about the things you've exposed and ways of moving forward. Most of the work is done out of the session."

Explore your options

If you think therapy could help you, explore your options as soon as you can – don't wait till you're in a crisis before you put this emotional safety net in place for yourself. For NHS therapies your GP or Community Mental Health Team is the gateway. Due to under-resourcing, you should be prepared for a time on the waiting list (three months to two years). Take counselling if you're offered it while waiting for therapy.

Charities and support groups provide free or low-cost counselling – try your local Mind group, social services, community centre or Citizens Advice Bureau. While counselling and psychotherapy can overlap, a key difference is the amount and intensity of work required of you. Counselling is for when you need to be listened to and understood. A psychotherapist will help you bring about longer-term lasting progress. Supervised trainee psychotherapists may also offer lower cost treatment, while some private therapists offer reduced fees (known as 'sliding scale') if you're on benefits. For private therapy, contact professional organisations the UKCP and BACP (see box) for registers of local approved, reputable psychotherapists.

Hard work and self-investment

Therapy is an important step for many people. "It takes a lot of courage," says MK. "People say, 'Oh, it's a relief, all you do is talk about your problems.' But you face up to things you never even knew about yourself. It's empowering. But it's also hard work. You deal with very sensitive issues – it hits your core". People are prepared to put in this hard work and courage for the long-term positive life benefits. The results are well worth it, as MK found: "Like the 'eureka' moments in cartoons, you get it! You start understanding your present behaviour, connecting seemingly random acts in your life, seeing patterns. Before, most of what I did and the reasons for it were not in my consciousness. So I couldn't change them. But now that I'm 'aware', I feel I can change. It's hard work, but it's self-investment. I would recommend it to everyone."

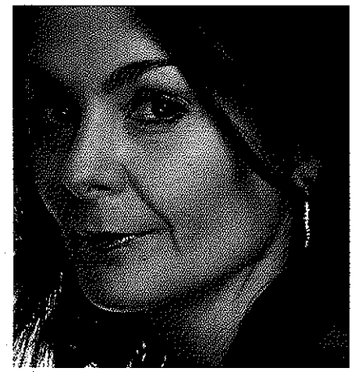
**Name changed by request*

Why therapy?

Dr Cecilia d'Felice, psychologist, broadcaster and Mind Journalist of the Year 2007, explains what the results of therapy can be

Talking therapies are about giving you insights, tools and techniques to help you think about yourself and your life in a more balanced and constructive way. It is not a magic wand that can clear away your housing problems, debts, or other external realities that will probably remain constant during your therapy. It's useful for anyone who wants to find new ways of understanding and coping with difficult feelings or experiences. I think that therapy can be useful for almost any human experience if you want to understand yourself better and learn constructive ways of being in the world.

Therapy can improve your self-esteem and confidence, helping you to challenge yourself and give up ways of behaving and thinking that ultimately keep you stuck. Therapy should feel both positive and challenging and there will be times when it will be emotionally painful, particularly if dealing with past traumas.



Dr Cecilia d'Felice

Two heads are better than one

Therapy is really important to people whose symptoms are seriously affecting their lives, their ability to function, work and relate to people. For these people it is vitally important that they have access to the appropriate psychological treatment so that they can pick up their lives as quickly as possible. But I think therapy can be helpful to everyone whenever they are facing difficulties, regardless of whether they have a mental health diagnosis or not, as it is about understanding and relating to yourself and your life with balance, compassion and love. Life is very challenging and we need all the help we can get! I always feel that two heads are better than one and I have found therapy incredibly helpful when I have really needed it.

Are you ready for therapy?

Therapy will intensify emotions as you begin to unravel and explore your experience so it is normal that there can be periods where your feelings will be heightened. Many people try therapy the first time and don't like it – as they feel too intruded upon or distressed – however, approaching it a second time with more insight can be really helpful people often say that they realised that they were too young, too defensive or not open to being helped on their first attempt.

In my experience many people feel quite a lot better in the first few sessions as they are relieved to be in therapy and to be listened to and understood. Feelings sometimes dip in the middle of therapy because the challenge of changing behaviour and committing to the work involved in therapy isn't easy. Towards the end of therapy people usually start to make a lot of progress, although there are times when because someone doesn't want to stop therapy they might find that they feel they are going backwards and this can feel very upsetting. But hang on in there; everything can be worked through if you are prepared to talk about it.

How do you get the most out of therapy?

Be open, honest, curious and engaged. If your therapist suggests things for you to try out then try them out. If you don't do the work you cannot expect things to change. Therapy isn't about a 'cure' it's about helping you understand yourself better and learning how to manage your feelings effectively without either having to act on them or become a victim to them.

Research: David Winters

Major types of therapy:

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) Works on the principle that changing how you think and behave changes how you feel. Focussed, pragmatic and brief compared to other talking therapies (usually 8–12 sessions), CBT uses a structured approach, helping you to identify connections between your thinking and things that happen to you, and helps you to develop healthier coping strategies for solving current problems. CBT is becoming more widely available on the NHS, in various forms.

Counselling A counsellor's role is to listen to you, in confidence, without judgement, in a safe and supportive way and offer feedback and practical advice. They give you a chance to talk through your difficulties at your own pace and express your feelings. Widely available on the NHS, whether as a one-off session, for a few weeks, or ongoing.

Psychotherapy A therapist is trained to help you explore in depth the interweaving connections between present feelings and actions and past events and make sense of how they shape your life. It's an active process of discovery involving an intense personal relationship and a two-way exchange of energy and effort. An outline of the many different types of psychotherapy can be found here:
www.mind.org.uk/Information/Factsheets/Treatments+and+drugs/Psychotherapy.htm

Looking for a private therapist?

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)
Tel: 0870 443 5252
web: www.bacp.co.uk

United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP)
Tel: 020 7436 3002
web: www.psychotherapy.org.uk

Need help now?

If you need to speak confidentially to someone about any difficulties you have, The Samaritans are available 24 hours a day:

Tel: 08457 90 90 90

www.samaritans.org.uk