

Some frequent questions about therapy and counselling

What exactly is therapy or counselling?

Therapy, also called psychotherapy or counselling, is the process of meeting with a therapist to resolve behaviours, beliefs, feelings, relationship issues, and/or somatic responses (sensations in the body) that are creating a problem in your life. Through therapy you can change unhelpful behaviours and habits, resolve painful feelings, improve your relationships, and more.

Therapy focuses not only on the content of what you talk about, but also the process. The therapeutic process--how you share your feelings and experiences--is just as important as the specific issues or concerns you share in therapy.

For children, and even sometimes with young people or adults, drawing and/or play may also be incorporated to help express thoughts and feelings and process events.

What happens in therapy or counselling?

Though no one can tell you exactly what your therapeutic journey will be like, in all modes of therapy generally you will establish goals for therapy and determine the steps you will take to reach them.

Good therapy should be tailored to you and your experiences. But generally you can expect that your therapist will be someone who supports you, listens attentively, models a healthy and positive relationship experience, gives you appropriate feedback, and follows ethical guidelines.

Some forms of therapy are insight-oriented; they strive to increase your awareness of the unconscious motivations and historical explanations for your current patterns.

Other forms of therapy are active, and will offer you specific, research-based techniques to help you change your negative thinking, manage stress, improve your mood, and enhance the quality of your relationships. This is particularly true if you are experiencing distressing symptoms related to depression or anxiety, self-harm or substance misuse. For people with these difficulties, one aspect of therapy will be to provide information about your situation and teach you methods to cope with and/or change your behaviour, moods and thoughts.

Given I believe therapy should fit with my client's personality style; I enjoy using a varied approach to therapy. Different types of therapy that can be provided includes aspects of, amongst others

- cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) a time-limited, evidence based therapy that is problem focused and skills based,
- dialectic behaviour therapy (DBT), a therapy that is helpful for teaching strategies to help manage emotional responses,
- family/whanau relationship work, which emphasises the interactions between family/whanau members and how these impact upon wellbeing,
- motivational interviewing, an approach which elicits behaviour change by helping clients explore the impact of their behaviour,
- narrative therapy, a therapy focussing on the stories of people's lives and how each person produces the meaning of their life from the stories,
- art and play may also be used.

What happens if I am nervous or don't like the therapist or counsellor?

It is completely normal to be nervous about attending therapy as you are meeting a complete stranger and having to share your thoughts and feelings with someone you do not know.

It is a good idea to approach your first meeting as an introductory “getting to know you” session and see if think you can form a trusting relationship with your therapist and if your personalities “fit”. If after your first meeting you don't feel that way, you should tell the therapist. They will not feel upset or angry or feel it is a personal insult. Rather they can talk it through with you and if need be may suggest someone else you might be able to form a different connection with.

Is therapy confidential?

Generally speaking what is said in therapy is confidential. However, there are some exceptions especially if there are concerns about risk. If you disclose in therapy that you want to harm yourself, want to harm another person, or someone is harming you, I may not be able to keep this confidential. However, I will discuss this with you and decide together how to deal with the situation as I have ethical, legal and moral obligations to keep everyone, including you, safe.

Also, if you are referred by an organisation or service, they will generally want or need to have some feedback on the therapeutic process. How much or how little information they receive will be discussed with you and I generally do not provide any written feedback without either your permission or without showing it to you first.

If you self-refer I may write a summary letter to your GP if this is appropriate. But again, I will discuss this with you first.

Please also be aware, as a clinical psychologist I discuss all my work with my clinical supervisor who is another clinical psychologist. This is mandatory for all clinical psychologists. The purpose of this is to review my practice to ensure I am providing my clients with the most appropriate and effective approach that meets their needs. It also helps reduce the risk of oversight and helps me to reflect on my own feelings, thoughts, behaviour and general approach with my clients.

What next?

If you are thinking about attending therapy with me, please do not hesitate to contact me to discuss this or arrange a brief meeting to see if you feel we can form a working relationship.

If you have any further questions, please call me at 021 2400078 or e-mail me at janice@jfloodpsychology.co.nz

Please note all information contained in this document reflects the opinion of the author and relates only to my professional practice, not that of every therapist or clinical psychologist.