

How to Start Therapy Workbook

Plan ahead so you can begin therapy with the right therapist, clear goals, confidence, and feeling ready to talk about your emotions.

How to Choose a Therapist

Therapy Goals

First Therapy Session Planner

Expressing Feelings

How to Start Therapy

Starting therapy can be an overwhelming but very rewarding process. Preparing in advance can make the process go more smoothly. **This workbook is designed to introduce you to the therapy process, help you choose a therapist, set goals, and practice expressing your feelings.** By engaging with these worksheets, you can take active steps toward better mental health and well-being.

Here is a brief introduction to each worksheet included in this package:

How to Choose a Therapist

This worksheet will guide you in identifying what is important to you in a therapist, including experience, approach, and personality fit. This worksheet can also help you keep information about a therapist's availability and payment options organized.

Therapy Goals

This worksheet helps you think through your goals and how you would like your life to be different as a result of therapy. Reflecting on your goals in advance can help you make therapy as effective as possible.

First Therapy Session Planner

This worksheet reviews what to expect from your first therapy session, encourages you to reflect on your current symptoms, and provides space to note questions and concerns for next time. Preparing in advance for your first session can help you feel more more organized and less anxious.

Expressing Feelings

Talking about emotions can be challenging for many of us. This worksheet is designed to help you understand barriers and benefits to talking about your feelings, as well as help you identify your emotions and practice expressing them.

**This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.*



How to Choose a Therapist

Therapy works best when you find a therapist who is a great fit for your needs, goals, and personality.

This worksheet will guide you through the process of finding the right therapist, helping you identify what to look for and what is important to you in a therapeutic relationship. **On this page, look over the content of each section and highlight or underline any items that matter to you.** When you review a therapist's website or talk to them during a phone consultation, explore the items you've chosen and check the box if the therapist has relevant experience.

Do you have experience with treating:

Common concerns:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Abuse | <input type="checkbox"/> Panic and anxiety attacks |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Addiction | <input type="checkbox"/> Personality concerns |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anger and frustration | <input type="checkbox"/> Sadness or grief |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety and worries | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-harm |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Behaviors that are difficult to control | <input type="checkbox"/> Sleep problems |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Body image issues | <input type="checkbox"/> Social difficulties |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Burnout | <input type="checkbox"/> Stress |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty concentrating | <input type="checkbox"/> Suicidal thoughts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Eating concerns | <input type="checkbox"/> Trauma |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fears and phobias | <input type="checkbox"/> Parenting challenges |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Guilt or self-criticism | <input type="checkbox"/> Fertility challenges |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Impulsivity | <input type="checkbox"/> Relationship challenges |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Intrusive thoughts | <input type="checkbox"/> Sex and intimacy challenges |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Meltdowns | <input type="checkbox"/> Work challenges |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mood swings | <input type="checkbox"/> Major life changes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: | |

Mental Health Diagnoses:

- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Anorexia or Bulimia
- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- Bipolar Disorder (BPI, BPII)
- Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD)
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)
- Major Depressive Disorder (MDD)
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Panic Disorder
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Separation Anxiety
- Sexual Disorders
- Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD)
- Specific Phobias
- Other:

Do you have experience providing:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <u>Cognitive Behavioral Therapy</u> (CBT) | <input type="checkbox"/> <u>Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing</u> (EMDR) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <u>Psychodynamic Therapy</u> | <input type="checkbox"/> <u>Exposure and Response Prevention</u> (ERP) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <u>Dialectical Behavior Therapy</u> (DBT) | <input type="checkbox"/> <u>Acceptance and Commitment Therapy</u> (ACT) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <u>Person-Centered Therapy</u> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: | |

Do you have experience working with:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> People with my race/ethnicity | <input type="checkbox"/> People with my religion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> People from my culture or nationality | <input type="checkbox"/> People with my disability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> People with my gender identity | <input type="checkbox"/> People my age |
| <input type="checkbox"/> People with my sexual/romantic orientation | <input type="checkbox"/> People in my financial situation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parents or people struggling with fertility | <input type="checkbox"/> Neurodiverse people |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: | |

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How to Choose a Therapist

If you hope to find a therapist specializing in work with a particular identity:

You can find specific guides here, which include:

- directories
- additional questions to ask
- more resources



[Find a Black Therapist](#)



[Find a Latinx Therapist](#)



[Find an LGBTQIA+ Therapist](#)



[Find a Neurodiverse-Affirming Therapist](#)

Below, consider your preferences for availability and cost. When you review a therapist's website or talk to them during a phone consultation, learn about where they provide their sessions, days and times they have available, whether they accept your insurance, and their rates.

Availability

Does this therapist offer sessions online? Yes No

Does this therapist offer sessions in person? Yes No
If yes, where?

What days and times do they have open for new clients?

Cost of therapy

Will this therapist accept my insurance plan?

Yes

- How much will insurance cover, and how much will I pay per session?
- Is there a limit to the number of sessions my plan will cover?
- What happens if we need more sessions?

No

- What is their out-of-pocket rate per session?
- Do they offer a sliding scale (discounts based on income)?

Are you accessing this therapist through your workplace's Employee Assistance Plan (EAP)?

Yes

- How many sessions are covered?
- If there is a limit and we need more sessions, what happens?

Are there fees for missed appointments or late cancellations? Yes No

Notes

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How to Choose a Therapist

On this page, consider questions to ask your potential therapist, and questions to reflect on for yourself.

Questions to consider asking your potential therapist:

- What do your credentials mean for me?
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.....
- How do you approach helping people?
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- Do you make treatment plans? If so, will you share mine with me?
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- How do sessions work with you? What will we do?
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.....
- How long might I be working with you?
.....
.....
- Do you give therapy “homework”?
.....
.....
- What’s your style as a therapist?
.....
.....

Questions to consider asking yourself:

- Did they seem positive, authentic, and professional?
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- Does this seem like a good personality fit?
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.....
- Does their approach to therapy fit with my goals?
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- Do they share or understand my identities?
.....
.....
- Did they explain confidentiality?
.....
.....
- Do I feel respected, validated, and comfortable with them?
.....
.....

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Therapy Goals

Setting treatment goals is an important part of working with a therapist. These reflection questions can help you think through your reasons for seeking therapy and what you hope to gain from it. You can also return to these goals as you continue through therapy as a way to keep track of your progress.

We encourage you to try these questions out on your own first, but if you're having trouble putting your goals into words, you can try the prompts on the next page to get started.

What problem has brought you to therapy? Why are you starting therapy now?

If therapy worked well, how would your life be different? Try to think of specific ways you would be able to tell.

What would you most like to work on in therapy?

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Therapy Goals

If you're having trouble putting your goals into words, you might try some of the prompts below, if they seem relevant to your situation:

What problem has brought you to therapy? Why are you starting therapy now?

- I can't stop thinking about
- A lot of the time, I feel
- I feel stressed, worried, down, or angry because
- A lot of the time, my body feels
- Too often, I seem to
- I seem to have a habit of
- I don't like that I
- My life has changed since
- People in my life tell me
- People in my life are
- Work has become difficult because
- Relationships have become difficult because
- I feel stuck because
- I can't seem to cope with

If therapy worked well, how would your life be different? Try to think of specific ways you would be able to tell.

- I would think
- I would feel
- I would do
- I would know
- I would start
- I would stop
- On most days, I would
- People in my life would
- Work would be better because
- Relationships would be better because
- I would cope with

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Therapy Goals

If you're having trouble putting your goals into words, you might try some of the prompts below, if they seem relevant to your situation:

What would you most like to work on in therapy?

- I want to figure out
- I want to learn
- A problem I want to solve is
- I want to explore
- I want to cope with
- I want to feel
- I want to improve

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First Therapy Session Planner

This worksheet is designed to help you understand the therapy process and get the most out of your first session. Before your first session begins, we encourage you to review the information below, note any questions or concerns, and reflect on your reasons for starting therapy. Preparing in advance can help you get your thoughts in order, as well as reduce anxiety.

Before your first session

Before your first appointment, you will likely need to complete a set of intake forms. These usually involve:

- Your personal and contact information
- Your insurance information (if applicable)
- Your mental health history and current symptoms
- Consent forms, which explain fees and billing, contact with your therapist, and confidentiality (how your information is kept private and when there may be safety-related exceptions)

Notes or questions

Preparing for your first session

Take a quiet, private moment to think about why you would like to begin therapy. This is a helpful process because your therapist will work with you to make a plan for treatment based on your goals and concerns. Using any of the prompts below that are relevant to your situation may help you put your goals and concerns into words:

I've been experiencing difficult:

- thoughts
- emotions
- behaviors
- memories
- stressful situations
- relationships

After working with a therapist, I want there to be differences in how I:

- think
- feel
- act
- remember the past
- cope with stress
- approach relationships

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First Therapy Session Planner

You can also use this space to brainstorm any other concerns or goals you have for therapy:

During your first session

During your first session (“intake appointment”), your therapist will likely have two main goals:

- Telling you about: their approach, the therapy process, and confidentiality and safety
- Asking you about: why you would like to begin therapy, your current mental health symptoms or challenges, and your history (your identity, family, upbringing, health, relationships, and work)

Expect that your therapist may have many questions about many different topics.

At the end of the session, your therapist may:

- Determine a mental health diagnosis, if applicable
- Start going over a treatment plan with you
- Discuss how frequently they recommend meeting (e.g., weekly, biweekly) and how long their sessions are
- Assign homework or something to work on for the next session, or ask you what you plan to work on

You can expect the first session to last 45-60 minutes.

Notes or questions

After your first session

Attending your first therapy session can bring up a lot of thoughts and feelings. Take a moment after your first session to reflect on the experience, and to note any questions or concerns you would like to discuss at your next appointment. Also, congratulate yourself! **You just took a huge step towards supporting your mental health.**

- concerns to discuss next time _____
- questions to ask next time _____

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Expressing Feelings

Talking about your feelings can be challenging for a variety of reasons. For many people, talking about emotions was ignored or discouraged during their upbringing. However, there are major benefits to talking about your feelings, especially within the privacy of therapy. This worksheet aims to help you think through barriers and benefits to talking about your feelings, help you identify how you're feeling, and show you ways to practice talking about your feelings.

Barriers to talking about your feelings

Many of us have had real past experiences that taught us lessons about why it's risky to talk about emotions.

People like me can't talk about their feelings.

- Whether it's because of gender, culture, race/ethnicity, age, or anything else around identity, many people have heard messages that they can't talk about or experience certain emotions. Messages like, "Boys don't cry" or, "In my generation, we don't talk about that" can make it difficult or risky to talk about or show particular feelings.

Feelings are irrational and distract from solving the real problem at hand.

- Many of us have heard, "You're being irrational" when we show or express our feelings. We've heard messages that seem to say we cannot be taken seriously or make good decisions if we are feeling an emotion.

If I talk about my feelings, something bad will happen, or it won't help.

- Sometimes, people who have heard our feelings have ignored us, rejected us, or hurt us for expressing them.

Write about a time in the past when it was difficult or risky to express your feelings. What happened?

.....

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.....



Expressing Feelings

What barriers get in the way of expressing your emotions in your everyday life?

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Benefits to talking about your feelings

Acknowledging, identifying, and talking about our emotions helps us learn important information and supports our mental health.

Emotions give us important information.

- In our brains, the emotional center (limbic system) scans our environment and gets us ready to act. When the limbic system senses danger, we feel fear and are filled with energy to fight or flee. But our limbic system signals us for other reasons, too - when it perceives a loss, a boundary has been crossed, that we may be judged, etc.
- Emotions are not always 100% “correct.” For example, you might *feel like* you have to flee from danger when in reality, you have to stand up and give a presentation in front of others. But emotions do signal us that something is important (for example, the success of the presentation could affect your promotion) and directs our attention and energy towards it (for example, thinking about the presentation often).

Expressing emotions supports our mental health.

- Research shows that just labelling our emotions alone can help our minds and bodies feel more calm.
- Expressing emotions (by talking or writing about them) helps reduce stress, especially when stressors are not controllable.

How could you benefit from expressing your emotions?

.....

.....

.....

.....

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Expressing Feelings

Even if it's been risky in the past, there are safe places to practice expressing emotion.

- Therapists and counselors are *required* to keep your information private, including what you say about your feelings.** They are also trained to help you identify your emotions and understand where they are coming from.
- Group therapy, support groups, and listening services are all created to understand and encourage people when they talk about their feelings.
- Religious or spiritual leaders often offer emotional support to those they serve.
- Trusted family and friends can provide a variety of supports, like validation, cheering you up, and helping you problem-solve.

Who could you express your emotions to?

.....

.....

.....

Figuring out how you're feeling

Sometimes it's hard to even decide how you're feeling, and that can prevent expressing your emotions. If you don't know what you're feeling, here are a few ideas:

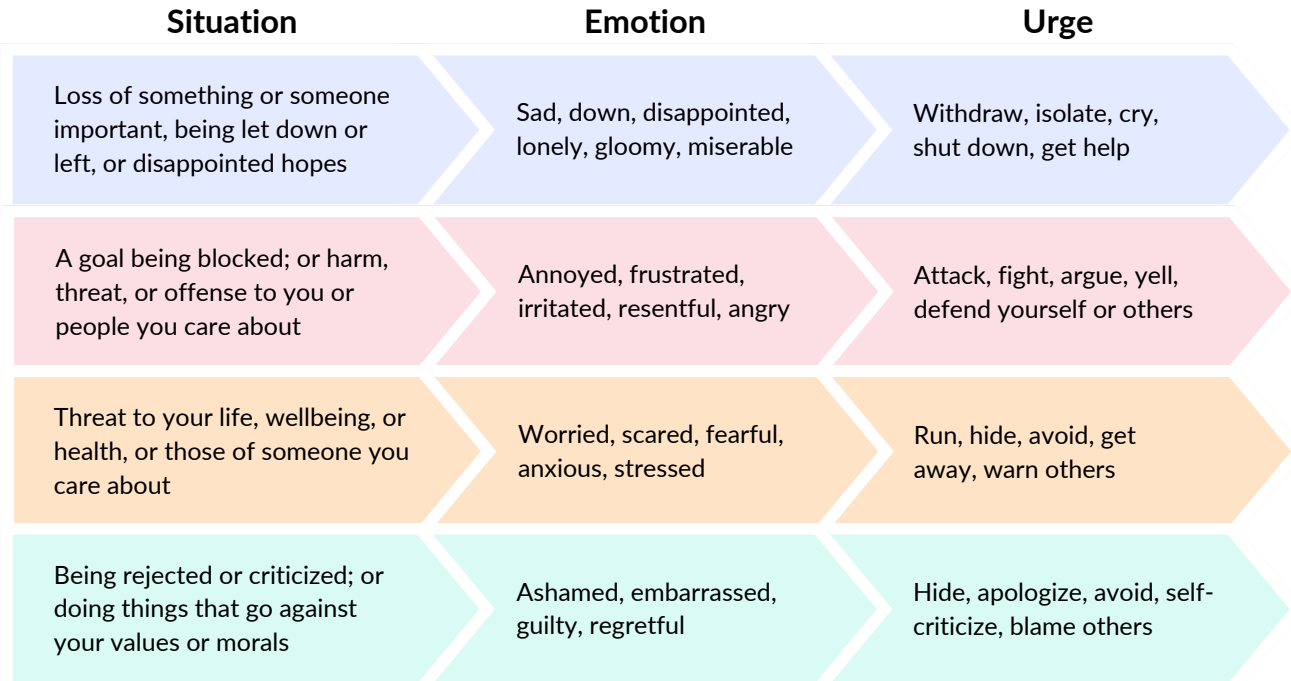
- Take a look at the **Emotion** column on the next page. Do any of those emotions seem like the right fit? If none of them are quite right, try looking at a larger [emotion list](#).
- You might not know what your emotion is yet, but try starting with the **Situation** column. For many people, certain types of situations (like losses) often result in a related feeling (like sadness). If your situation matches one below, take a look at the related feelings to the right and consider if they are the right fit.
- Emotions get our bodies and minds ready to act in ways to meet our needs. If you are not sure of what your emotion is, but you know what you feel like *doing*, take a look at the **Urge** column. Urges (like isolating) are often the result of an emotion (like sadness), so if your urge matches one below, look at the related feelings to the left.

**Therapists and counselors do need to break confidentiality when required by law if there is a serious safety risk.

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Expressing Feelings



Which idea(s) did you try? Did they work for you? Why or why not?

.....

.....

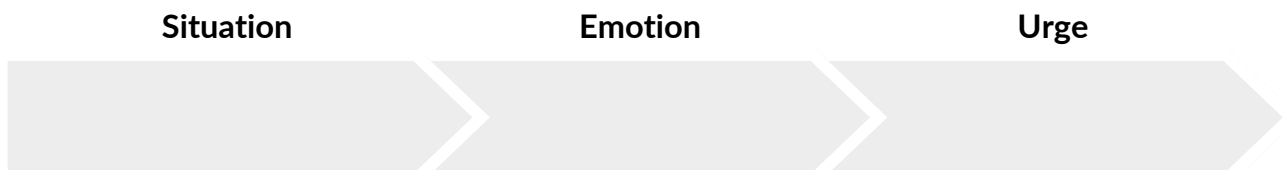
.....

Name your feeling(s) here, even if you have to guess. Practice will help you name your feelings in the future.

Practicing talking about your feelings

To practice talking about your feelings, take a moment to remember a time you had strong emotions, or try these exercises the next time you feel a strong emotion.

1) Write down the situation, emotion, and urge.



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Expressing Feelings

2) Talk about your feelings, just to yourself. If you're not sure what to say, you can follow the process above and try saying something like, "When [situation] happened, I felt [emotion], and I wanted to [urge]." You can also practice by writing a note to yourself, or recording yourself speaking aloud and listening back to the recording. In the space below, write about what you tried and how it went.

.....

.....

3) Imagine expressing your feelings to someone patient, understanding, and respectful to you. What do you imagine this would be like? How would this feel? What would they say back?

.....

.....

.....

4) Practice with someone you trust. Here are a few ideas for how you might practice expressing your feelings:

- The next time someone asks how you are, try taking the opportunity to express a mild feeling, and resist the urge to just say something like, "fine," "good," or "okay."
 - For example, "I'm a little frustrated with [situation]," or, "I'm excited about [something]"
- Add "I felt." The next time you're talking to someone you trust about something, try adding just one sentence about how you felt.
 - For example, "My boss asked to meet one-on-one yesterday. I felt kind of nervous, but it turned out fine."
 - Or, "Did you see the game? I felt so frustrated at halftime."
- Ask them how they feel, and pay attention. What words did they choose? Why did they feel the way they did?
- If you can, let someone know you're working on this skill. Telling someone you trust can help you stay accountable, and they can prompt you to talk about your feelings.

5) Keep trying. Like any other skill, you can get better at talking about your feelings with practice.

You can do it!

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Additional Resources to Support Your Mental Health Journey

It can be hard to know where to begin looking for support in your mental health journey. Getting a referral from a primary care physician is a reliable first step. Also, sometimes family and friends have experienced similar issues and have professionals they would recommend. The experts at ChoosingTherapy.com are here to help as well, with resources we have reviewed and recommend. Our [strict editorial standards](#) ensure our reviews are fair, honest, thorough, and based on firsthand experience.

You Can Trust ChoosingTherapy.com



325+
Companies Reviewed



3,625+
Hours of Firsthand Experience



1,545+
Data Points Analyzed



[Best Online Therapy](#)

Online therapy is a convenient way to connect with a licensed therapist to address mental health issues, reduce unhealthy behaviors, develop effective coping skills, and get more satisfaction out of life. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.

[Best Online Psychiatry](#)

Online psychiatry providers enable patients to consult with licensed psychiatrists and other mental health professionals. They can evaluate, diagnose, and prescribe medication to help manage mental health issues. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.



[Best Mental Health Apps](#)

Apps can be great way to monitor mood, track sleep, journal, and practice healthy coping skills like mindfulness and meditation. There are apps specifically designed to help people reduce the symptoms of depression, anxiety, ADHD, chronic stress, and burnout.

[Therapist Directory](#)

When you're looking for a mental health provider with a very particular skill set, level of experience, or personality type, a therapist directory can be very helpful. Using the filters, you can refine your search until you find a therapist who feels like a perfect fit.



Find Online Treatment Options Specific to Your Needs

Finding specialized treatment based on age, identity, goals, or diagnosis can make a difference in the efficacy of therapy. The experts at ChoosingTherapy.com are here to help, with specific resources we have reviewed and recommend. Our [strict editorial standards](#) ensure our reviews are fair, honest, thorough, and based on firsthand experience.

You Can Trust ChoosingTherapy.com



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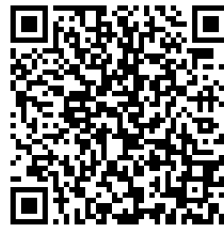
3,625+
Hours of Firsthand Experience



1,545+
Data Points Analyzed



[Best Online Therapy
Platforms for Teens](#)



[Best Online Therapy
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People](#)



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