

Have you wondered whether you might benefit from psychotherapy?

First and foremost, most psychotherapy is a means of learning to understand yourself better and of helping you make changes you want to make in yourself and in your relationships. Therefore therapy is something that many people can profit from at some time in their lives. In fact, you probably know people among your relatives, friends, and associates who may have engaged in and benefited from therapy. Life is, after all, stressful. How well many of us cope with the demands made on us; the changes we must go through and how effectively we maintain our confidence and self-esteem depends on many inter-related factors. Once the process begins most people discover that their fears subside, and they are relieved at having begun. People of any age can grow and profit from the psychotherapy experience. There is no “wrong” time to begin.

Consider the following reasons for seeking the help of a psychotherapist:

If you know that life could be more satisfying, that you could feel better about yourself, less stressed or more easily able to use your potential and reach the goals you set for yourself.

You find yourself anxious or depressed, in a rut, having trouble concentrating or sleeping, fighting with your family, not taking care of yourself physically, and generally under the weather.

Perhaps you must handle a burden; a medical crisis; job loss or divorce. During your life you may consider yourself a victim of the present, your past, or other emotional pain and memories.

You may want to feel more effective and comfortable in your relationships, better at communicating and resolving conflicts.

You may always have been interested in what makes people tick or you would like to understand yourself better.

WHAT IS PSYCHODYNAMIC PSYCHOTHERAPY?

Psychodynamic psychotherapy differs from other forms of therapy in several important ways. Psychodynamic psychotherapy looks at the whole human being and at the many complex factors that have contributed to one’s development and situation. It focuses on the inner workings (the dynamics) of the person. Symptoms such as anxiety or depression are viewed as signs that some part of the person needs attention.

Psychodynamic psychotherapy assumes the existence of the unconscious mind; that part of our being which includes dreams, hidden memories, assumptions and subtle reactions to current experiences. In these less known realms of our daily lives reside many of our emotional wounds and our desires to live up to our full potential. The outcome of learning about our inner selves is that one feels more empowered to make positive and life-affirming decisions. You can see past and present events and people more clearly. You will develop a more whole, intact—and empowered life. You can understand old patterns and choose, for example, to relate to others differently. The honesty and courage necessary for this kind of understanding are discovered and encouraged.

HOW DOES PSYCHODYNAMIC PSYCHOTHERAPY WORK?

In the process of psychotherapy, you can see beneath the surface and integrate intellectual understanding with your emotional experiences. The confidential therapy session grants a freedom for your thoughts and emotional experiences to flow freely. In this free flowing process, thoughts and feelings emerge, helping to create a window into yourself through which you understand your behavior and reactions better. The exploration of the moment-to-moment feelings that arise in the therapy session, including your feelings about the therapist, has another benefit. You are able to experience and practice the complexities of relationships in a safe, protected relationship with the therapist. This process should transfer gradually to other relationships in your life. Some have referred to this experience as the awakening of the inner self, part of which has been hidden. This awakening is often slow and subtle, usually with a range of emotional surges that go with this insight.

WHAT DOES THE CLIENT DO IN PSYCHODYNAMIC PSYCHOTHERAPY?

Your primary responsibility in psychodynamic psychotherapy is to work toward becoming more aware of your experiences, thoughts, feelings, and memories and to talk about them during the therapy session. These may include any aspect of your present or past life; about the therapy or the therapist; about night dreams, daydreams and fantasies; about hopes, joys, sorrows, fears, and relationships. Preparing for therapy sessions by creating an agenda is a common practice among people who are beginning psychotherapy. One will, sooner or later, come to trust that the process itself will bring to mind useful material. It may take time for you to build trust to know your therapist is vitally interested in your experiences. That she or he will be nonjudgmental nor shaming, no matter what you reveal or talk about.

The process of revealing thoughts and experiences that are uncomfortable, painful, or laden with shame or guilt is important. Indeed, simply talking at length about the details of such experiences in the presence of someone who is interested and empathic tends to be helpful. Revealing joyful experiences or points of pride and delight is equally important. You and your therapist work together toward a compassionate attitude about aspects of yourself you have difficulty tolerating or understanding. Thus, psychotherapy does not move at a regular pace. It is a process of gradual exploration of emotions, thoughts and ideas, impulses, dreams and actions all of which add up to your whole complex being.

WHAT DOES THE THERAPIST DO IN THE COURSE OF THERAPY?

The purpose of the psychotherapy process is to provide understanding, freedom, and empowerment and to provide a safe context in which you can develop aspects of yourself. The therapist is always mindful of and interested in the unique nature of your present and past experiences, reactions, and feelings, and the particular ways these have been integrated. The degree to which the therapist acts as a quiet listener or as an active participant depends on his or her understanding of what will be helpful to you as well as on his or her individual style.

In psychodynamic psychotherapy, the therapy experience is for the client. For this reason, most therapists tend to reveal relatively little to clients about their personal lives or opinions irrelevant to the therapy. The client is best served by making life decisions independently, with the therapy providing a context in which those decisions can be clarified and understood. Therapy is an intensely private matter, and works best if it is thought of and kept that way.

The therapist creates the context in which the work unfolds. After you and your therapist decide to work together, you agree on a contract that serves as a framework. Issues such as frequency and time of sessions, fees and payment, use of insurance, vacations, appointments cancellation policy, and confidentiality are discussed. This basic contract and the regularity of sessions provide the beginnings of the sense of safety that is necessary for the work to proceed.