

The No BS guide to going to talk therapy

Introduction

I'll keep this as short as possible. In about 11 pages you'll understand the basics of being in talk therapy. This guide is meant for you if you are in therapy or are planning to go but have little clue of what's about to happen or what you are supposed to do.

That's all! Dive in.

Chapter 1

Preparing an Agenda for Therapy Sessions

Therapy sessions can feel overwhelming if you don't have a plan for what to discuss. Before each appointment, take 10-15 minutes to jot down the key issues you want to talk about. This helps ensure you cover everything that's been on your mind and prevents important topics from getting lost.

Your agenda can be just a brief bulleted list of 3-5 discussion points or questions. Don't feel beholden to rigidly following the list, but use it as a guide to keep the conversation productive. Bring this list to your appointment and refer to it periodically.

As you start each item, provide some context around the issue to get the conversation flowing. For example, "I've been having a lot of anxiety around work lately because..." Then your therapist can dig in with you on that subject.

Chapter 2

Journaling to Get More Out of Therapy

Keeping a therapy journal allows you to process and express thoughts/feelings outside of sessions, which makes your time with your therapist more productive. Get in the habit of writing in your journal regularly - even 10-15 minutes per day can be beneficial.

Use the journal to capture any significant events, persistent thoughts or behavior patterns, vivid memories or dreams, or other experiences you want to analyze with your therapist's guidance. Recording these things as they happen prevents you from forgetting or minimizing important details before your next session.

The journal also serves as a record of your progress and growth over time. You can look back on early entries and see how your mindset, perspectives, and circumstances have evolved through the therapy process.

In addition to capturing experiences, use the journal to explore your thoughts and feelings more deeply through freeform writing. This gets you accustomed to being more aware, introspective, and vulnerable - skills that translate to your work with your therapist.

Chapter 3

How to Open Up More in Therapy

The therapeutic process can't be effective unless you're willing to open up honestly about your experiences, thoughts, emotions, and struggles - even about painful or embarrassing subjects. But many people have a hard time with this level of vulnerability. They may fear being judged, struggle with shame, or have a hard time finding the right words.

Start slow by sharing relatively minor struggles early on. As you build trust in your therapist's non-judgmental stance and see that vulnerability leads to insights and growth, you'll find it easier to go deeper. Use "I" statements focused on your feelings without defensiveness. For example, "I felt extremely hurt and abandoned when that happened."

If you get flustered or choke up, that's okay - the courage to show that emotion is part of the process. But if you routinely struggle to open up, explore the core vulnerabilities holding you back. Your therapist can help you work through these barriers over time. Be kind to yourself if you have setbacks.

Chapter 4

Giving Your Therapist Feedback

The client-therapist relationship is a partnership, so you shouldn't hesitate to give your therapist open and honest feedback, especially if you feel sessions aren't as productive or effective as they could be. Here are some examples of useful feedback:

- If you need a different approach or therapeutic style, express that clearly. You may want more direct guidance and structure, or conversely a more open-ended exploratory approach.
- If you have a personality clash or struggle to build rapport, look for ways to improve understanding between you. But also don't be afraid to consider a new therapist if the relationship isn't a good fit after giving it a genuine effort.
- Let your therapist know which techniques or exercises have been helpful for you and which haven't landed as well. This allows them to better tailor their approach.
- If you ever feel misunderstood, dismissed, or judged in a way that breaks your trust, share those feelings right away so they can be addressed.

Delivering feedback respectfully, objectively, and in the spirit of improving your work together makes the therapeutic process much more effective.

Chapter 5

Dealing With Therapy Avoidance

It's normal and expected to sometimes feel an unconscious urge to avoid bringing up difficult subjects, emotions, memories, or realizations in therapy. You may try deflecting conversations toward more superficial topics as a coping mechanism.

When you notice yourself engaging in this avoidance pattern, don't judge yourself harshly, but try to gently override it. Remind yourself that while therapy can be painful at times, evading the hard stuff limits your ability to heal, gain insight, and achieve growth.

If you're embarrassed or fearful about opening up on a particular subject, share those feelings with your therapist. They can help you explore the root of that vulnerability and process it over time.

You can also agree with your therapist on a gentle policy of calling it out when avoidance is happening. A simple "It seems we may be avoiding x topic today" helps surface the pattern with compassion.

Chapter 6

Setting Therapy Goals and Tracking Progress

At the very start of the therapeutic process, take time with your therapist to get aligned on the key goals and outcomes you're working toward. Your goals may relate to:

- Managing a specific mental health condition like anxiety or depression
- Improving relationships and communication habits
- Overcoming traumatic experiences from your past
- Changing unhealthy patterns of thinking, behavior, or coping mechanisms
- Achieving personal growth related to your values, life purpose, and self-actualization

Once you've set clear goals, devise a basic system with your therapist for tracking and evaluating your progress over time. This could involve periodic check-ins, detailed journaling, rating-scale assessments, or other techniques.

Don't get too rigid, as your goals and circumstances may change throughout the therapy process. Revisit your goals every few months and update them as needed based on your latest insights and progress.

Chapter 7

Making the Most of the Last 10 Minutes

Too often, therapy sessions can feel adrift or anticlimactic at the end. But taking 5-10 minutes to recap and solidify the session's most important points makes a big difference:

- Review any key revelations, breakthroughs, or conclusions you reached through your discussions and exploratory work. Summarize these in a few sentences so you lock them into your memory bank before departing.
- Go over any skills or techniques you want to practice applying in your daily life before the next session. Confirm your understanding of how to use them.
- If your therapist provided any specific corrective feedback on your thought patterns, behaviors, or mindset, make sure you captured the essence of it clearly.
- Agree on any "homework" assignments to complete before next time, such as journaling exercises, experiential practices, or reading suggestions.

The closing minutes are also a time to celebrate successes, reinforce your motivations, and reaffirm the therapeutic alliance. Wrapping up sessions this way ensures you get maximum value and retain the most important takeaways.

Chapter 8

Continuing the Work Outside of Sessions

The true benefits of therapy are realized when you actively apply the insights, techniques, and mindset shifts you're learning through the actual therapy sessions. In the spaces between appointments:

- Follow through diligently on any homework or practice exercises your therapist assigns. Treat these as high-priority commitments.
- Be proactive about identifying opportunities in daily life to apply learnings from therapy. For example, if you worked on communication skills, try them out with your spouse or colleagues.
- Regularly review your notes, recordings (if appropriate), and therapy journal to retain key concepts while they're fresh.
- Continue delving deeper into topics through supplemental reading, videos, support groups, or other educational resources.
- Build new healthier habits and routines to reinforce the progress you're making.

The therapeutic process is fundamentally about integration - taking the ideas and tools you're discovering and living them in the real world. With diligent practice between sessions, you'll experience faster and more lasting growth.

Chapter 9

What to Do When You Feel Stuck in Therapy

Even with the right mindset and effort, you'll likely hit a plateau or stuck point in your therapeutic process at some stage. When this happens:

Have an open discussion with your therapist about switching up the approach and testing different modalities or techniques. You may need to spend more time on some root issues before being able to progress.

Explore whether underlying issues like transference or resistance related to your specific therapist dynamic may be impeding progress. If so, work through those patterns directly.

A temporary pause or "therapeutic break" for deeper self-reflection can also help regain momentum. Use this time to journal, read, or take a fresh look at your goals.

Be patient, but also honestly evaluate whether you need to part ways and find a new therapist if the stuck pattern persists over many months without resolution.

Chapter 10

Dealing With Therapy Fatigue

Even if you're putting in the hard work, it's common to experience therapy fatigue at various points in the process. The emotional weight of confronting painful subjects, challenging deeply held beliefs, and making major life changes can be exhausting.

When you hit an especially draining phase, be kind and compassionate with yourself. Consider temporarily throttling back the intensity for a few weeks if you're feeling overwhelmed. Use this respite to recharge through self-care activities like exercise, meditation, spending time outdoors, etc.

However, don't let yourself slip into avoidance. Recognize that working through difficulty is ultimately what leads to healing and breakthrough moments. Celebrate small wins along the way and lean on your support system of loved ones when you need encouragement.

If the fatigue becomes unmanageable or brings up thoughts of self-harm, tell your therapist immediately. You may need to take a planned break from therapy while still caring for your basic needs.

The journey of therapy involves cycles of progression and stagnation, forging ahead and pulling back to gather strength. Have faith that rejuvenated energy will follow the tiresome stretches if you continue showing up for yourself.

Conclusion

I hope you have a general understanding about being in talk therapy by now and what to expect in your journey.

About me: I am Advait Naik a designer who is passionate about self reflection, I am currently building Verba which is an app that helps you capture your life through reflection so that you can recall it in your therapy sessions.

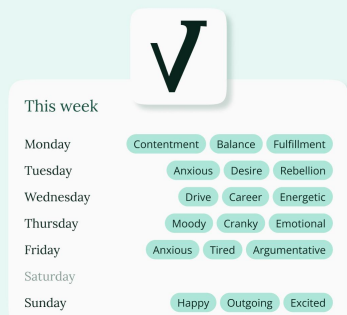
It helps you remember the good and bad days so you can discuss them with your therapist without forgetting about what you went through and also acts as a self reflection companion between sessions.

Verba is available for iOS and Android devices all over the world! You can learn more about it here: <https://myverba.com/>

I hope you enjoyed this sweet and short read and am grateful that I could provide you with the shortest guide/ crash course before or while you are on your journey.

All the best,
Advait

Capture your life in
detail for therapy



Verba automatically
writes *daily recaps*
about your life

