



8 Things To Consider Before Entering Into Therapy

by Natalie Carrière, MA, RP

When you are struggling with anxiety or depression, grief, or a difficult life transition, it can be a good idea to talk to a trained professional who can help you process the many difficult emotions you are living through, and help you transition into the next phase of your life.

Before you choose a therapist to accompany and guide you in this process, here are 8 things you should know about therapy:

Choosing the right therapist for you is essential

Not every therapist can be everything to everyone. Credentials are important and you should look for someone whose practice is overseen by a regulatory body. Here in Ontario, the College of Registered Psychotherapists of Ontario, the College of Psychologists of Ontario, and the Ontario College of Social Workers oversee most practitioners who offer therapy.

Finding the right fit is just as important as the credentials therapists hold. You want to make sure that the practitioner you are seeing not only has the right training, expertise and experience to fit your needs, but also has a personality and style that mesh with yours. Their Web sites are a good place to start in order to get to know potential therapists, and most practitioners will be happy to take the time to talk to you over the phone to answer your questions before making an appointment. Sometimes it takes seeing a few different therapists before you find the one that is right for you. Trust your intuition.

So is your commitment to the process

Therapy is about much more than receiving support during a difficult time. A good therapist will offer you support and empathy but they will also challenge you to step out of your comfort zone, learn new skills and try new behaviours. Their job is to help you figure out what you'd like to change in your life to decrease your suffering and then help you navigate those changes.

Therapy is a considerable investment both financially and time-wise. Your commitment to the process, both in and outside of sessions, is essential.

If you aren't ready to commit to change you may not be ready for therapy.

You might feel worse before you feel better

Part of a therapist's job is to delve into difficult emotions in order to help you process them and move forward. Sometimes you will leave a session feeling better and other times you may leave feeling a little raw. That is normal, and that pain can be indicative that you are processing something important.

Therapists appreciate your honesty

The more you open up about yourself the better your therapist will be able to help. If you're not feeling better after a few sessions, being honest about it with them will help you both. And, if you realize it isn't the right fit, it is OK to discuss terminating the relationship or ask for a referral. Being honest about your therapy experience helps practitioners adjust or change their approach and improve.

They don't give advice

A good therapist will not tell you what you should do; for example whether you should leave your marriage or stay and work it out.

Clients often enter therapy hoping they will have someone to tell them what they should do in a particular situation. A therapist's job is to help you figure out how to move forward in the best way possible for you. The goal of a good therapist is to help their clients increase their autonomy and ability to cope effectively, without giving advice.

They are not in it for the money

Their fees may seem high, especially since they are not covered by OHIP and private insurance coverage is often limited. It is important to know that therapists in private practice don't pocket all of their fees. Overhead costs like renting office space, licensing fees, taxes and continuing education all need to be covered by their hourly rate.

Good therapists will also limit the number of clients they see in any given work week. They do this to take care of themselves, in order to offer you the best care possible. This means that they aren't getting paid for every hour of a typical work day. Many therapists also have a sliding scale rates and there's no shame in asking if an arrangement can be made that will help you meet your therapy needs.

They guard your privacy

Anything you tell your therapist is completely confidential. Even the fact that you are in therapy is guarded by your therapist and unless you tell them otherwise they will not acknowledge or say hello to you if they run into you outside a therapy session.

There can be limited instances when a therapist will be compelled by law or professional ethics to break confidentiality; for example if your personal security is at risk, or if a child or elderly person is being abused or harmed. Otherwise what you share stays within the confines of your therapist's office.

They know when you don't need them anymore

While some people benefit from long-term open-ended therapy, for most there is an end-point after making progress and reaching treatment goals. In an ideal treatment scenario, the end of therapy is planned. Goals and task are discussed, agreed upon and monitored throughout. The length of treatment is tailored based on your individual needs.