

# So, What is Therapy Anyway?

■ by Josephine Martinez, MSW, LCSW



Therapy, short for psychotherapy, can seem like a mystery if you have never experienced it.

The word *psychotherapy* can be intimidating.

What does the word “psycho” mean? Pop culture unfortunately uses that word to describe a person who is dangerous, deranged, or homicidal. Because no one wants to think of themselves as “psycho,” it’s understandable that making an appointment to talk with a psychotherapist can be daunting. The word *psych* simply refers to the mind, soul, or

spirit. Psychotherapy is the healing or treatment of the mind, soul or spirit. The words *therapy* and *counseling* are used interchangeably in practice.

## What Really Happens Behind the Closed Door?

The unknown can result in feelings of anxiety and second thoughts about going to see a therapist. It takes courage to make the decision to call and set up a first therapy appointment. It takes courage, determination, and follow-through to actually walk through the front door and tell a stranger your feelings. Your therapist will be aware and sensitive to the nervousness you may feel coming into your first session.

The first therapy session is a brief introduction. In addition to meeting the therapist for the first time, the first session provides new clients with an overview of what to expect. You can expect to have the opportunity to describe the reason(s) which brought you to therapy. The therapist will ask questions to clarify understanding of what you are experiencing. Also, during the first session, basic office policies including scheduling, billing, confidentiality, and a brief packet of paperwork will be reviewed. By the time you leave your first session, you will feel more at ease about the process and have a better understanding of what to expect going forward.

The first few sessions will be used to further describe your experiences and reasons for attending therapy and to develop goals. Ongoing therapy sessions are uniquely based on you. It is important for clients to feel comfortable and that there is a good fit with the therapist. Therapists are able to use a broad set of skills and therapy approaches. These skills help people to develop awareness and understanding of how thoughts, feelings, and behavior patterns impact responses to life situations. Integrative treatment approaches include several types of therapy, such as psychodynamic therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, client/person centered therapy, and many more. Sessions can include talking, art, music, mindfulness, written therapeutic exercises, and more. Therapists are able to adapt sessions to best fit your unique personality and circumstances. From time to time, you will have the opportunity to review your goals with the therapist and talk about progress.

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## Does Therapy Really Work?

Therapy is a practice. Like working out at the gym, you get results based on what you put in. It can seem like you are working hard and not seeing immediate results. With consistency and time, you will start to see positive growth in understanding yourself and your situation better. Being ready, willing, and committed will positively impact the benefits of therapy. It might seem easier to avoid or stuff negative feelings, but putting in the hard work allows you to become stronger. No pain, no gain!

## Why Not Just Talk to My Friends?

Working with a therapist provides an objective perspective from someone who is professionally trained in problem solving, supporting, and empowering clients to gain control over their emotions, decisions, and responses to life circumstances. Talking with a therapist gives clients the freedom to express their thoughts, and feelings, and to explore ideas that might not be safe or acceptable to do in their own relationships. When we talk with our friends and family, we must always be aware of the consequences and how our words can hurt feelings. During a therapy session, clients are able to process feelings and practice how to respond to them without fear of hurting loved ones' feelings or damaging relationships. In addition to addressing problems, therapy is a useful tool to set new goals or improve in specific areas, such as leadership, communication, and relationship skills.

## Why a Christian Therapist?

Christian counseling or therapy is no different than regular counseling in regards to professional aspects and overall procedure when done by a licensed professional. However, Christian counseling has the added component of combining the client's spiritual beliefs into the therapy session itself. Spiritual guidance and nurturing is present in Christian counseling through discussion of how faith and prayer provide hope, build coping skills, and transform people. A Christian counselor is able to help clients strengthen their faith and to provide spiritual support through praying with clients when requested.

Sometimes clients feel guilt or anxiety about seeking therapy. It can seem contradictory to struggle with anxiety and have faith in God, especially when we read verses that instruct us to be anxious for nothing and to cast our cares on him. Imagine that you have a broken arm and seek medical care to treat your injury. God provides healing and can use doctors as a tool to assist the healing. In a similar way, we all have areas that we struggle to handle emotionally and mentally. Therapy is a tool that God can use to provide support and healing of our spirit. A Christian therapist can be the method that God provides for clients to release worry and anxiety.

It is expected to feel some anxiety about attending therapy, especially if it's the first time. Therapists are caring, willing to listen, and non-judgmental. Psychotherapists are resources that can provide great support and guidance through life's ups and downs. Each therapist, client and situation is unique. Diverse people and integrative treatment approaches create a special opportunity to have a personalized experience in receiving treatment and healing of the mind, soul, and spirit.



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