

THE POWER OF THE WORD – TALK THERAPIES

Sometimes you need some new ideas to help yourself or a friend in need. At these times, it may be that talking therapy (also known as ‘psychotherapy’ or ‘therapy’) could be a good way to go. There is a range of individual and group therapy approaches. Depending on what the issue is, any one of these therapies may be suitable. The best place to start is to see your General Practitioner to discuss the resources available to you.

What is psychotherapy?

Psychotherapy, also known as counselling or therapy, allows people to explore their difficulties and worries in depth. There are several types of psychotherapy, each with a different approach and either individually or group based. The main approaches are summarised below. Your Psychologist will typically conduct an interview and administer any relevant psychological tests, questionnaires or inventories, before recommending to you a therapeutic intervention or treatment (see [Getting The Most Out Of Therapy](#)). Regardless of which specific therapeutic approach is employed, the intent is to help you develop alternative ways of coping so that you can regain a sense of happiness, enjoyment and control in your life.

What can psychotherapy do for me?

Some of the best treatment outcomes for many mental illnesses are achieved during psychotherapy, sometimes in combination with psychiatric medication to manage the symptoms of the disorder. But mental health is not only about addressing illness – it is also concerned with mental well-being more generally. To this end, psychotherapy can be helpful in assisting you to improve certain aspects of your life that are not necessarily severe, but which you feel are not going as well as they might. Therapy can be useful to:

- Learn how to identify and change behaviours or thoughts that adversely affect your life,
- Explore relationships and experiences,
- Find better ways to cope and solve problems,
- Learn to set realistic goals for your life,
- Find stress management techniques that work for you,
- Understand and better manage your diagnosed psychological condition, and
- Enhance your overall effectiveness through improved general mental health.

Types of therapy¹

The main therapeutic approaches are summarised below. Some of the approaches work best with certain mental disorders, others can be applied to a range of psychological issues more generally.

Cognitive therapy

¹ More information on the different therapeutic approaches is available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/conditions/mental_health/therapy_talking.shtml and <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/psychotherapy/MH00009> (accessed February 2008).

Cognitive therapy emphasises how negative thoughts and unhelpful beliefs impact on your life and helps you to develop behaviours that challenge these. The idea is to help you to see your situation in different ways and to build up different coping skills.

Behavioural therapy

Behaviour therapy is used most commonly with phobias. The treatment involves gradually exposing the person to the object or situation he / she is afraid of and showing that it won't harm them. Techniques for dealing with anxiety and panic are also taught as part of the process.

Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT)

Cognitive behaviour therapy combines features of both cognitive and behaviour therapies to identify unhealthy, negative beliefs and behaviours and replace them with healthy, positive ones.

Psychoanalysis

When people think about therapy, usually they are picturing psychoanalysis. This approach involves examining memories, events and feelings from the past to understand current feelings and behaviour. It is a long-term, intensive therapy that often involves several sessions a week with a psychoanalyst for several years.

Group therapy

Psychotherapy can be conducted in a group situation and is a useful way of helping people to realise they are not alone in their experience. A well-conducted group therapy programme enables each member to contribute to the progress and wellbeing of the others.

Support groups

Although not a type of therapy as such, well-conducted professional community based support groups can provide a confidential and non-threatening environment for people to learn about their problems and how to deal with them. They connect people to organisations that can help, and to people who have had similar experiences. Your therapist may explore the idea of you joining a support group as a way of maintaining and enhancing the gains you make in therapy.

A comprehensive listing of support groups available in Australia nationally is provided at Drs Reference Site <http://www.drsref.com.au/support.html>. A search of the internet will also identify the range of options available in your local area. Be sure to discuss these with your Psychologist / General Practitioner as part of your therapy.

Conclusion

Regardless of whether you are addressing a specific mental illness or are seeking to enhance your mental well-being more broadly, any approach you choose should be delivered by a properly qualified person, usually a Psychologist or other qualified and registered mental health practitioner. If you feel that therapy might assist you, consult your General Practitioner to discuss a referral to an appropriate provider.