Therapy for Anxiety: The Best Treatment Option

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How Therapy Can Help With Anxiety

So you've tried reading the books. You have researched, studied and memorized all that there is to read online. You ordered the motivational CD/ DVD package. You even went to the self-help seminars at the community college. Maybe they helped a little. They did give you some tips and options to make things better, but here you are looking for more information.

Anxiety is a part of your life. Over recent months, it probably feels like it is becoming an even bigger part of your life despite all of your efforts to reverse its progress. Now you are left confused, concerned and without another direction to take. What can you do? What should you do now?

It's funny that the simplest, most obvious options are the ones that seem to elude us. The clear choice for you, and others like you, is therapy. Therapy can mean a lot of different things to different people, pet therapy is even known to be beneficial for those with anxiety, but for the sake of this piece, therapy is face-to-face, individual counseling sessions with a professional counselor, social worker or psychologist. Some psychiatrists in your area may do on-going therapy, but this is becoming rarer and your insurance company might not be willing to pay for it.

Group therapies are definitely beneficial in many ways but differ in too many ways from individual sessions to be put in the same category. Similarly, there is a strong movement towards distance therapy that is completed via video chat or instant message. That is a different beast as well.

Therapy Basics

In individual therapy, you and your therapist will meet for between 45 minutes and an hour at a prescribed frequency for some amount of time. Sometimes you may need years of therapy. Sometimes you will only need a handful of sessions. It is all part of the process and the process works, especially for anxiety.

Therapy will help before your first appointment because it will allow you concede that anxiety is a problem that you cannot solve on your own. This may seem like a negative, but admitting that you have a problem really moves the process forward.

Hopefully, along the way, you can reduce the stigma that still accompanies mental health issues by telling people in your life that you are seeking treatment. Their acceptance of you will foster self-acceptance, which is needed to find improvement regardless of your situation.

Next page: digging deeper into therapy.

Therapy Basics

At the onset of therapy, your therapist will help by providing you with education regarding your symptoms and your diagnosis. With the access to information available today, many people seek answers specific to them from information online. Surely, the internet has the answers, but you might not know the correct questions to ask. It also has its fair share of red herrings that only distract you from your quest. Your therapist can accurately assess the onset and progression of your symptoms to arrive at a diagnosis that makes sense for you.

Many people feel a great comfort in hearing their diagnosis from a professional. It makes them feel that they are not alone with their struggles. Giving something a name makes it less scary.

From there, a therapist can help by planning goals and discussing the treatment plan. The best therapists work to establish clear, specific goals with their clients early in the course of treatment. Some will be formalized on paper while others will be verbal agreements, but these plans serve to give direction to the sessions.

Without direction, it will be easy for sessions to slide off track. Another benefit of treatment planning is being able to track progress over time. It can be hard to appreciate the road that you have traveled without looking back on your movement.

Digging Deeper

Moving forward, your therapist will teach you a very effective skill that you may have been lacking until now: self-monitoring. Self-monitoring is the ability to accurately know yourself and have insight into what you do and why you do it. This knowledge is accomplished through the combination of acknowledging your thoughts, feelings and behaviors and noting how they impact your life.

When a therapist asks, “How did that make you feel?” they are really encouraging you to reflect on the connections between events and the feelings they bring up. This can help you identify your anxiety triggers. What makes you anxious? What thoughts do those situations trigger? How do you respond? This process can seem foreign and uncomfortable at first, but the benefits of improved self-monitoring make the process completely worthwhile.

Being able to better understand yourself helps you better understand the people and the world around you. This recognition leads directly to a feeling of power and control over your symptoms, which is another benefit of therapy. Without fail, anxiety has made you feel powerless at some point. Since knowledge is power, you get some autonomy back.

Your therapist will help next by showing you that anxiety is largely self-reinforcing. This means that anxiety, left untreated, makes itself worse over time. This idea can be surprising to those in therapy for the first time.

Anxiety works by making you think that terrible things are lurking around every corner. This makes you stay at home, isolate and cut off your supports. Without supports, your anxiety gets worse and makes your comfort zone shrink.

Another example of anxiety being self-reinforcing involves driving. Think about driving when your anxiety is high. In an attempt to manage the situation, anxiety convinces you to grab the steering wheel with all your might and focus perfectly on the road ahead. Sounds like a good plan, right? Yes, until you consider that squeezing the wheel tenses your muscle making your motor skills worse and focusing too hard on the road will cut off your peripheral vision. Each make your driving skills worse. The best response is usually the opposite of what anxiety tells you.

Next page: additional benefits of therapy.

Digging Deeper

After you improve your self-monitoring and reduce your self-reinforcing behaviors, your therapist can help by

giving you new interventions to limit your symptoms. With anxiety, there are dozens of helpful interventions that your therapist can tailor to your symptoms, goals and abilities. This in itself is another benefit of a therapist. If you read books or information online, you can be easily inundated with tips and tricks that might not be right for you.

For example, a useful tool for anxiety is guided imagery. This involves the client working to clear their mind of worry and anxious thoughts and substitute them with visions of far-off, peaceful destinations. Guided imagery can reduce overall anxiety, but if the client has racing, anxious thoughts that are too pervasive, they cannot clear their mind. This makes the tool useless.

A skilled therapist can recommend another intervention like autogenic training as a replacement. The therapist will save you time, energy and frustrations by giving you techniques most useful for you.

Some other options for treating anxiety, like medications and relaxations, really only target the symptoms of anxiety rather than the sources. A therapist can do both. By discussing your symptom history and using your self-monitoring skills, the therapist can assist you in building your awareness of the people, places and things that spark your anxiety.

From there, you can engage in a decision-making process to see which items can be avoided, which can be modified and which need to be accepted as-is because of their unchangeable nature. Some people might be mistakenly tempted to avoid every anxious trigger or simply accept everything as unchangeable. These options tend to make anxiety bigger and stronger in the long-term. Working with your therapist will help you differentiate between the avoidable, changeable and unchangeable to improve your life and beat back against anxiety.

Bonus Benefits

The list of therapy benefits for anxiety truly goes on, so consider these additional benefits:

- Therapy provides you a sounding board in the form of someone to tell your thoughts and feelings to.
- Therapy builds structure and routine in your life by having a weekly appointment to leave the house.
- Therapy has been shown to physically change your brain leading to improved levels of happiness.
- Therapy can push your limits, allowing you to do things that you previously thought impossible.
- Even though you are seeking therapy for anxiety your therapist can improve your communication skills, which will benefit all aspects of life.
- Since therapy is not a crutch, it will show you how to cope with current and future issues even after therapy has ended.

Conclusion

The most obvious answers are usually the best ones. The case of seeking therapy for anxiety proves this statement. Depending on your situation and your therapist, treatment for anxiety can be efficient, relatively painless and really helpful in improving all aspects of life. Choose the treatment that is right for you. Choose therapy.