

What to Expect in the First Session

The first session is designed to let us get to know each other, to allow you to tell your story, to form a conceptualization of the issue(s), to make a plan, and often to begin treatment. Try to be open with your feelings and opinions. If you state something that does not sound correct or went too far, you can walk it back. For all issues about which you are unsure, you are allowed to guesstimate. The first session can last up to 90 minutes but can be completed in 60 minutes with follow-up in the next session. The first session includes the objectives and tasks listed below.

Discuss and clarify any questions about forms, policies, or procedures

Tell your story in an open-ended fashion

Talk in an open-ended manner about what is going on for you now, as well as your history. You are basically summarizing the novel of your life, focusing on key moments, which certainly include the present and your future. If you get stalled, Dr. Weibel can help you by asking questions. Opening questions include “Why now?” or “What brings you?” Other questions relate to the areas described below.

Issues/Symptoms

What is going on? What are the issues, problems, symptoms?
 How is your mood? How do you experience anxiety? How is your sleep?
 How are your relationships with family, friends, coworkers, romantic partners?

What are your passions, hobbies, strengths?

What do you love, or have you loved in the past?

Present Job & Career History

Do you like your job? Do you get along with coworkers? Are you challenged, bored, overwhelmed?

Educational History

Marital & parental history

List dates of marriage and any divorces and second marriages.
 List ages and gender of any children and describe how they are doing regarding school/work, social functioning, and any issues.

Family tree – family history

Are your parents still married? If parents are divorced, what age were you when they divorced? What age were you when they remarried?

Describe your parents, including strengths. Do your parents suffer or struggle with any psychological symptoms, even if never diagnosed? You are allowed to give your opinion here.

Describe your grandparents. If they passed before you knew them, describe what you know by story or lore.

List your siblings ages and gender. Are they doing well in terms of mental health and occupational and social functioning?

Overview of childhood

Where did you grow up? How was it?

For elementary, middle, and high school, were you generally stable, content, and had enough friends? Did anything big or bad happen? Did you suffer any abuse of any kind?

Previous Therapies

Estimate dates and number of sessions. Did you benefit? What did you like or dislike about the therapy and the therapist? Here, most therapists are not spying on each other. We mainly ask to learn about you, and about how to proceed with you. If you say the therapy was too directive or not directive enough, I can adjust to fit your desires. Describe any hospitalizations/inpatient stays

Previous and Current Medications

What are your current psychotropic medications? Do you like them? Do they help? Side effects? Please describe history of previous medications.

Substance Use

Estimate average alcoholic drinks/week. Estimate average amount of other drugs currently used, if any. Guesstimate lifetime uses of drugs.

Risk Factors for Self or Others

Describe any previous suicide attempts. Describe any current or past suicidal ideation, intent, or plan, and your reasons for living. Describe previous fistfights in your life, or other violent acts, and if there has been a decrease as you have aged. Describe any previous or current homicidal ideation, intent, or plan.

Goals and Plan

Describe any goals you have for therapy or your life.

Return to your story to find the main themes

After completing the standard questions, we return to where you started in your open-ended story and try to find a main theme or issue. Main themes include overcoming anxiety, building trust, assertiveness, improving a marriage, anger, inability to forgive someone, deciding whether to change careers, finding a sense of safety after trauma, improving social skills, moving toward self-actualization. We explore and clarify what is the main issue you wish to improve.

Our work begins

Dr. Weibel may offer an initial conceptualization and describe treatment options and offers a preview of what we can do together. If we can agree on some initial approaches, Dr. Weibel introduces some techniques to give you a feel for how we can work together. Dr. Weibel often gives handouts and web links and suggests readings or exercises for home.