

Why Therapy? Exploring the Strengths of Seeking Help

Long before there were therapists, there were family members. Grandpa and Aunt Jane listened, or gave us advice, or sometimes just told us to buck up. If family couldn't help, there were friends or a clergy member. But most likely, we were also warned not to broadcast our troubles, and many people suffered their mental problems silently.

Times change, and so has society's acceptance of seeking help. The old stigma of being seen as weak or incapable is largely gone, helped by many well-known writers, actors and politicians being open about their struggles with, and treatments for, everything from depression to chronic shoplifting. Going to a therapist is now seen as a positive step in most people's lives.

"Therapy is a unique relationship and what makes it valuable sets it apart from friendships, working partnerships, family connections and love affairs," says Carl Sherman, author of *How to Go to Therapy: Making the Most of Professional Help*.

In his book, author Sherman describes therapy as a balance in which two people are "collaborating on a single project: helping you deal with your problems and achieve the change you want. There is no other agenda."

It's the simplicity of that agenda, combined with a structured schedule, confidentiality and trust, that make this unique relationship work so well for so many people. Rather than proof that someone is "sick," it is a sign of good health to make a commitment to change.

Some people still believe a therapist will make them lie on a couch. While some therapists might have couches in their offices, you choose where to sit. You choose what to say. You choose when to say it. And, nowadays, there is an incredible number of ways to explore problems. Beyond conventional talk therapy, there is art therapy, music therapy, somatic therapy—even laughter therapy—to name just a few. For every kind of problem, and every kind of person, there is a therapeutic healing modality that fits.

The strength of therapy is that there are no strings attached. In his book, Sherman offers some further benefits of the therapeutic relationship:

1. **Safety.** If the relationship is right, you can feel safe to reveal your fears, dreams and fantasies without fear of repercussions or judgment on the part of the therapist. Unlike telling a friend or family member, your words to a therapist won't come back to haunt you.
2. **Confidentiality.** The therapist is bound by ethics and law (except in a few well-defined cases) not to reveal what you have said during sessions. This adds to the feeling of safety and trust, and aids in people making changes.
3. **Learning.** Therapy can be seen as a deeply educational experience, in which a therapist acts like a coach or teacher to help the client see the world—inner and outer—in new and positive ways.

Into each life some rain must fall, and we all have felt deluged at least once in our lives. Grief, loss, anger, financial hardship, relationship problems, stress—all of these are a normal part of life. So is seeking help when coping is just too hard. It's also normal to be a little afraid of what friends and family might say about seeing a therapist. But, in the end, it's your life, and you know best how to make it a richer, happier and more fulfilling one—with a little help.