**TEXT**

**PSYCHOTHERAPIES**



Psychotherapy (sometimes called talk therapy) refers to a variety of treatments that aim to help a person identify and change troubling emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. Most psychotherapy takes place when a licensed mental health professional and a patient meet one-on-one or with other patients in a group setting.

You might seek out psychotherapy for many reasons, including the following:

* Dealing with severe or long-term stress from a job or family situation, the loss of a loved one, or relationship or family problems
* Having symptoms with no physical explanation, such as changes in sleep or appetite, low energy level, lack of interest or pleasure in activities you once enjoyed, persistent irritability, excessive worry, or a sense of discouragement or hopelessness that won’t go away
* A health care provider suspecting you have or diagnosing you with a mental disorder that is interfering with your life
* Supporting a family member or child who has been diagnosed with a condition affecting their mental health

First being examined by a health care provider can help ensure that there is no physical health issue that would explain symptoms. This step is important because sometimes symptoms, like a change in mood or trouble concentrating, are due to a medical condition.

**Psychotherapy and other treatment options**

Psychotherapy can be used as an alternative to or alongside [medication](https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/mental-health-medications) and other treatment options. Choosing the right treatment plan should be based on a person's individual needs and medical situation and occur under the guidance of a mental health professional.

Even when medication relieves symptoms, psychotherapy can help a person address specific issues. These might include self-defeating ways of thinking, irrational fears, problems interacting with other people, or difficulty coping with situations at home, school, or work.

**Elements of psychotherapy**

A variety of psychotherapies and interventions have shown effectiveness in treating mental health disorders. Often, the type of treatment is tailored to the specific disorder. For example, the treatment approach for someone who has obsessive-compulsive disorder is different than the approach for someone who has bipolar disorder. Therapists may use one primary approach or incorporate other elements depending on their training, the disorder being treated, and the needs of the person receiving treatment.

**Elements of psychotherapy can include:**

* Helping a person become aware of automatic ways of thinking that are inaccurate or harmful (for example, having a low opinion of their abilities) and then finding ways to question those thoughts, understand how the thoughts affect their emotions and behavior, and change self-defeating patterns, in an approach known as [cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)](https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/anxiety-disorders#part_2225)



* Identifying ways to cope with stress and developing specific problem-solving strategies
* Examining a person’s interactions with others and teaching social and communication skills
* Applying mindfulness and relaxation techniques, such as meditation and breathing exercises
* Using exposure therapy (a type of CBT) for people with anxiety disorders, in which a person spends brief periods in a supportive environment learning to tolerate the distress caused by certain items, ideas, or imagined scenes until, over time, the fear associated with those things dissipates
* Tracking emotions and behaviors to raise awareness of their impact on each other
* Using supportive counseling to help a person explore troubling issues and receive emotional support
* Creating a safety plan to help a person who has thoughts of self-harm or suicide recognize warning signs and use coping strategies, such as contacting friends, family, or emergency personnel.



Note that there are many different types of psychotherapy. Therapies are often variations of an established approach, such as CBT.

However, for many therapies, research involving large numbers of patients has provided evidence that the treatment is effective. These evidence-based therapies have been shown to reduce symptoms of depression, anxiety, and other mental disorders.