



COGNITIVE
BEHAVIORAL
THERAPY INVOLVES
MEETING WITH A
THERAPIST ONE-ON-
ONE ON A REGULAR
BASIS.

YOUR GUIDE TO THERAPY

Finding the best therapist and the most suitable kind of therapy can be overwhelming. Here are some crucial things to keep in mind.

BY AKANKSHA SINGH

EVERYONE'S IN THERAPY—or so the saying goes. According to health insurance provider Value Penguin, more people are seeking out therapy than ever before. According to a survey of 1,300 Americans, nearly 30 percent of participants said they have seen a therapist during the coronavirus pandemic, and 86 percent believe therapy has helped them cope with mental strain.

Even outside of stress-inducing major world events, therapy can be a wonderful tool to work through and evaluate our mental state, whether we're depressed and anxious or simply looking to better our relationships with others and ourselves. Regardless of why you're considering therapy, there are several things to consider so you can find the right therapist and choose the kind of therapy that best suits you.

Before you commit to a therapist to help you on your mental health journey, it's important to choose the right type of therapy to suit your needs.

BEHAVIORAL THERAPY

Behavioral therapy is a catchall term that refers to therapies used to treat mental health disorders. Notably, it is different from psychoanalytic therapy, a form of talk therapy (developed by Sigmund Freud) where the therapist simply listens to the clients talk about their thoughts and feelings. Where talk therapy includes techniques like dream interpretation, behavioral therapy focuses on learning and unlearning behaviors. It's more action-focused than psychoanalytic therapy.

COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY

Commonly referred to as CBT, cognitive behavioral therapy helps people identify and replace negative thought patterns that result in negative behaviors.

For instance, say you're a writer who sends their manuscript to a publisher and has it rejected. If your automatic response is "I'm such a loser. I'll never get

published,” your negative thinking pattern is over-generalization: You tell yourself that something *always* happens to you. Through CBT, once you’ve identified this pattern, instead of beating yourself up over one rejection, you challenge that thinking once you’ve identified it: “Am I really a failure because I got one rejection?” Eventually, you can work on reframing that thinking with more positive self-talk (“That’s OK—I tried once and I’ll try again”).

CBT is the most common type of behavioral therapy and can be combined with other types of treatments. It can be used to treat several mental health conditions and disorders, including depression, anxiety, eating disorders, bipolar disorder, and substance abuse disorders, to name just a few.

You will likely be treated by a psychologist, a licensed clinical social worker, or a licensed professional counselor specifically trained in CBT. It can be an effective short-term treatment: Once you’ve learned the skills to combat patterns that are harming you, you can deal with them yourself.

PSYCHODYNAMIC THERAPY

Psychodynamic therapy is a form of talk therapy that encourages people to better understand the thoughts and feelings that drive their behaviors. It especially helps people recognize how repressed emotions and unconscious influences impact their actions. It can be used to treat depression, anxiety, and eating disorders. Compared to CBT, it is a long-term treatment and can last several years. As a result, it is also more expensive in the long run.

You’ll likely be treated by a psychologist, a licensed clinical social worker, or a licensed professional counselor with training in psychodynamic therapy.

Which Therapy Setting Is Right for You?

Depending on why you’re seeing a therapist, you may opt for an individual, group, couple, or family setting. Courtney Cornick, PhD, a licensed psychologist and the owner of CAYA Wellness, explains that choosing between a group or individual setting varies by circumstance. “For individuals who are in minority groups, there could be some benefits to group psychotherapy,” she says. “You can hear that others have similar issues and struggles—this can help people to feel less alone.” Individuals also receive support from group members in addition to their therapist or therapists, depending on how many the group has. Not to mention—group therapy is certainly a more afford-

able option for many.

That said, Cornick cautions that confidentiality is difficult to guarantee in a group setting. On the other hand, individual therapy, while expensive, ensures that your needs are being met on an individual level—the entire time you’re in therapy is your time, and your treatment is specific to you (confidentiality is ensured, as well).

As for when it comes to couples therapy versus family therapy, that depends on whether you’re focused on improving the interpersonal relationship between yourself and your partner or with different members of your family.

Finding the One (the Therapist, We Mean)

Searching for a therapist often involves a delicate balance between your insurance coverage (if any), time, and what you’re hoping to get out of the experience. “Cost can be a huge barrier for some people, particularly individuals in underserved populations,” says Cornick, adding, “I would suggest asking a therapist if they offer a sliding scale to see if there can be a reduction in the treatment cost.”

In terms of searching for a therapist, Cornick recommends looking on platforms that cater to your demographic group. For example, she says, a site like therapyforblackgirls.com is a good way to find BIPOC therapists. Similarly, larger platforms, like Psychology Today, offer filters for you to search individuals who specialize in working with BIPOC and LGBTQ2S+ populations. Cornick notes that if you’re looking for group psychotherapy but live in a community that has a small LGBTQ+ population, virtual group therapy is always a great option.

Once you’ve narrowed it down to contacting someone, Keisha Pruden, owner and therapist at Pruden Counseling Concepts in Ahoskie, North Carolina, suggests “auditioning” your potential new therapist. “Give the therapist you have chosen at least three sessions to determine if you and [they] are a good fit,” Pruden says.

She also advises being specific in your search for a therapist to best suit your needs: “If you would like a therapist of color who has experience in treating your symptoms, look for that, and don’t settle.” Pruden suggests asking your prospective therapist questions about their experience up front, including how they feel about discussing race during sessions, and whether or not they have experience treating mental health issues related to race. “Most therapists will have no problem answering these questions for



prospective clients,” Pruden says.

Navigating a relationship with a therapist can be hard in the best of times, and much more so when minority dynamics threaten to skew your relationship. Both Pruden and Cornick agree that being heard and leaving sessions feeling good is key.

To quote TV’s favorite radio psychiatrist, one Dr. Frasier Crane: “I’m listening.”

Which brings us to an important, under-discussed aspect of a client-therapist relationship.

Red Flags and Breaking Up with Your Therapist

Sometimes it becomes clear that the relationship just won’t work. Pruden and Cornick suggest looking out for a few specific things:

- Therapists who attempt to minimize your issues regarding race, gender, and sexual orientation.
- Therapists who are not inclusive and show signs of racism, homophobia, transphobia, etc.
- Therapists who showing no interest in learning about your race and/or culture, or who make comments that may be viewed as insensitive.
- Therapists who change the subject when it comes to these topics.

Additionally, if you leave sessions feeling less valued, enter them feeling the need to censor yourself, or find yourself choosing to skip sessions altogether, those are signs that you need to find a new therapist. Ultimately, progress and healing are often related to having a good fit with your therapist, Cornick says. “If you find that your therapist is missing the mark and unwilling to recognize the intersection between race and mental health [for instance] or being dismissive of conversations related to race and cultural factors, it is okay to move on and seek a new provider,” she says.

Cornick also stresses that it’s never worth worrying about “offending” your therapist by ending the relationship if it’s not working. A good therapist will want what’s best for their client, she points out—even if that means parting ways.

If you’ve been hesitant to take the first step in finding a therapist, take the time to really think about what’s important to you in a therapist and what your budget is, bullet-point a few notes about what you want to accomplish in therapy, and start looking up therapists in your area. The American Psychological Association has a Psychologist Locator tool (locator.apa.org) that’s a great place to start. ●