

What makes therapy work?

Based on recent research, the answer is a combination of feeling supported and understood by your therapist, a commitment to doing things to help yourself between sessions, monitoring progress through feedback and having a collaborative plan with your therapist. Here is how I incorporate all four elements into my practice:

- **Empathy.** Feeling respected and understood by me is a necessary condition for therapy to be helpful. This is why I have you complete an evaluation of your experience of our time together after each session. It was once believed empathy was sufficient for therapy to work. We now know that even though it's a necessary condition, empathy alone does not result in lasting change.
- **Self-Help.** If you want change, a commitment to your own self-help is required. Think of it this way; If you see a physical therapist to heal an injury or a personal trainer to get in shape and the only time you exercise is during your appointment times, progress will be slow-going. For this reason, much of the pace of our progress is dependent on your willingness to put the time and effort into assignments in between sessions.

Though individual and varied, here's a sampling of the kinds of things you may be asked to do outside of sessions as part of your therapy plan:

- Worksheets such as a Mood or Habit Log, Decision-Making Form or Cost-Benefit Analysis or other writing assignment, such as journaling.
 - Communication Training: The Five Secrets of Effective Communication is a tool that can help you deal more effectively with problems in personal or professional relationships. It is a skill I can teach you that would involve learning and practice over time on your part.
 - Using a Checklist of Cognitive Distortions to track your own thoughts or other tools for tracking and recording thoughts and/or behaviors.
 - Reading articles or chapters from self-help books, watching assigned videos or researching relevant online resources.
 - Taping Sessions so you can listen to the recording at home between sessions. During a productive session, you may discover important insights but it's often difficult to remembering what the session was about. This is a common phenomenon, so it can prove helpful to review our time together.
- **Feedback and Self-Assessment.** This is your therapy and as such it's my responsibility to work in a way that meets your needs. In order to do so, I need your feedback. I work a little differently than many therapists in that one of my top priorities is

making sure you benefit from our work and achieve the results you are wanting. I don't strive to be perfect but I am committed to being as effective as possible which is why I ask for your feedback before and after each session. I rely on this feedback to track progress and make adjustments so we don't steer off course. A great deal of research shows that your experience of our work together is a good predictor of whether we will be successful. I am always learning and curious about how to improve my skills so the more you can tell me about what's working and what's not, the more it helps me help you. In addition, you may be asked to complete a variety of self-assessment tests before or between sessions. The purpose will depend on your specific case but they are often used to evaluate the severity of depression or anxiety, your satisfaction in relationships, the progress of our work together, how you are feeling about yourself or further understanding of your symptoms. These tests can help clarify your goals or track your progress in therapy. All forms and tests are confidential and do not require identifying information.

- **Direction.** Imagine you've requested an Uber but when asked the destination, you say, "take me anywhere but here." Many people come to therapy not sure of what they want or so hurt or weary over what they've been through that the only thing really clear is what they don't want. This is both a common and natural part of our human struggle. At the same time, even with the most detailed of maps and efficient means of transport, knowing the destination is the first step in getting you where you want to go. That said, don't worry if it's still hard to pinpoint; you're not alone on this journey and I have tools to help navigate and keep us on track. Completing a Therapy Goals Worksheet will be the first step in this process.

In sum, you are making an investment of time, effort and money into this process. It's not easy to reach out and it takes courage to keep showing up and doing the work of change. I have the utmost respect for your time and investment in this process and I'm willing to work hard and to use our time together wisely so that ultimately you can be your own therapist and move forward in a new and happier way.