



# Therapy Changes

*Focused guidance when you need it most*

THERAPY CHANGES GUIDE

## Demystifying Therapy

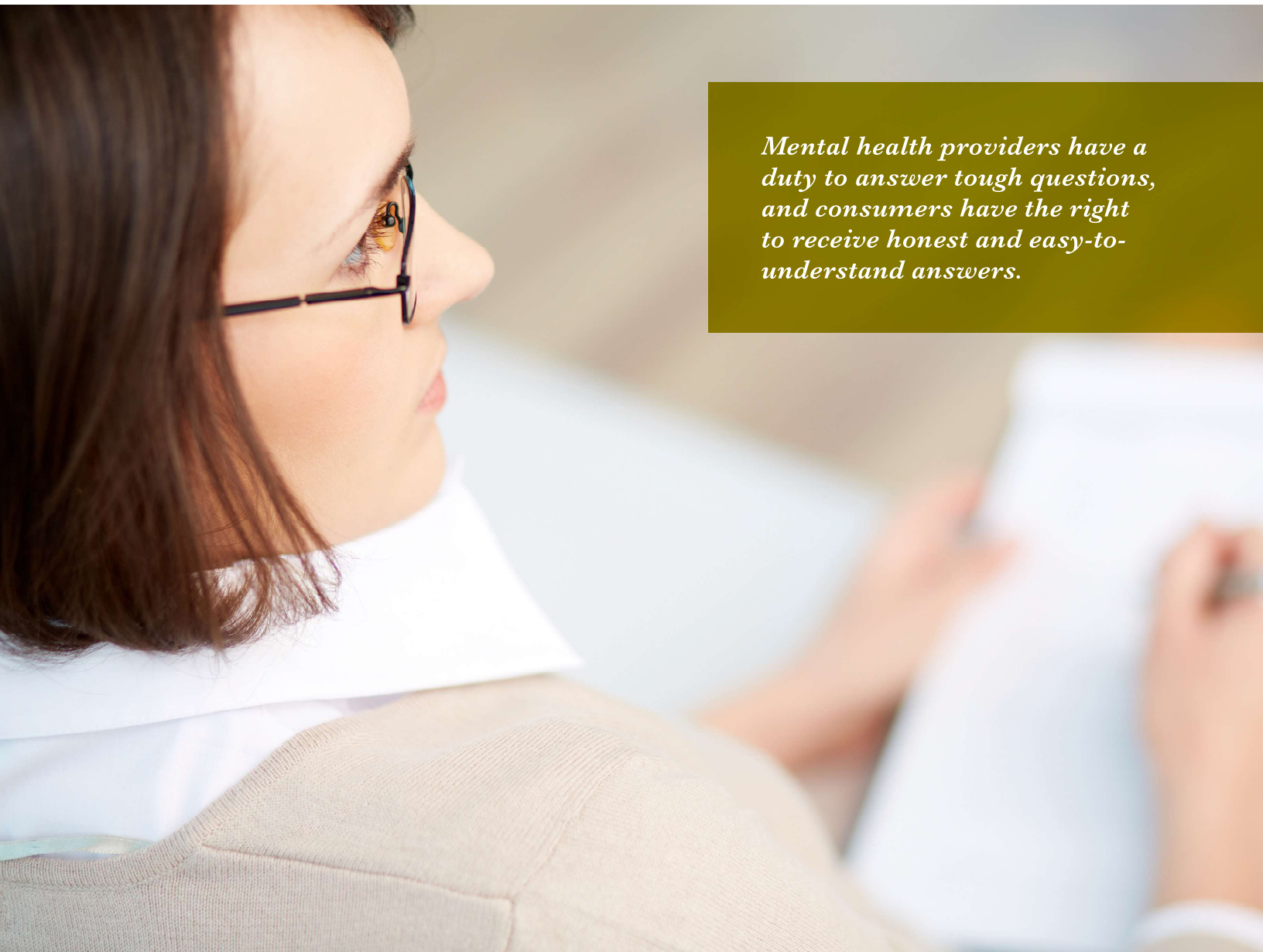


## Demystifying Therapy

Most people, when asked what they do for a living, can answer relatively quickly and easily—but that is not the case for many Psychologists. Although the practice of psychology has gained a great deal of recognition and there have been recent developments in psychology research over the past 30 years, misconceptions still exist. Unfortunately, answers to questions like, “What is therapy?” and “How does it work?” are still difficult to answer.

Perhaps one reason for this is that therapy is an experience that can be difficult to put into words. It is challenging even for a therapist to describe the change that she sees in her clients and put a finger on what is causing it.

However, mental health providers have a duty to answer these tough questions, and consumers have the right to receive honest and easy-to-understand answers. It should serve as a red flag when therapists cannot or do not clearly define how they can help solve specific issues or concerns. In addition, therapists should never offer unsolicited advice or be judgmental. They should not blame clients or encourage clients to blame others. They should not be critical of clients’ lifestyle, behaviors, or problems.

A close-up, profile view of a woman with dark hair and glasses, looking towards the right. She is wearing a light-colored top. In the background, another person's hands are visible, holding a document or tablet.

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## What is Therapy?

Therapy is a collaborative treatment based on the relationship between an individual and a Psychologist. Therapists should provide a supportive environment that allows clients to talk openly with someone who's objective, neutral and nonjudgmental. Psychologists work with clients to identify and change thought and behavior patterns keeping them from feeling their best.

## How Does Therapy Work?

Therapy helps people of all ages live happier, healthier, more productive lives by applying research-based techniques to help people develop more effective habits. The kind of treatment depends on a variety of factors, including current psychological research, the specific problem, cultural and spiritual beliefs, as well as the Psychologist's theoretical orientation. Psychologists who use **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)**, for example, have a practical approach to treatment. They ask clients to identify their thinking patterns in an effort to help them develop more effective coping skills. This approach often involves homework assignments, such as gathering more information, practicing new skills between sessions, and reading assignments.

The first objective of therapy is to reduce suffering. Therapy can address and resolve a large number of specific concerns, issues, and symptoms by introducing new coping strategies and creative problem solving to overcome barriers. As a result, therapy can help to increase positive feelings such as joy, compassion, peace, self esteem, and love.

A secondary objective is self-actualization. Throughout the course of therapy, many people become more conscious about themselves and their relationships, and they clarify their values and life priorities. By asking provocative questions and making observations, therapists can help clients see things they might not have seen before.



## Who Goes to Therapy?

The belief that people who go to therapy are “crazy” or “damaged” is false. The most common demographic of therapy goers include, ordinary people struggling with everyday, human problems, such as depression, anxiety, **trauma**, addiction, and **relationship issues**. Those who can benefit from therapy may feel overwhelmed, or have a prolonged sense of sadness, problems that don't seem to get better, difficulty concentrating on work or difficulty carrying out daily activities.

## How Do Clients Get the Most Out of Therapy?

Clients should be discriminating when choosing a professional to help them through trying times. In fact, research shows the most significant factor contributing to successful outcome in therapy is the quality of the therapeutic relationship. A common misconception is that it is not okay to speak up in therapy. To the contrary, having honest conversations about worries, hopes, or grievances will help ensure a more sustainable, positive patient-therapist relationship – and thus, a better chance for a successful outcome.

- » **Discuss expectations.** Therapists are available to serve as guides during clients' unique journeys. An important part of therapy is learning to express expectations to another person in a healthy, assertive way.
- » **Discuss what works.** The decision to participate in therapy is a personal investment. Clients should communicate their preferences—such as the style and type of questions that work best for them—to help ensure they get the most out of their efforts. Therapists will have expertise and good reasons for doing what they do, but a good therapist also has some room for flexibility.
- » **Discuss what doesn't work.** It is also important to share when something isn't helping. For instance, therapists may not realize they have said something upsetting—unless clients tell them.





*Medication can sometimes be necessary for people in crisis to get to the point where they are able to engage in therapy. Therapy teaches new strategies and problem-solving skills that help people better address future problems.*

## What Role Does Medication Play in Therapy?

A common misconception about Psychiatrists is that they only treat people with severe mental illness. In fact, Psychiatrists provide much needed help to high functioning individuals who are suffering from the effects of depression and anxiety. When Psychologists see clients who could benefit from medication, they refer them to a Psychiatrist for a consultation and possibly a prescription.

If someone is continuing to do well in therapy, and can attend work or school and have relationships with family and friends, therapy alone can be very effective. In fact, research has shown that CBT can be more effective than medication for treating a variety of mental health concerns.

There is a role for medication in therapy for certain situations. Examples include difficulty getting to therapy, panic or anxious symptoms that make it difficult to stay focused and maintain attention, sleep problems, poor appetite, and thoughts of suicide.

Specific conditions that often lend themselves to a combination of talk therapy and medication include Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Bipolar Disorder, eating disorders, and severe Post Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD).

What is important to remember is that medications do not help people develop the strategies necessary for dealing with life's problems. Without therapy, once medications are discontinued, the problems often still remain – or may return.



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