

# Starting Therapy

Starting therapy can be a significant step toward better mental health, but it's normal to feel a bit uncertain or unsure about the process. To help you feel more comfortable and get the most out of your therapy experience, it's important to prepare yourself emotionally, mentally, and logistically. Here's a comprehensive guide to help you get ready before you begin therapy, covering topics like expectations, readiness, goal-setting, and finances.

## The First Session

Your first session is typically an intake session where the therapist will:

- Ask about your history (medical, psychological, social).
- Discuss the issues that led you to seek therapy.
- Set the tone and explain confidentiality and the therapeutic process.
- Discuss logistics such as session length, frequency, and fees.

The first session is often about establishing rapport and gathering background information, so don't expect immediate resolution of your issues. It's an important foundational step.

## Ongoing Sessions

- Therapy is a process, not a quick fix. Most therapies involve a series of sessions, with each one building on the last.
- Over time, you'll be expected to participate actively. This may involve homework, practicing new skills, or reflecting on what's discussed in between sessions.
- Sessions may involve exploring difficult emotions, and you may be asked to confront uncomfortable feelings or thoughts. This is normal and part of the healing process.

## Assessing Readiness for Therapy

Before beginning therapy, it's essential to assess whether you're ready to engage in the therapeutic process.

### Self-Reflection:

- **Emotional Readiness:** Are you open to exploring deep emotions or difficult topics? Therapy often involves confronting painful memories or beliefs, so it's important to ask yourself whether you're prepared to dive into this process.
- **Willingness to Change:** Therapy requires active participation. Are you ready to make changes in your life? This might mean changing behaviours, thought patterns, or perspectives that have been ingrained over time.
- **Commitment to the Process:** Therapy takes time. Are you prepared to stick with it, even when progress feels slow or difficult? Be ready for the ups and downs that are a natural part of personal growth.

### Assessing Emotional State:

- If you're in the middle of an acute crisis (e.g., experiencing suicidal thoughts, severe depression, or emotional numbness), you might need more immediate intervention, such as crisis therapy or psychiatric support before diving into ongoing therapy.
- If you're unsure about your readiness, it may be helpful to speak to your potential therapist about where you're at emotionally and how you feel about starting therapy. This can help clarify whether therapy is the right fit at this time.

### **Setting Goals for Therapy**

Having clear, defined goals for therapy will help both you and your therapist stay focused. Therapy is most effective when you have an idea of what you hope to achieve, though this may evolve as you go along.

### Identifying Goals:

Before your first session, think about your primary concerns or issues. Some questions to guide you:

- Are you seeking therapy for mental health issues (e.g., anxiety, depression, trauma)?
- Do you want to improve relationships with others, such as family or partners?
- Are you hoping to gain better coping skills for stress or emotional regulation?
- Do you need to process past trauma or difficult experiences?

You may want to write down a few key areas you want to address or things you'd like to change. Keep in mind that these goals might evolve as you progress in therapy.

### Collaborative Goal-Setting:

- During your first few sessions, your therapist will help you refine your goals, making them more specific, measurable, and achievable.
- Goals might evolve as therapy progresses. You may start with a broad goal (e.g., "I want to feel less anxious"), and through the process, work toward more specific objectives (e.g., "I want to learn how to manage anxiety during social events").

Remember: Therapy isn't just about fixing problems; it's also about growth, healing, and building resilience.

### **Financial Considerations and Logistics**

Therapy can be an investment, both emotionally and financially. Understanding the financial aspects of therapy before you begin is crucial to avoid surprises later.

### Understanding Costs:

- **Insurance Coverage:** Check if your health insurance covers therapy. If it does, find out which therapists are within your network and what your out-of-pocket costs will be (co-pays, deductibles, etc.).
- **Sliding Scale Fees:** Some therapists offer sliding scale fees, meaning they adjust their rates based on your financial situation. If you have financial concerns, it's worth asking about this option.
- **Private Pay:** If you're paying out of pocket, session costs can vary. On average, therapy can cost anywhere from \$100 to \$250 per session, depending on the therapist's experience and location.
- **Payment Plans:** Some therapists offer payment plans or may accept credit cards, which can make paying for therapy more manageable.

### Frequency of Sessions:

- Many therapies begin with weekly sessions, but as you make progress, you may transition to bi-weekly or monthly sessions.
- The frequency will also depend on your goals and the therapist's recommendation. For example, if you're managing severe symptoms, weekly sessions may be needed. For maintenance or self-exploration, bi-weekly sessions may be enough.

### Time Commitment:

- Therapy often requires a time commitment. Sessions typically last 50-60 minutes, and you may need to allocate additional time to process your thoughts or complete homework assignments.
- Make sure that therapy fits into your schedule and doesn't add unnecessary stress.

## **Creating the Right Environment for Therapy**

Therapy will be most effective when you feel comfortable and safe. Consider how you can prepare your personal environment to enhance the therapy experience:

### Physical Space:

- **In-Person Therapy:** If your therapy will be in person, make sure you can get to the therapist's office without undue stress. Consider travel time, parking, and any other logistics.
- **Online Therapy:** If you are engaging in teletherapy, ensure you have a private, quiet, and comfortable space for your sessions where you won't be interrupted.
- **Confidentiality:** Make sure you can talk openly without fear of being overheard, especially for sensitive topics. This is particularly important in family therapy or therapy for children/adolescents.

### Emotional Environment:

- **Open-Mindedness:** Come with an open mind, ready to explore new ideas, techniques, and perspectives.
- **Self-Compassion:** Therapy can be emotionally taxing. Be kind to yourself as you go through the process. Remember, growth takes time, and it's okay to take breaks when needed.

### **Preparing Emotionally and Mentally**

Therapy often involves difficult, sometimes painful work. Here's how to prepare emotionally:

### Recognizing Resistance:

- It's normal to feel nervous or even resistant to therapy at first. Some people feel a sense of discomfort when facing their emotions or talking to a stranger about personal issues. Acknowledge these feelings and remind yourself that therapy is a safe and non-judgmental space.
- **Feelings of Vulnerability:** It's common to feel vulnerable during therapy. Allow yourself to experience these feelings without judgment—therapy is a place to explore them.

### Openness to Feedback:

- Therapy involves self-reflection, which can lead to valuable insights. Be open to feedback from your therapist. Remember, their goal is to help you grow, not to criticize you.

Starting therapy can feel like a big step, but the process of preparing yourself can make the experience more productive and rewarding. Take your time to reflect on your goals, get informed about the therapy process, and ensure you are ready both emotionally and logistically.

Therapy is a personal journey toward healing, growth, and understanding. By preparing ahead of time, you can maximize the benefits of the therapy process and feel confident in your path toward better mental health.