

## A SELF-CARE SEPTEMBER BONUS ARTICLE

### Help! Do I Need A Therapist

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As a clinical psychologist, people ask me this a lot. Of course, as with all complex questions, there's no simple answer. What I can say is that we are all at once, perfect and a work in progress! We all have good days and bad days, and most of the time, we can enjoy the good days and we get through and somehow figure out how to manage the bad ones. But sometimes, we do tend to struggle more than usual or feel overwhelmed by life. We can even lose hope and feel as though life is spinning out of control.

At times, we can become overwhelmed and confused, and feel as though our problems are preventing us from taking care of our daily life tasks and responsibilities. When this happens, it can be highly beneficial — and life-enhancing — to go outside of ourselves and seek help. Let's take a look at some of the reasons people seek therapy, some of the types of therapy available, and how to go about finding a therapist when you find yourself asking 'Would I benefit from therapy?'

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#### **One in five**

Just as we may occasionally require the help of a medical doctor to address problematic physical health issues, our mental health may, at times, also need care and attention. In fact, every year, one in five Canadians will experience a mental health issue.

We can become overwhelmed by self-doubt, feelings of hopelessness, or other stressors in life, and unable to manage our life tasks and relationships. Many people struggle in silence with anxiety, mood, trauma triggers, substance abuse, workaholism, gambling, or other problematic behaviors, and even lose interest in life. As a result, many people withdraw, or shut down. Others struggle with undiagnosed underlying mental health issues. Unfortunately, due to the stigma that still exists around mental health, many people who would benefit from the guidance and support of a mental health professional do not seek help. And many who would like to seek help, have no idea how or where to begin.

#### **Where and how to begin**

Now that you understand some of the reasons why you might consider therapy, let's look at where and how to start. Depending on

the nature of the mental health challenges in play, a treatment plan could involve a thorough assessment of your unique needs, type of effective therapy, medication, or both a combination of psychotropic medication and therapy treatment and supportive counselling. There are many entry points and strategies available when seeking a therapist. A primary care physician or family doctor can recommend a therapist and provide a list of community resources. For employees with an EAP, insurance providers will have resources available for anyone seeking therapy. For post-secondary students, on-campus mental health resources can be a great starting point. People can also begin their search for a therapist through hospitals, community resources, online supports, looking at the College of Psychologists of Ontario's website directory of Clinical Psychologists listed by location area and another helpful way to find someone, is simply by word of mouth referrals. Included at the end of this article you will find a link to a number of mental health resources.

#### **Understanding types of therapy**

There are a number of effective evidence-based therapies that help people address symptoms, develop core strengths and

abilities, and can provide transformative, life strategies and healing. The benefits of therapy can continue long after therapy ends. Besides individual therapy, therapists can also work with workplaces, couples or families. Therapists often incorporate multi-disciplinary approaches to treating symptoms. Here's a brief overview of several well-known types of therapy, and how they work.

**Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT):** CBT is a structured, problem-focussed and goal oriented form of psychotherapy. In Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, patients learn to identify and challenge negative thoughts or cognitions and facilitate positive change in attitudes and beliefs. As well, there is a focus on behavioural reactions from negative thoughts and support to shift maladaptive behaviors through exposures, and revise habits to healthier, more positive, adaptive ones as one challenges maladaptive thoughts.

**Behavioral Therapy (BT):** In Behavioral Therapy, patients work to identify and change maladaptive, distressing and harmful behaviors in their lives. BT reinforces exposures to desirable, healthy behaviours to eliminate unwanted ones in order to enhance ones quality of life.

**Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (DBT):** In Dialectical Behavioural Therapy people are taught acceptance and change. Acceptance of experiences and behaviours and learning to positively change to manage emotions and relationships better to move forward in a healthy manner. There is a focus on emotional regulation, mindfulness and responding versus reacting, distress tolerance, learning how to cope better in stressful situations or when triggered, and interpersonal effectiveness to maintain healthy bonds with others. Such skills can be both individual and group therapy and both are helpful with enhancing healthy coping.

**Psychodynamic therapy:** In this psychoanalytic form of therapy, with roots in

Freudian therapy, the patient and therapist engage in depth talk therapy, examine memories, dreams, emotions, relationships, and thought patterns, and explore the connection between their unconscious and their behaviors with the outside world.

### **Emotionally Focused Therapy**

**(EFT)** explores personality and relationships. This helps emotional and behavioral dynamics between couples or within families/workplaces. It examines the interplay of emotions and corresponding behaviors, the effect of these behaviors, attachments and interactions on relationships. Participants learn strategies to change negative cycles and establish stronger, more positive interpersonal dynamics and relationships.

### **Mindfulness Meditation**

Mindfulness Meditation is a practice to facilitate being present in the "here and now," and acknowledge where you are, what you are feeling and thinking and accept as is feelings, thoughts and sensations without judgement. **Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)** teaches one to sitting with symptoms as they are than trying to get rid of them. It allows one to work on focussing on the breath to ground oneself and be in the now and training oneself to slow down racing thoughts and let go of judgement of self and thoughts and the negativity one is plagued with and just be in that moment, with your breath. It allows one to feel calmer in ones mind and body.

### **Mindfulness-based Cognitive**

**Therapy (MBCT):** Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy combines cognitive therapy with mindfulness-based meditation techniques in a group setting. Patients learn meditation techniques and cognitive therapeutic strategies for managing mood, anxiety, and difficult emotions.

### **Eye Movement Desensitization**

**Reprocessing (EMDR):** Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing is a psychotherapy treatment that alleviates the distress associated with traumatic or distressing memories. EMDR facilitates the

healing and clearing of adverse life experiences, reducing the intense feelings one experiences. EMDR can facilitate healing resulting from life-threatening traumas, including wartime experiences, sexual assault, intimate partner abuse, childhood abuse, sudden losses and other life-threatening events. Eye movement or other bilateral stimulation, in concert with replaying life-threatening memories, is proven to reduce the intensity of overwhelming emotions, de-personalize concepts that are unhealthy for one to hold onto and process accurately hurts of traumatic memories and experiences. With EMDR many times affective distress is relieved, negative beliefs and cognitive distortions are reframed and physiological arousal is reduced and alleviated.

### ***The right therapist***

Finding the right therapist can take time and effort, but like any working relationship worth having, it is worth the effort. A therapist that is a good fit for you will connect with you, and make you feel safe, understood, and heard. They will take the time to understand your issues and goals, and will provide you with a sound treatment plan to help you reach your goals. They can also help you articulate and understand difficult feelings and situations, help you reframe negative automatic thoughts, and provide life-changing skills and strategies that will remain valuable throughout your life. If in the course of working with a therapist you feel unsupported, unsafe, or uncomfortable for any reason, make your feelings known. Your therapist will work with you to resolve any issues and refer you to another therapists or alternative resources. It

is important to understand that a therapist is only as good as you allow them to be. They are service providers and can only work with you in the process. Hence, it is important to be transparent, honest and sincere in your efforts to be present in sessions. This is for you to receive full benefits of therapy.

### ***A healing journey***

The decision to seek the help of a therapist is often the first step of a powerful healing journey. It is a sign of strength and belief in yourself, and an investment of your time and energies that will pay dividends. Just as going to the doctor when you require medical attention is beneficial and wise, seeking the help of a mental health professional is good self-care. The benefits of working with a therapist can be life-changing and life-long. Taking care of your mental health can help you live a more authentic life at your highest and best!

### **When NOT to seek the help of a therapist!**

If you or someone you know is in the midst of a mental health crisis — that is to say, if you or someone you know are in danger of harming themselves or someone else — it is important to seek immediate help. Here is what you can do:

- **Go** directly to the closest hospital emergency department
- **Call** 911
- **Call** The Canada Suicide Prevention Service 1.833.456.4566. Responders are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

[Link to: mental health services and resources](#)



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*About the author*

*Dr. Monica Vermani is a Clinical Psychologist specializing in treating trauma, stress and mood & anxiety disorders, and the founder of Start Living Corporate Wellness. She is a well-known speaker and author on mental health and wellness. Her upcoming book, A Deeper Wellness, is scheduled for publication in 2021.*

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*Dr. Vermani has recently launched an exciting online self-help program, A Deeper Wellness, delivering powerful mental-health guidance, life skills, and knowledge that employees can access anywhere, anytime. <https://www.adeeperwellness.com/>*

