

What to Expect When Seeing a Psychologist

Starting Treatment

Effective psychotherapy requires a good match between client and therapist. During your first few sessions you and your therapist will determine if they are a good fit. If not, they can refer you to a therapist that they believe can serve you better.

When you arrive at your first appointment, you will be asked for any financial documentation that was requested, such as insurance cards, who is responsible for payments, etc. This should be previously discussed when you are scheduling your first appointment as not all psychologist accept the same form of insurance and payment.

The initial visit is a period for you and your therapist to get to know each other and get an idea how to proceed. Keep in mind that psychotherapy is a long-term process. You will not get any instant solutions to your problems the first day. Therapy is about equipping you with life-long solutions rather than a quick fix. The psychologist and patient work the best when they work together. You are likely to gain the most benefit from counseling if you are committed to the process and attend regularly. You can discuss with your psychologist the frequency of your appointments and what will work best for your needs.

Since biological factors can contribute to unwanted psychological distress, the psychologist may ask you about your health, diet, and family medical history. In some cases medical assessment and intervention is helpful and/or necessary. Some individuals benefit from a combination of psychotherapy and drug therapy.

Clients typically schedule 50-minute appointments one time per week, or once every other week. The length and frequency of your sessions will be your decision. Longer sessions that are scheduled close together tend to result in the most efficient outcome.

What if I need Medication or Further Treatment?

At times the level, duration or nature of a patient's distress is such that the use of medication appears to be indicated. Should this situation arise, you can discuss with your psychologist the symptoms and circumstances that indicate that medication may be useful or necessary. Psychologists are not physicians and consequently do not prescribe medication at this time. They work closely with psychiatrists and they, at times, collaborate on issues of medication, ensuring that your specific needs are met and ensuring continuity of care. If medication were indicated, you would typically use the services of a psychiatrist who serves as a "medication consultant" while continuing psychological treatment with your psychologist.

In certain circumstances the seriousness of a patient's condition may require a higher level of care than can be provided in an outpatient setting. If this should become necessary, you can discuss the need for a hospital stay or admission to a residential treatment program and identify the program that best meets your unique needs. The final decision to enter a program will be yours.

Ending Treatment

In most cases, the time comes when the circumstances that indicated psychological treatment are fully understood and resolved. A natural ending point or termination becomes evident to both the patient and the psychologist. Either of us may terminate our work together if we believe it is in your best interest. Termination should not be done causally, as it can be a valuable part of your treatment with the psychologist. Typically the decision is made jointly, allowing sufficient time to review your time in therapy together including accomplishments and any outstanding issues that remain. If referrals are warranted, they will be made at this time.

* Information obtained from the Maryland Psychological Association