApp)

In crisis? Call or text 9-8-8, or call 911.

This resource is for education and self-reflection. It is not a diagnostic tool and is not a substitute for professional assessment or care.

References

Flückiger, C., Del Re, A. C., Wampold, B. E., & Horvath, A. O. (2018). The alliance in adult psychotherapy: A meta-analytic synthesis. *Psychotherapy*, 55(4), 316–340.

Swift, J. K., & Greenberg, R. P. (2012). Premature discontinuation in adult psychotherapy: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 80(4), 547–559.

Usage Notice

© 2026 Insightful Journey Inc. All rights reserved.

This resource is intended for personal growth and education purposes only. No part of this publication may be copied, reproduced, shared, or distributed in any form, digital or printed, without prior written consent from Insightful Journey Inc.

This material is the intellectual property of Insightful Journey Inc. and may not be modified, resold, or integrated into other programs or publications.

For permissions or clinical use inquiries, please contact: info@insightfuljourney.ca

Insightful Journey Inc. | www.insightfuljourney.ca