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## The Importance of Professional Help© 9 Ways Psychotherapy Leads to Change

Mental health challenges can be complex. That makes professional guidance essential. Psychotherapists provide unique features in the therapeutic relationship that are different from other relationships.

Let's look at what therapists provide and how that facilitates change.

### **1. Personalized Treatment Plans:** Tailored strategies to address your specific needs.

We discuss your goals for treatment. We may ask: "Think out to about a year from now. Consider that we have made great progress working together. 1) What would you like that progress to look like? 2) What changes in your life would you see one year from now, after we had done some really good therapeutic work." Those would be your unique overall goals.

**Symptoms.** Most of the goals will involve reducing your symptoms. So if you're depressed, we'd like to see you feel more well-being. If you're anxious, we'd like to see the end of your anxiety and an increase in your overall equanimity and calmness. If you have been using a substance, we'd like to see you be in



abstinence and recovery. Those would be examples of some symptom goals.

**Impairments in Living.** A second kind of goal has to do with impairments. Impairments are the challenges and problems in living that are caused by symptoms. For example, a depressed person may not have be able to concentrate at work. An anxious person may have difficulty going to malls or large stores to shop. A person with a substance abuse or gambling problem may be chronically short of money. Another person may have difficulty holding onto a job due to bipolar disorder. Those are impairments. So some of your goals will have to do with overcoming your impairments.

**2. Safe, Supportive Environment:** A safe space to express feelings and thoughts without judgment.



One of the most important features of a psychotherapy relationship is security and safety. The relationship takes place in a confidential space. There are very few limits to confidentiality, such as the reporting of abuse or to answer certain subpoenas or court orders. So, the great many clients will find that there psychotherapy relationship is fully confidential. Furthermore, another part of that support is that the therapist is there to understand and validate your experience in life and to find out how you are feeling. Most situations in life do not afford us this opportunity to be understood.

*The therapeutic relationship is more important to the outcome of therapy than is any other factor, such as the therapy method.*

**3. Increasing Hope and Understanding:** We find that clients begin to feel better rapidly when they feel understood by the therapist. That contributes to feeling hope that the problem will be resolved or improved. That in turn gives the feeling there is a path to improvement, that life's problems can be managed.

**4. Finding Healthier Coping Strategies:** Learning and strengthening tools and techniques to manage symptoms effectively.

Therapists are trained to evaluate the clients' ability to cope and to manage anxiety in various situations and to manage situations. Clients may expect the therapist to give a lot of advice. However, therapists give very little advice. Most of the time, we are evaluating the coping strategies people use in some of their difficulties. We are able to help you shift to more mature, healthy, effective and functional strategies for managing your emotions, your anxiety, depression, and the situations in your life.

**5. Developing Insight and Understanding:** Professional insight into the nature of your problems and how to navigate them.

One of the most crucial parts of therapy is the help that we give gaining insight into some of your less helpful patterns. We call these "dysfunctional patterns" or "dysfunctional thinking patterns." Some are illogical, mental processes. Some of them are ineffective ways of coping with anxiety, pain, depression, or difficulty. Some are interpersonal problems that you learn in certain situations, but they are now ineffective in the present situation. Our goal is to help identify these patterns, *most of which are unconscious*. By identifying them, we help you to change the patterns that you are using.

**6. Promoting "Memory Reconsolidation":** Re-writing the way painful memories are stored in the mind so they are less troubling.

Memory reconsolidation requires a bit of an example. Samantha experience a serious car accident. It made her afraid to drive at all. And after she was able to drive a little bit, she was



afraid to go anywhere near the part of the city in which her accident took place. The memory of being flipped over and thinking that she would not survive was deeply impressed upon her mind. The memory was intrusive. That is, it was coming up in all kinds of situations. Whenever it came up, she was flooded with anxiety. We used a particular kind of therapy known as exposure therapy or EMDR. We were able to change the way this memory is stored in her mind. So, it becomes a historical memory rather than an active one. It goes from being like a storm of anxiety every time she remembered it to something that just happened once in the past. Now, she could tell herself that it's unlikely to happen again. Now that she's more careful when she drives in that part of the city, she's unlikely to be hit the way she was that one particular day. She noticed that after *memory reconsolidation*, she could drive through that part of the city with no anxiety at all. What happens is the memory is rewritten so that the emotional script that goes along with the memory has changed.

**7. Fostering Skill Development:** We also help you develop skills that may be lacking, especially social skills, executive skills such as attentiveness, listening skills, communication skills, emotion management skills, and thinking skills. We have a separate paper on our website, *How Psychotherapy Helps with the development of psychological skills*.

#### 5 Types of Personality Skills With Examples

*A. Cognitive/Thinking Skills* - critical thinking, solving problems, decision making

*B. Coping Skills* - managing stress, managing strong or unpleasant emotions, resilience

*C. Emotional Regulation Skills* - control of impulses, self-soothing when in distress, knowing and labeling emotional states

*D. Executive Functioning Skills* - often troubled for people with ADHD and behavior problems, including planning, organization, follow-through, working memory, self-awareness

*E. Social/Interpersonal* - care in listening, empathy for others, resolving disagreements, making connections with others

**8. Using Specific Techniques:** You may have heard of various psychological techniques such as psychoanalysis, cognitive-behavioral therapy, hypnosis, mindfulness, behavior therapy, and others. There are literally dozens of techniques that have been developed in the 130 year history of the of research into the improvement of psychotherapy methods. Most therapists have a fairly deep knowledge of one or two areas of technique and additional knowledge or training in a few others. That way they can help a broad range of

people with mental health difficulties. Most of our techniques have solid evidence behind them. Your therapist would be informed of the evidence-based methods for the problems that you present.

**9. “Disease Management”:** Some problems, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder are brain level problems that cannot be ended, but can be managed in order to reduce disruption and so you can have a better quality of life. While most mental health problems can be resolved, some are permanent features of a person’s brain. But they can be managed. We manage with a combination of medications, which reduce the symptom severity, and psychotherapy, which helps the person to overcome the power of life changing events and emotional crises. We also help the family to manage the symptoms and help the person to know when those symptoms seem to be increasing so that they can contact their helping professionals. The patient is often often is not the first one to realize that symptoms have been increasing. We use a number of plans, ideas and methods for disease management.



## Conclusion

Acknowledging the need for help is a brave and critical step towards recovery. If you or someone you know is experiencing any of the mental health problems listed above, consider seeking professional therapy ASAP. **Remember, mental health is a crucial component of overall well-being, and there is strength in seeking help.**

Perhaps you are seeking a particular kind of therapy that we offer. For example, you may be seeking eye-movement desensitization and reprocessing therapy, also known as EMDR, which is a treatment that is highly effective for trauma. Or you might be seeking cognitive behavioral therapy, also called CBT, or play therapy for children, or psychoanalytic therapy. We offer the main evidence-based forms of therapy.

Perhaps you are unsure of the specific problem, but you feel some need for help and support. We will recommend the best treatments to help you.

Therapy always begins with some assessment of the problem in which we'll evaluate what your concerns are, what your goals may be for this therapeutic encounter, and how we may recommend the best program of care to help you. All of our care is evidence-informed and we are aware of some of the latest research in medicine and psychiatry that affects the best practices in psychotherapy.

***We hope that you will not hesitate to use psychotherapy services as soon as you feel some need. Do call us. We will respond to your questions. We hope that we can get you an appointment within just a week or two of your call.***

Call us with your questions at 414-540-2170 or email [referrals@shorehavenbhi.com](mailto:referrals@shorehavenbhi.com) or use the Contact Us link above.

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