

Sometimes people are told by teachers or parents that they *have* to go see a therapist - because they have been behaving in ways that are unacceptable, self-destructive, dangerous, or worrisome. When therapy is someone else's idea at first, a person may feel like resisting the whole idea. But learning a bit more about what therapy involves and what to expect can help make it seem like a good thing after all.

What Is Therapy?

Therapy is the treatment of a disorder or illness. Therapy isn't just for mental health, of course - you've probably heard people discussing other types of medical therapy, such as physical therapy or chemotherapy. But the word "therapy" is most often used to mean **psychotherapy** (sometimes called "talk therapy")- the psychological treatment of emotional and behavioral problems.

Psychotherapy is a process that's a lot like learning. Through therapy, people learn about themselves. They discover ways to overcome troubling feelings or behaviors, develop inner strengths or skills, or make changes in themselves or their situations.

A psychotherapist (therapist for short) is a person who has been professionally trained to help people with their emotional and behavioral problems. Psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, counselors, and school psychologists are the titles of some of the licensed professionals who work as therapists. The letters following a therapist's name (for example, MD, PhD, EdD, MA, LCSW) refer to the particular education and degree that therapist has received.

Some therapists specialize in working with a certain age group or on a particular type of problem. Other therapists treat a mix of ages and issues. Some therapists work in hospitals, clinics, or counseling centers. Others work in schools or in psychotherapy offices.

What Do Therapists Do?

Most therapy is a combination of talking and listening, building trust, and receiving support and guidance.

Through talking, listening, and observing, a therapist is able to evaluate the problem situation that needs attention and care. In doing so, the therapist can help a person figure out what's been making him or her so unhappy and how to get things going on a better track again.

It might take a few meetings with a therapist before a person decides to talk openly. Trust is the most important ingredient in therapy - after all, therapy involves being open and honest with someone and talking about sensitive topics like feelings, ideas, relationships, problems, disappointments, and hopes. A therapist is trained to be patient with people who need to take their own time talking about themselves and their situation.

Most of the time, a person meets with a therapist one on one, which is known as **individual therapy**. Sometimes, though, a therapist might work with a family (called **family therapy**) or a group of people who all are dealing with similar issues (called **group therapy** or a **support group**). Family therapy gives family members a chance to talk together with a therapist about problems that involve them all. Group therapy and support groups help people give and receive support and learn from each other and their therapist by discussing the issues they have in common.

What Happens During Therapy?

If you see a therapist, he or she will talk with you about your feelings, thoughts, relationships, and important values. At the beginning, therapy sessions are focused on discussing what you'd