

What happens when therapy goes wrong?

Client information

Kathleen Daymond and Sarah Millward from our **Get help with counselling concerns service**

Thinking about the issue

Think carefully about why you're feeling uncomfortable with your therapy. For example, your concerns might include:

Concerns about practical issues

- My therapist agreed to see me on reduced fees but now she wants to increase her charges and I can't afford it.
- My therapist keeps changing the time of my appointment at short notice.
- My therapist has suggested we meet at his home rather than my GP's surgery where we started and I don't feel comfortable with it.
- My therapist says she can't carry on working with me because she's got a full time job. I feel she's dumping me.

Concerns about the process

- My therapist often doesn't say anything and waits for me to speak. The long silences make me feel uncomfortable.
- I keep asking my therapist what I should do but he won't give me any advice. I expected to be given more help making decisions.
- My therapist often talks about herself in sessions. I feel annoyed because sometimes the sessions are more about her than me.
- I feel very uncomfortable because my counsellor takes notes during our sessions.

Concerns over the relationship

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Talking to your therapist

It's best to tell your therapist what is wrong as soon as you can.

Many therapists will invite you to give regular feedback during your sessions about what aspects of your therapy have been helpful and what have not. This can help you deal with issues as they arise. If they don't offer time for this, you should feel free to raise any concerns in your next session.

Sometimes it's easier to say things about problems in a relationship when there is some distance between you, so if you feel uncomfortable discussing it face-to-face you could email, telephone or write them a letter.

Key points

- you should raise any concerns you have with your therapist
- be open and give honest feedback about how you experience your therapy
- tell your therapist what is and what is not helpful
- don't be afraid to raise concerns about practical matters such as fee increases or changes to appointment times

Taking it further

If you've tried talking to your therapist and their response was unhelpful, or if you have serious concerns about your therapist's competence, think carefully about what you want to happen next.

Do you want an apology, an acknowledgement of what happened and a guarantee that it won't happen again? Or perhaps you simply want an explanation about why something happened? It can be useful to put your concerns in writing, explaining the outcome you'd like and giving your therapist time to respond.

Your therapist may provide a satisfactory explanation or apology so you feel able to carry on with therapy.

But if you're not satisfied by the response, if you can't relate to your therapist, or if you don't feel safe with them, you don't have to continue. You may feel trapped and think you have to carry on but you don't. You can decide when to stop.

You also have the right to look for another therapist. If you're receiving therapy through an organisation, such as a GP practice, EAP or voluntary organisation, you may be able to switch to another therapist. If you're working with a private practitioner, you can simply approach another therapist.

If you're still really unhappy, you may wish to make an official complaint.

