

What is Psychotherapy?

Psychotherapy is a treatment that involves a relationship between a therapist and patient. It can be used to treat a broad variety of mental disorders and emotional difficulties. The goal of psychotherapy is to eliminate or control disabling or troubling symptoms so the patient can function better. Therapy can also help build a sense of well-being and healing.

Problems helped by psychotherapy include difficulties in coping with daily life, the impact of trauma, medical illness, or loss, like the death of a loved one, and specific mental disorders, like depression or eating disorders. Psychiatrists and other mental health professionals can provide psychotherapy.

One out of five Americans will experience a mental illness severe enough to require treatment at some time in their lives. Mental illnesses and emotional distress do not discriminate. They affect men and women of all ages, ethnic groups and socioeconomic statuses. These disorders impair how people feel, think, and act. They can interfere with how people function at work or school and affect their relationships with friends and family.

Therapy Sessions

The goals of treatment and arrangements for how often and how long to meet are planned jointly by the patient and therapist. Most sessions are 45 – 50 minutes long. Psychotherapy can be short-term, dealing with immediate issues, or long-term, dealing with longstanding and complex issues. Therapy may be conducted in an individual, family, couples, or group setting, and can be used by adults, children, or adolescents.

Medication is often used in addition to psychotherapy, and for some disorders the combined treatment is better than either alone. This is a decision to be made by a patient in consultation with the therapist.

Confidentiality is a basic requirement of psychotherapy. Also, although patients share personal feelings and thoughts, intimate physical contact with a therapist is never appropriate, acceptable, or useful.

Does Psychotherapy Work?

Research shows that most patients who receive psychotherapy experience symptom relief and are better able to function in their lives. Psychotherapy has been shown to improve emotions and behaviors and to be linked with positive changes in the brain and body. The benefits also include fewer sick days, less disability, fewer medical problems, and more job stability.

The cost of not treating mental disorders can often be greater personal anguish, substance abuse, poor work performance, broken relationships with family and friends, or death by suicide.

Types of Psychotherapy

Psychiatrists and other mental health professionals use several types of therapy. The choice of therapy type depends on the patient's particular illness and circumstances, and the patient's preference.

Common types of therapy include:

- * **Cognitive behavioral therapy, which helps patients identify and change thinking and behavior patterns that are harmful or ineffective, replacing them with more accurate thoughts and functional behaviors. It often involves practicing new skills in the "real world."**
- * **Interpersonal therapy, which is used to help patients understand underlying interpersonal issues that are troublesome, like unresolved grief, changes in social or work roles, conflicts with significant others, and problems relating to others.**
- * **Psychodynamic therapy, which is based on the idea that behavior and mental well-being are influenced by childhood relationships and experiences, psychological conflicts, and unproductive or inappropriate repetitive thoughts or feelings that are often outside of the person's awareness. It uses the**

relationship with the therapist to work on understanding oneself more fully and to change old patterns so a person can more fully take charge of his or her life.

- * **Psychoanalysis, which is a more intensive form of psychodynamic therapy. Sessions are conducted three or more times a week.**

Choosing a psychotherapist

Psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and some others may have specialized training in psychotherapy. However, only psychiatrists are also trained in medicine and are able to prescribe medications.

Psychiatrists are medical doctors who are specially trained to treat individuals for a broad range of emotional and behavioral problems. They are uniquely qualified to diagnose and treat emotional difficulties because they understand the mind, brain and body and their interactions. They are trained to use psychotherapy, medications, and the two in combination.

Finding a psychiatrist or other therapist with whom an individual can work well is important. Good sources of referrals include family physicians, local psychiatric societies, medical schools, and community health centers.

Psychotherapy

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Resources

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Academy of Cognitive Therapy

260 South Broad Street
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267-350-7683
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American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

112 South Alfred Street
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American Psychoanalytic Association

309 East 49th Street
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American Academy of Psychoanalysis and Dynamic Psychiatry

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Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies

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One in a series of brochures designed to reduce stigma associated with mental illnesses by promoting informed factual discussion of the disorders and their psychiatric treatments. This brochure was developed for educational purposes and does not necessarily reflect opinion or policy of the American Psychiatric Association. For more information, please visit www.healthyminds.org.

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