

How to Get the Most Out of Your Therapy Experience



Therapy is an empowering process to help you work through some of the challenges that life can bring. Whatever the circumstances that have prompted you to seek help, here are some tips for getting the most out of your experience:

▶ **Think of therapy as an investment in yourself, with lifelong return potential.**

We live in a culture that prizes instant fixes, Dr. Phil ten-second sound bites, and effortless “tricks” to magically solve complex life difficulties. Unfortunately, most important life changes usually take a little longer to achieve than we would like them to. Successful therapy requires a certain commitment of time and effort from you for things to get better in your life. As with many things, what you get out of therapy will depend on what you put into it. Think of therapy as an investment in who you are as a person, rather than just a place to go and “fix problems.” Good therapy should be addressing not only your present life circumstances, but also helping you to define the kind of person you are looking to become, and support your growth accordingly.

▶ **Reflect on your purpose and needs.**

Sometimes clients may believe that the therapist is going to have an agenda set for each session with all the topics / focal areas for discussion laid out. Most counsellors do not work this way though. It can be helpful to think of the therapist as being more of a consultant and facilitator to you about your life, rather than an all-knowing educator or problem-solving guru. By spending a little time *before* each meeting reflecting on your priorities, goals, and what you would like to focus on, you'll be able to maximize the time you have in session.

▶ **Journal in-between your sessions.**

Writing can be a great outlet to express thoughts and feelings you are having. Make notes about the key ideas / strategies from your last session that you want to incorporate into your life. Record your successes and changes as well as areas you are still struggling with as you go along. You may find that writing about your life raises points or ideas that you want to focus on in your next session.

▶ **Let your therapist know about changes—for better or for worse.**

Sometimes clients may inadvertently overlook small successes they had between sessions, or feel that the therapy time should only focus on problems and difficulties. But remember that most change is gradual, so small successes really are significant. Therapy is certainly a place where you and your therapist can celebrate what is going well! Besides, therapists really appreciate hearing about changes that are happening—and that includes both successes and continued challenges you face.

▶ **Periodically review how things are going with your therapist.**

It's helpful to review how the therapy process is working for you after several sessions. In particular, if you have found some specific parts of the process to be really helpful or if you have some concerns or questions, a good therapist will be very interested to know about it and appreciate your feedback. He or she may also offer feedback or further ideas to you about ways you can get even more from the sessions.

▶ **Set boundaries that allow yourself enough time to and from your sessions.**

Life can be busy and involve a lot of rushing around, but do your best to avoid scheduling a therapy session in a crunch where you barely have enough time to get to and from your appointment. You'll feel distracted and stressed out during your session...and that kind of goes against the spirit of why you're coming in!

▶ **Homework helps!**

Some therapists suggest homework between sessions, which might consist of questions to reflect on, new strategies to try out, or maybe something to read or a worksheet. Often this homework will help you to go significantly further with implementing some concepts from the session, so it's like an extension to the therapy!

▶ **Reward yourself!**

This one is simple: Making changes in your life can be hard work, so be good to yourself for rising to the challenge.

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