

Changing Therapists

It's common for therapy to be a deeply personal experience, and not every therapist will be the right match for every person. If you find that you're not working well with your therapist or you simply don't feel comfortable, it's important to address the situation with honesty and respect. A therapeutic relationship should foster trust, safety, and progress, and if that's not happening, it may be time to make a change.

Here's a step-by-step guide on how to approach the situation when you're considering changing therapists:

1. Recognize the Signs That It's Not Working

Before you take any steps to change therapists, it's important to reflect on why you feel the therapy isn't working. Some signs that it may be time to consider a change include:

- **Lack of Rapport:** You don't feel comfortable opening up, or you don't trust the therapist.
- **No Progress:** Despite consistent sessions, you're not seeing any progress or positive changes in your thoughts, emotions, or behaviour.
- **Unmet Needs:** Your therapist's approach isn't aligning with your needs. For example, if you need more structure, but they're too laid-back, or if you need a specific type of therapy that isn't being offered (e.g., you need trauma-focused therapy but they're using a different method).
- **Feeling Judged or Unheard:** If you feel your therapist is dismissive of your concerns, doesn't fully listen to you, or makes you feel uncomfortable in any way.
- **Therapeutic Style Mismatch:** Your therapist's approach, whether it's too direct or not direct enough, isn't resonating with you. For example, if you need more of a structured approach (e.g., CBT) but they are using a more free-form or exploratory style.
- **Personal Discomfort:** You may feel uneasy about their personal behaviours, mannerisms, or professional boundaries.

Recognizing these signs early can help prevent wasted time and emotional energy. Trust your instincts and feelings.

2. Assess Your Feelings Before Making a Change

Changing therapists is a significant decision and might require some reflection. Take some time to consider:

- **Are your expectations realistic?** Sometimes therapy can feel uncomfortable or challenging, especially in the early stages. It's normal to experience resistance or discomfort while working through difficult emotions. Consider whether the issue is more related to therapy itself (e.g., a therapeutic technique that feels difficult but necessary) or whether it's about the therapist's specific approach or personality.

- Is it the therapist, or could it be other factors? It's important to distinguish between a therapist who isn't a good fit (e.g. difficulty building rapport, not feeling heard or understood) and environmental factors (e.g. the clinical setting, distance, noise) or issues in your own life or mental health that may be affecting your therapy progress (e.g., resistance to change, willingness to share, readiness to engage). Ask yourself if your expectations are being unmet due to the therapist or if there's something going on that's affecting how you engage with therapy

3. Consider Talking to Your Therapist About the Issue

If you feel comfortable, it can be helpful to address your concerns with your therapist directly before deciding to make a change. Most therapists will appreciate the feedback and will be open to adjusting their approach if something isn't working. Here's how you can approach this conversation:

Be Honest and Open:

- "I've been reflecting on our sessions, and I'm finding that I'm not feeling as comfortable as I would like. I think it might be helpful to talk about how we're approaching things."
- "I'm not sure if I'm getting the kind of support I need right now, and I'd like to discuss whether there might be a better approach for me."

Frame It as a Personal Need:

- "I'm finding it difficult to engage fully in the way things are going. I wonder if we can try a different approach."
- "I feel like I might need more structure/less structure/another type of therapeutic technique to feel more comfortable moving forward."

Be Clear About Your Needs:

- If there's a specific issue (e.g., needing a more trauma-informed approach or a more directive style), let them know so they can either adjust or refer you to someone who is a better fit.

This conversation could provide valuable insight into whether the relationship can be repaired, or if a change would be better for both of you.

4. Decide Whether to Change Therapists or Continue

Once you've expressed your concerns, you'll have a better sense of whether things can be improved with this therapist or if it's time to move on. If the therapist is receptive to your feedback and makes adjustments that you feel will work for you, it may be worth staying. On the other hand, if you still feel disconnected or uncomfortable after discussing the issue, it might be best to look for someone else.

5. How to Find a New Therapist

If you decide that a change is necessary, it's important to be proactive in finding a new therapist that better fits your needs. Here's how to make the transition as smooth as possible:

Ask for a Referral:

- If you're leaving your current therapist but still want to continue therapy, you can ask them for a referral. Many therapists are happy to provide recommendations, especially if they feel another professional would be a better fit for you.

Do Your Research:

- **Therapist Directories:** Look for therapist directories or your insurance provider's list to find professionals who specialize in the issues you want to work on (e.g., trauma, anxiety, relationship issues).
- **Ask About Specializations:** If there's a specific treatment or approach you want (e.g., CBT, EMDR, trauma-focused therapy), search for someone with that expertise.
- **Consider Logistics:** Make sure the new therapist's location, availability, and fees align with your needs.

Meet with Potential Therapists:

- You might want to schedule an initial consultation or brief phone call to ask about their approach to therapy, experience, and to gauge if their style feels more aligned with your needs.
- Don't be afraid to "interview" a therapist to make sure you're comfortable with them and that their approach aligns with your therapeutic goals.

6. Make the Transition Smoothly

If you decide to change therapists, here are a few tips for making the transition as smooth as possible:

Inform Your Current Therapist:

- If you're ending the relationship with your current therapist, it's respectful to inform them. A simple, direct message or conversation can help:
 - "I've decided to try a different approach with a new therapist. Thank you for the work we've done together so far."
 - "I've thought about my goals and I believe I need to work with a therapist who specializes in X. I'm grateful for your support, and I think I'll be better served by this change."

Keep Your Information for Future Reference:

- If you've done any work in your current therapy (e.g., exercises, worksheets), keep it! You may want to bring this information with you to your new therapist to help them understand your journey so far.

Be Patient with the New Process:

- Starting with a new therapist may require time to build rapport and trust again. Be patient and gentle with yourself as you navigate the new relationship and therapeutic process.

7. Don't Feel Bad About Changing Therapists

It's important to remember that therapy is about you and your healing. If a therapist isn't the right fit, it doesn't mean you've failed, and it doesn't reflect poorly on the therapist either. Everyone has different needs and personalities, and a strong therapeutic relationship is built on trust and comfort. Seeking a better fit is an important part of your mental health journey, and there's no shame in recognizing that a change is necessary.

Changing therapists can be a difficult decision, but it's ultimately about finding someone who can help you make progress and support you in your mental health journey. By addressing your feelings openly, considering your needs, and taking the steps to find the right match, you can ensure that you're receiving the best care possible. And remember, therapy is a process, and sometimes, the right fit is just around the corner.