

9 Ways to Help Your Therapist

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Are you in therapy or thinking about beginning? Sometimes life presents challenging circumstances, ideas, preferences and feelings; many can be addressed in therapy. It will be especially worth your while if you have undergone some major life events like divorce, other significant loss, illness or lifestyle change. Some people use psychotherapy to understand themselves and want to find ways to change unwanted behavioral, emotional, or thinking patterns. Many have a presenting problem, find it difficult to cope, and want to solve their problem. Going to therapy is also a great form of self-care. Do you ever wonder how you could make your therapy more productive and get the most out of it? Let us explore nine ideas for making the most of your time with a therapist. See if the following assists you in this process.

1. First, pay attention to feelings, thoughts and wishes you notice, as you get ready for a counseling session. Therapists love to hear about these things. Spot feeling sensations in your mind as well as in your physical body realms. Take a risk and share these with your therapist. If it's the first time you are meeting with a professional, you may be anxious and fear filled, wondering things like, "Am I crazy?"

If true, go ahead and say so as part of your therapy session. Possibly, there are reoccurring thoughts that come to your mind. Naturally, you may second guess yourself and stop yourself from expressing these. I encourage you to take a risk and plunge right into them so you can clear the air and make it easier to continue.

2. Next, tell your therapist when they miss your point when expressing yourself or when you feel uncomfortable. Therapists are human and not psychic. It's amazing how helpful you can be by correcting us therapists. This also serves to practice assertive communication skills. Your therapist does have power, so pushing through your fear of speaking up or confronting is a way to build your own confidence. Feedback allows a genuine experience for both parties in the exchange.

Include things such as, you may be a person who's just not a risk taker, so it takes time to feel when its right to act. Your suggestions may include how you best receive help. Possibly you need to spew, speak thoughts aloud and be listened to as your primary need. In contrast, some may speak all over the place and need structured guidance or to be asked questions by the therapist. You'll know by the way you feel inside or when some flow happens.

3. Tip off your therapist by adding your inklings. Sometimes you know that a subject needs to be brought up in therapy but you find this very difficult to bring up. Let this be known. It is fine requesting that your therapist ask you directly about deep issues because you won't bring it up on your own.

4. Before a session ask yourself, "What are my primary topics that would maximize my time?" You may not know what they are. In this case just speak about something that needs improvement or repeatedly comes up that bothers you. Rambling is also a valid way to enter a session. A therapist may build upon and choose something to focus upon.
5. Educate yourself. Read about topics that are relevant to your mental health. For example, if you struggle with finding your voice in a primary relationship, you might Google assertiveness or fair fighting strategies. Bring such information to your session and let it be known that you would be interested in learning more. If you read about a topic or see something of interest on TV share it with your therapist. Also, ask your therapist for materials and resources that may help you, such as saying affirmations to build self-esteem. Perhaps your therapist is waiting and happy to provide these, as well as other techniques and tools that may help you. Therapists like to learn as well and can benefit from a new topic or technique you discover.
6. Write down questions to take into your therapy. Ask a trusted friend or family member for suggestions of topics they see that would be helpful for you to address in therapy.
7. Take notes during the session. Ask for homework assignments to support your inner work. You may also request your therapist give you some bullet points to consider between sessions. Provide feedback to your therapist. For example, say I don't do well with homework, but I like one thing to work on between sessions.
8. Journal write daily. Use a notebook devoted to this or write on your computer. Journaling involves writing what is being experienced at the moment, what you are feeling, reacting to, or resisting. Answer simple questions such as, "What is my mind and body telling me at this moment, what am I feeling right now, are these negative or positive? What confusing or damaging things do I participate in, who in my life 'sets me off' and what did they do that led me to react? What do I want different in my life?" This is a basic way to gain insight, reduce feeling overwhelmed and discover what is really important to you. It is a way to provide self-counseling and get more out of your sessions. By the way, I recommend keeping your journal protected and private by hiding or locking it away and if writing on your computer using coded language including passwords if needed.
9. If you are timid and cannot talk about things, say so to your therapist. Some family systems condition and sometimes traumatize their children with guilt, shame and punishment if they talk to anyone outside the family about the problems or

dysfunction they see. As adults, these people still feel this fear and resist sharing family secrets. In this case, it may take you time to open fully and trust that talking about these things are actually good for you. Consider asking someone who knows you well to help you formulate some ideas of problems they see that could be addressed in therapy. Write them down and share with your therapist. Therapy is easier if you have at least one other person encouraging you to get help. Take note, if more than one friend says you need therapy. Take it seriously. If you need support to begin therapy, consider asking a concerned friend or family member to accompany you to your first visit. This third person may be a catalyst and present issues that you find difficult to talk about. Observing you with this third person gives a therapist information too.

Typically, a therapist won't book a first appointment via a third person unless it is a minor. With discretion, a therapist may deal uniquely with this custom and set up an appointment through a third party, especially when there is a crisis.

Many individuals are timid or uncomfortable with receiving help. Life is full of challenges and this may be yours. Allow yourself to face discomfort as you receive help through therapy. You are always in charge of your therapy. You have the freedom to change your mind or the plan you entered into for therapy. You also have the privilege of going against your therapist's opinion or recommendation. This can be tough because the therapeutic relationship is a close bond, however, if you find yourself in spot where you are not open to an idea or not ready, then chose what you know is right for you. It is of utmost importance to remain loyal to yourself and honor your resistance. Go ahead and follow your truth and inner wisdom with choices that reflect you. You are the only one who knows what is right for you, truly. Therapists adjust and can be happy you were able to do as you chose.

If you find it difficult to take any of my suggestions discussed above, you may find two simple techniques helpful to move you in a new direction; visualization and affirmation. Let's suppose you are not able to journal write between sessions. You know its a good idea, yet you do not discipline yourself to sit for a few minutes each day to write. Begin by closing your eyes and simply picture yourself in therapy liking the insights you are receiving. Then with your imagination, see yourself in a comfortable place sitting with a notebook and pen or at your computer writing about your thoughts, feelings, insights, irritations, etc. Additionally, go an extra step in your mind by getting the feeling of what it would be like to REALLY follow through with journaling. This is a form of creative visualization and is powerful for readying you to take the next step.

Related to this, is the use of affirming statements. Notice something you want yet cannot do it, such as speaking up for and saying no to someone. Maybe your negative voice says things like, " If I set a boundary the other person will get angry or emotionally pull away from me. I'm not strong enough to handle their rejection". If you were afraid to speak up, you would affirm some of the following to yourself, "I deserve to speak up and set a boundary. I'm open to speaking up. I am stronger now. I am ready to face my fear of rejection. I am seeing where I could have said no. I will speak up someday soon." It is recommended that you write and speak these aloud to yourself.

Let me also address the idea that a certain therapist is not a match for you or that you are ready to stop therapy, having received what you needed at this time from treatment. It may

be wise to decide to close your treatment. You may have a gut feeling or knowing about this. The ideal is to do this face-to-face during your next session. Each of you deserve closure on the work you have done together. If you cannot be that direct, then contact your therapist through another means such as email, phone message or letter as soon as you can. If you fail to do that, the therapist will figure it out when you drop out of treatment. It's about taking care of you. If you still notice the same problems showing up, I recommend you look for someone else to help you. It's all part of your therapeutic process.

In summary, there are positive steps you can take to add to your therapy. Paying attention to what you are feeling is very important as is direct communication with your therapist so you can be understood better, including when you feel misunderstood. Offer direction to your therapist so you can tailor your sessions to your style of receiving help. Consider journaling to do some self-therapy. As you participate in your therapy you help create a positive, nurturing experience. It will make for a worthwhile investment in your own self-growth, as I know very well having been on both sides of the fence.