Individual Therapy (Psychotherapy)

Individual therapy—also known as psychotherapy, talk therapy, or counseling—is a collaborative process between therapist and client that aims to facilitate change and improve quality of life. Therapy can help people confront barriers that interfere with emotional and mental well-being, and it can also increase positive feelings such as compassion, self-esteem, love, courage, and peace. Many people find they enjoy the therapeutic journey of becoming more self-aware, and they may pursue ongoing psychotherapy as a means of self-growth and self-actualization.

What Does Individual Therapy or Psychotherapy Treat and When Is It Recommended?

Psychotherapy can treat specific, diagnosable mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, or ADHD, in addition to everyday concerns, such as relationship problems, stress management, career ambitions, or other issues that may affect a person's mental well-being.

When specific issues or mental health conditions begin to cause distress and interfere with a person's normal activities, it may be time to seek therapy. Distress can manifest in the form of problematic beliefs, feelings, behaviors, and sensations in the body. A therapist can facilitate lifestyle changes, serve as a listening ear, help identify underlying causes of symptoms, and provide specific strategies or techniques for changing unwanted thoughts, behaviors, or emotions. Through therapy, people gather tools to manage symptoms, alleviate stress, and face challenges.
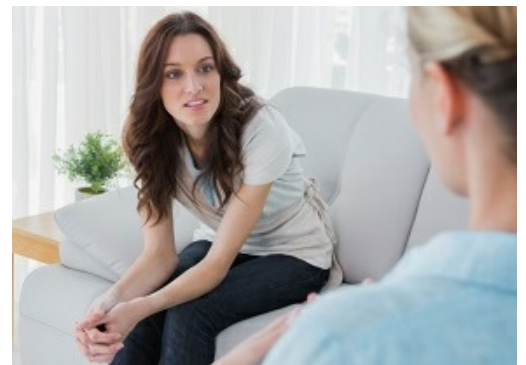
Who Provides Psychotherapy and How Does It Work?

A number of specialists can provide psychotherapy to clients, and qualifications to be a psychotherapist are generally determined by a state licensing board. In most cases, therapists have at least a master's degree, though students in the process of obtaining a master's degree may perform therapy under the direction of a supervisor. Therapist titles include licensed marriage and family therapist (LMFT), licensed clinical social worker (LCSW), psychologist, and licensed professional counselor (LPC).

There are many different types of therapy and psychological approaches to understanding and helping, and therapists may use a single treatment approach, or combine several. These treatment approaches are called modalities, and examples of psychotherapeutic modalities include humanistic, cognitive behavioral, emotionally focused, feminist, and psychoanalytic.

How Are Therapy Goals, Frequency, and Duration Determined?

In general, the goal of psychotherapy is to talk through mental health issues and help clients heal, grow, and move toward more productive, psychologically healthy lives. Good therapy is client-driven, and specific goals for therapy will be determined by you and your therapist.

Individual psychotherapy sessions typically last between 45 and 60 minutes. The frequency and duration of therapy will depend largely on your needs, treatment goals, and progress. Many concerns are readily resolved with short-term therapy, and other chronic or more complex concerns require long-term commitment before improvement is

realized.

Is Psychotherapy an Effective Form of Treatment?

Ultimately, the individual's desire and determination to heal play an essential role in whether psychotherapy is successful. Finding the right therapist is also an important component of effective therapy.

Research has shown that psychotherapy results in fewer relapses of common conditions such as moderate depression and anxiety, and that the positive effects of good therapy extend well beyond treatment. In fact, many clients report improved conditions long after therapy has ended. In general, psychotherapy is often more effective than psychotropic drugs or medical treatments alone, which may cause harmful side effects. In addition, many therapeutic modalities are evidence-based, meaning they have been subject to research studies and clinical observations, and they have been analyzed for effectiveness.

History of Psychotherapy

The term psychotherapy is derived from the Greek words for soul and healing. The ancient Greeks were probably the first to treat mental health conditions as ailments rather than as a result of demonic possession as was common in other cultures at the time. Unfortunately, treatments for severe mental health concerns were harsh and inhumane for many centuries before reformers lobbied for improved conditions beginning in the 18th century.

While it's likely that informal types of psychological counsel were practiced throughout time, modern psychotherapy developed toward the end of the 19th century in Western Europe. The first laboratory for psychological research was established by Wilhelm Wundt, and Sigmund Freud's "talking cure" laid the foundation for psychoanalysis. A number of psychotherapeutic techniques flourished in the 20th century, inspired by the dominant paradigm of the day, such as behaviorism, established in the 1920s, and existentialism, which took root in the 1950s. Today's psychological treatments are innumerable and varied, incorporating such diverse fields as mindfulness and neurobiology.

References:

1. American Psychological Association. (2012). *Recognition of Psychotherapy Effectiveness*. Retrieved from http://www.apa.org/about/policy/resolution-psychotherapy.aspx

2. Goodwin, James C. (2008). *A History of Modern Psychology*: Third Edition. Danvers, MA: John Wiley & Sons.

3. Public Broadcasting Service. (2002). Timeline: Treatments for Mental Illness. *A Brilliant Madness*. Retrieved from http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/nash/timeline/

Last Update: 12-16-2013