



~ May is Mental Health Awareness Month ~



# What is Therapy?

■ by Kelsee Costanza, MS, LPC

**W**ith the slowing down of our lives during the corona virus, issues may not be getting “lost in the busy” as they once were. Maybe you’ve been thinking about therapy?

If you have never been to therapy before or if you had a previous negative experience in therapy, entering or re-entering therapy can be mysterious and intimidating.

## So, what exactly is therapy?

Psychotherapy, typically called therapy or counseling, is a form of mental health treatment generally involving weekly or biweekly appointments. The process focuses on your emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. Therapy offers a non-judgmental, supportive space in which you can share your story, make sense of your thoughts and feelings, learn coping tools, and gain insight into yourself and the issues you are experiencing.

People seek out therapy for a variety of reasons. There is not an issue “too small” or “not serious enough” that cannot be addressed in therapy.

## What can you expect?

In your first appointment, you can expect to review paperwork; discuss office policies such as confidentiality, scheduling, and billing; learn about the therapeutic process; and share what led you to seek out therapy.

Your first few sessions will primarily focus on further describing your reasons for pursuing therapy, sharing other details of your life such as family history, and developing goals for treatment. Your goals then establish a foundation for the focus of therapy moving forward, and you and your therapist will work collaboratively to achieve those goals. Over time you will review your goals and discuss progress.

Many people wonder how therapy can be helpful if it is “just talking.” While therapy does largely involve talking, it is much more than that. In therapy, you are processing your emotions and thoughts, receiving insights or feedback from your therapist, and discussing specific strategies to help you cope with your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Therapy sessions may also include experiential components such as mindfulness exercises, art or movement therapy, and homework assignments to complete between therapy sessions.

There are many different evidence-based modalities or techniques that therapists use, which have been shown to be effective for particular issues. Your therapist will use these approaches according to their education and training. However, therapy is not a “one size fits all” treatment; different approaches may resonate with you more than others. You can expect your therapist to tailor the process to meet your unique needs.

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*Promoting health and wholeness through professional counseling, consultation and education from a Christian perspective.*



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## What makes therapy successful?

Research has shown that the most important factor in determining successful treatment outcomes is the therapeutic relationship between the client and therapist. The therapeutic relationship describes how you and your therapist connect and engage with each other. You should feel connected to your therapist and view him/her as someone who is trustworthy, compassionate, genuine, accepting, and non-judgmental.

Another key component to the success of therapy is collaboration between therapist and client. With collaboration, both client and therapist work toward maintaining the therapeutic relationship, agree on therapy goals, and work together throughout the therapeutic process.

Therapy is a process that takes work. The amount of progress you will see correlates to the amount of effort and time you put into it. You may not see immediate, big results. However, over time, you will notice bits of progress that are leading to a better understanding of self, healthier choices, and more balance. Therapy is different for every individual and depending on what you are hoping to get out of therapy, it can take weeks to months to years.

## What is different about Christian counseling?

If you are seeing a licensed professional, Christian-based professional counseling is not much different than any other professional counseling in terms of process, techniques, or overall procedures. The difference is that with Christian-based counseling, your counselor is a Christian too and has a foundational understanding of your faith and can integrate faith into the treatment process. Additionally, as a Christian, your counselor will rely on the Holy Spirit for guidance and wisdom in the treatment process.



Many people take comfort in knowing that their faith and spiritual values will be honored by their therapist. You can share your spiritual beliefs and practices with your therapist without having to explain the basic tenets of your faith, as your therapist is also intimately familiar with Christianity. It is impossible to separate your faith from the rest of your life, and Christian-based counseling allows for open discussions about how your faith connects

to what you are experiencing. You may also share prayer requests with your therapist and talk to your therapist about praying together.

Our God is a healing God and He uses therapists as a conduit for the healing process. With a professional Christian counselor walking alongside you and bearing witness to your story, you can be reminded of the hope and restoration that God provides. *“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous hand.”* (Isaiah 41:10) ■

*Kelsee Costanza is a Licensed Professional Counselor and sees clients in our Chicago (South Loop) and River Forest, IL locations.*



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