

Therapists may see clients as:

- **Individuals (one to one therapy)**
The most common way of receiving therapy is where you and your therapist are alone together in the same room. But you can also receive individual therapy by telephone or online (by email or via the internet).
- **Couples (relationship therapy)**
If you're having relationship difficulties, counsellors may work with you as a couple or as individuals.
- **Families**
Family counselling can be for the whole family or just some family members and may involve one or more therapists. It might include parents, siblings, extended family and looked after children ple or

- Counsellors and psychotherapists

These are generic terms that cover therapists providing a wide variety of psychological help. They mostly work outside hospitals in a wide variety of settings including GP surgeries, mental health centres, voluntary agencies, organisations, schools, further education, the workplace and in private practice.

Counsellors and psychotherapists will help you understand yourself, your behaviours and relationships with others. You would probably see them on a weekly basis for a set number of sessions.

How can therapy help?

Therapy can be helpful if you're feeling painful emotions or facing difficult decisions, if you want to improve or change your relationships, or if you'd like to develop a better understanding of yourself or others.

Perhaps something unsettling has happened, such as a bereavement, redundancy, divorce or health scare. There may be something in your past that's not been dealt with and is now interfering with your daily life. Or you may want help to cope with issues such as anxiety, stress or personal problem solving.

You may feel isolated and have no one to talk to, but sometimes even those with the most supportive friends and family can find it difficult to explain why they're feeling anxious or depressed. Or you might just find it easier to talk about personal, family or relationship issues with someone independent.

But you don't have to be in, or on the verge of crisis, before having therapy. You might be feeling dissatisfied with life in general or seeking balance in your life.

(See [What therapy can help with](#) on our website for information on how counselling can help with all these issues and more.)

What happens in therapy?

Therapy is time set aside by you and your therapist to talk about the issues that have made you seek therapy. It's not just a friendly chat like you'd have with friends or family. Your therapist may offer

therapist to contact your GP or any other agency, you should first agree this with them and confirm the issues to be discussed.

Within organisations such as GP practices, schools, universities and some therapeutic agencies, your information may need to be shared so they can best help you. Make sure you're clear what information may be shared and with whom.

Disclosures

However, there are certain circumstances – for example if there's a serious risk of imminent harm to you or to others - when they may have to break your confidence. For example, if a client is seriously mentally ill and needs hospitalisation, or if the therapist suspects a child or adult is being abused, they may refer the client to a GP, social services or the police. Such referrals are usually made with the client's knowledge and consent but may not be, depending upon circumstances.

Sometimes therapists are required by law to break confidentiality, for example in the case of terrorist activities. In this situation it can be a criminal offence for the therapist to tell or 'tip off' the client that they've made a disclosure.

Disclosures can also be made at the client's request – for example if the client has been abused and asks for help or for assessment reports to help with court cases.

You should discuss confidentiality in your first session with your therapist and agree on the limits of confidentiality for your work together.

Contracts and boundaries

Your therapist should agree a contract with you establishing clear boundaries. The contract should cover:

- dates and times of therapy sessions
- how and when you can contact each other
- the limits of confidentiality
- the nature of the relationship – clarifying that it is a professional relationship and the therapist will not be a personal friend

You can ask for a written contract if your therapist does not offer one.

(See our client information sheet on Boundaries for further information.)

How to get therapy

Through the NHS

Your GP can help you decide what type of therapy may be best for you and will know what is available locally. Some GPs have therapists within the practice and offer a free counselling service for patients. If not, they will be able to refer you to an NHS or other local service, or provide a list for you.

NHS staff may be able to refer you to specialist NHS mental health clinics, located in hospitals or in separate premises. Services such as CAMHS (Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services) may accept referrals from schools, Social Services or other sources. Some hospitals also offer referrals to specialist staff if you're receiving treatment for specific conditions.

In some areas, the NHS provides talking therapies under the IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) programme. You can sometimes self-refer to these services. Try the NHS Service Finder (www.nhs.uk/service-search) to look for services in your area.

Advantages:

- services are usually free
- therapists are likely to be qualified and experienced

Disadvantages:

- you may have little choice of therapist or type of therapy
- there may be a long waiting list
- you may be limited to six to 10 sessions

Through your employer

Your employer may have an inhouse staff counselling service or offer confidential referrals through an occupational health service or Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). These services are designed to help employees who are having personal or work-related problems that are affecting their job performance, health and mental wellbeing. In some cases, you may need to get permission from your line manager to use the service.

Advantages:

- services are usually free for employees
- initial contact is usually through a telephone helpline
- there's unlikely to be a waiting list
- therapists are likely to have an understanding of workplace issues

Disadvantages:

- you'll probably have a limited number of sessions
- depending on the contract your employer has with the EAP, your line manager may need to be told that you're seeing a therapist and this should be explained at the start of counselling so you can choose whether to continue. However, this may also be considered an advantage, for example, having time off work to attend the therapy, needing workload adjusted or a reduced working pattern for a period of time.

Through your school, college or university

Many colleges and universities have a free and confidential inhouse counselling service. You can usually find out what they offer and how to make an appointment through the counselling service section of their website.

Some schools also offer counselling services. You can speak with a teacher or the Head if you feel your child needs therapy. Or if the school has a school-based counsellor, your child can approach the counsellor themselves.

Advantages:

- services are usually free of charge
- available during school/college/university hours
- confidential
- easy to access

- you'll have a choice of therapists, although you may need to wait if your preferred therapist is not available
- except under exceptional circumstances, no one needs to know that you're seeking help
- you should be able to have as many sessions as you need
- you may feel more in charge of your therapy if you're paying for it

Disadvantages:

- you'll need to pay, although costs vary and may be negotiable
- your therapist is likely to charge you if you miss or cancel a session
- you'll need to make your own checks on the qualifications, experience and suitability of a therapist

Before starting therapy

If you have a choice of therapist, it's important to ask questions to ensure that a therapist is suitably qualified and experienced, and that you will feel comfortable talking openly with them.

If you're receiving therapy through the NHS or another free service, you may not be able to choose your therapist. But you can still ask questions to ensure you're happy about the service you will receive. You should tell your therapist if there is anything you do not understand or are not comfortable with.

Good questions to ask might include:

- What qualifications, experience and accreditations do they have? Are they on a register accredited by the Professional Standards Authority? Do they adhere to an ethical code?
- when



