



▼ Introduction

Do you ever feel too overwhelmed to deal with your problems? If so, you're not alone.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (http://www.nimh.nih.gov/statistics/1ANYDIS_ADULT.shtml), more than a quarter of American adults experience depression, anxiety or another mental disorder in any given year. Others need help coping with a serious illness, losing weight or stopping smoking. Still others struggle to cope with relationship troubles, job loss, the death of a loved one, stress, substance abuse or other issues. And these problems can often become debilitating.

What is psychotherapy?

A psychologist can help you work through such problems. Through psychotherapy, psychologists help people of all ages live happier, healthier and more productive lives.

In psychotherapy, psychologists apply scientifically validated procedures to help people develop healthier, more effective habits. There are several approaches to psychotherapy — including cognitive-behavioral, interpersonal and other kinds of talk therapy — that help individuals work through their problems.

Psychotherapy is a collaborative treatment based on the relationship between an individual and a psychologist. Grounded in dialogue, it provides a supportive environment that allows you to talk openly with someone who's objective, neutral and nonjudgmental. You and your psychologist will work together to identify and change the thought and behavior patterns that are keeping you from feeling your best.

By the time you're done, you will not only have solved the problem that brought you in, but you will have learned new skills so you can better cope with whatever challenges arise in the future.

When should you consider psychotherapy?

Because of the many misconceptions (</helpcenter/psychotherapy-myths.aspx>) about psychotherapy, you may be reluctant to try it out. Even if you know the realities instead of the myths, you may feel nervous about trying it yourself.

Overcoming that nervousness is worth it. That's because any time your quality of life isn't what you want it to be, psychotherapy can help.

Some people seek psychotherapy because they have felt depressed, anxious or angry for a long time. Others may want help for a chronic illness that is interfering with their emotional or physical well-being. Still others may have short-term problems they need help navigating. They may be going through a divorce, facing an empty nest, feeling overwhelmed by a new job or grieving a family member's death, for example.

Signs that you could benefit from therapy include:

- You feel an overwhelming, prolonged sense of helplessness and sadness.
- Your problems don't seem to get better despite your efforts and help from family and friends.
- You find it difficult to concentrate on work assignments or to carry out other everyday activities.
- You worry excessively, expect the worst or are constantly on edge.
- Your actions, such as drinking too much alcohol, using drugs or being aggressive, are harming you or others.



What are the different kinds of psychotherapy?

There are many different approaches to psychotherapy. Psychologists generally draw on one or more of these. Each theoretical perspective acts as a roadmap to help the psychologist understand their clients and their problems and develop solutions.

The kind of treatment you receive will depend on a variety of factors: current psychological research, your psychologist's theoretical orientation and what works best for your situation.

Your psychologist's theoretical perspective will affect what goes on in his or her office. Psychologists who use cognitive-behavioral therapy, for example, have a practical approach to treatment. Your psychologist might ask you to tackle certain tasks designed to help you develop more effective coping skills. This approach often involves homework assignments. Your psychologist might ask you to gather more information, such as logging your reactions to a particular situation as they occur. Or your psychologist might want you to practice new skills between sessions, such as asking someone with an elevator phobia to practice pushing elevator buttons. You might also have reading assignments so you can learn more about a particular topic.

In contrast, psychoanalytic and humanistic approaches typically focus more on talking than doing. You might spend your sessions discussing your early experiences to help you and your psychologist better understand the root causes of your current problems.

Your psychologist may combine elements from several styles of psychotherapy. In fact, most therapists don't tie themselves to any one approach. Instead, they blend elements from different approaches and tailor their treatment according to each client's needs.

The main thing to know is whether your psychologist has expertise in the area you need help with and whether your psychologist feels he or she can help you.

► Finding a psychologist

► Selecting a psychologist

► Getting started

► Making your first appointment

- Toolkit (23)
- Conference Materials (20)
- Bibliography (17)
- Guidelines (17)
- Manual/Handbook (17)
- Directory (15)
- Policy/Procedure (15)
- Letter (13)
- News Responses (13)
- Bylaws (12)
- Chart/Table/Figure (11)
- Blog (10)
- Speech/Transcript/Script (10)
- Summary (10)
- Survey/Survey Results (10)
- Event Calendar (9)
- Database/Electronic Product (7)
- Form/Application (7)
- Opinion/Editorial (5)
- Obituary (4)
- Presentation (3)
- Call for Comment (2)
- Task Force Report (2)

[Show fewer resources](#)

© 2015 American Psychological Association
750 First St. NE, Washington, DC 20002-4242
Telephone: (800) 374-2721; (202) 336-5500
TDD/TTY: (202) 336-6123

[APA Home](#) | [Contact](#) | [Press Room](#) | [Advertise](#) | [APA Store](#) | [Privacy Statement](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Accessibility](#) | [Website Feedback](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Help](#)

Follow APA: [!\[\]\(cbe80b694ebd74fcfe136a095b608235_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(27df6be88af07602ea392719b144fe7f_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(96f0a292e266dbee33329d5ab59a28c7_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(e690b1f92192b826402019fb9f52289a_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(2f1aaa3afac05d904f8b2c7a378e5c6b_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(8884d0e19cafcc80b61bc09a93a91741_img.jpg\)](#)

More APA websites:

[APA Style](#) | [APA Practice Central](#) | [APA Center for Organizational Excellence](#) | [ACT Raising Safe Kids Program](#)
[APA Education Advocacy Trust](#) | [Online Psychology Laboratory](#) | [Psychology: Science in Action](#) | [APA PsycNET®](#)