

Is Therapy Right For You?

Fall is often a time when people are beginning a new academic year, work project, or some other new adventure. One option you might find that you are considering this fall is psychotherapy. When we are considering trying something new, it can be difficult to determine if it is the right choice. I believe that therapy is the process of co-creating a healing conversation that is focused on helping an individual examine what is working and not working well in his/her life. The general aim of therapy is to improve a person's overall life satisfaction. This goal can include many different activities, such as researching options, gaining new knowledge, clarifying one's identity, making decisions, and living in new ways. At its heart, therapy is about change and growth. However, since life is always changing, how can one determine if psychotherapy is the right option in a given situation?

One of the most common feelings expressed during the first therapy session is the feeling of being overwhelmed. Often, it is the feeling that we are being faced with too much at once that indicates we need help in our personal lives. If we are feeling confused, depressed, anxious or fearful, it can be time to talk to a mental health professional. If our usual coping strategies are not resulting in relief and/or the possibility of receiving assistance brings hope, it could mean that psychotherapy is a useful option for us at that time.

It is important to note that Registered Psychotherapists (RP) in Ontario are authorized to perform the controlled act of psychotherapy, which is defined as: *to treat, by means of psychotherapy technique delivered through a therapeutic relationship, an individual's serious disorder of thought, cognition, mood, emotional regulation, perception or memory that may seriously impair the individual's judgment, insight, behaviour, communication or social functioning.* The College of Registered Psychotherapists of Ontario (CRPO) is one of the six health regulatory colleges whose members are authorized to provide psychotherapy.

The opportunity to talk with someone who is completely apart from your daily life can provide you with a more objective perspective on it. Sometimes, a new perspective is all one needs to feel more hopeful about life. Opening up your thoughts, and getting out of your head, can also lead you to spontaneous insights. Sometimes, one does not even realize how clear the choice he/she needs to make, or the course of action one needs to take, is until he/she has said everything aloud to someone else unfettered by interruptions or uninvited input.

Certainly, choosing the right psychotherapist for you is essential. Talking to a few different psychotherapists on the telephone can be important because the personal connection you feel with the therapist greatly impacts the quality of the healing relationship. If you feel that the therapist listens to you, answers your questions, and can provide you with information about his/her professional training (usually a Master's degree is the minimum requirement for a psychotherapist, as well as a full membership to a health regulatory college in Ontario), then it will probably be easier to share your more personal thoughts. Most of all, it is important to feel

a "click" with your psychotherapist.

If you decide to book a session, you can use that time to determine how you feel about continuing to work with the therapist. It is always your right to decide to stop working with a psychotherapist, despite any recommendations he/she might make. The right therapist can also provide you with information about research, therapeutic groups and/or community organizations that may relate to the issue(s) at hand.

However, there are also times when therapy is not the right choice. Sometimes, you may find that you have done enough talking and you need to act instead. It might be time to try out on your own the new strategies that you have learned. Therapy is not meant to be an endless endeavour. A good sign that indicates psychotherapy is done is when you engage in more general and superficial topics of conversation during a session, or when you no longer have a specific topic to discuss. A well-trained psychotherapist will be able to help you identify when the discussion has shifted from a therapeutic dialogue to a more casual conversation.

Therapy can be a valuable tool when a person is feeling emotionally overwhelmed, and seeking a confidential space that is focused on his/her personal needs. Trusting your gut instinct, and giving yourself the opportunity to try it with a psychotherapist you like, will help you to determine if therapy is right for you. Overall, the experience should bring you something positive, whether it is comfort, support, hope, insights, challenges, resources, skills, or some other beneficial result. Psychotherapy can be the doorway through which an entirely new, fresh and exciting way of being in the world can be discovered.