

Improving Success in Therapy

By Kim Peterson

Many people spend months or even years considering therapy, long after they recognize a problem. Just like anything else in which you want to succeed, therapy takes commitment, time, and effort. Below are tips for improving your chances of meeting your goals in therapy. These tips apply to adults, adolescents, and child clients, as well as couples and families.

1. Choose the right therapist.

After deciding to seek help, the first step is finding the right therapist *for you* (and/or your child if you are a parent). Make sure they fit your personality, location, and availability needs, and have experience in working with your issues. All of these will impact your progress. Check out “Finding the Right Type of Mental Health Professional” and “Five Qualities of a Good Child Therapist” on my website for additional help. Remember, this may be an individual involved in your life for a long while.

- To find a therapist near you, visit Google businesses, psychologytoday.com, and Goodtherapy.org for information.
- Make a list of the therapists who fit your needs by their location and credentials.
- Contact the therapist directly and ask as many questions as needed. Find out their experience in working with your issues and any other questions that are important to you. Many therapists are willing to schedule a time to meet with you in person for an initial consult at no charge.
- Write down how you feel after talking to the therapist. Were they friendly? Did you feel at ease talking with them? Did you hear a willingness to answer your questions? And, finally, will this therapist be a good fit in terms of personality, credentials, availability, and location?
- Consider meeting with one or two additional potential therapists so you can optimize your chances of finding the right fit.

2. Ask questions about your treatment plan, goals, and progress.

During the first session, and ongoing from there, your therapist is gathering information on your mental health, identifying problem areas, establishing treatment goals, and tracking progress. Have a discussion about these points with your therapist and don't be afraid to ask questions if you do not understand.

3. Attend consistently.

Your therapist will likely recommend how frequently you should be attending therapy. Consistency is just as important to therapy as learning a new sport. The more frequently and consistently you practice, the better you will become!

4. Do your work outside of session.

Your therapist may prescribe homework in the form of journaling, writing a letter, documenting thoughts and behaviors, etc. These are just a few examples, but all of them are intended to help you reach your therapeutic goals.

5. Respect the process.

Therapy is a process. At times it may seem slow, but respect the journey you must take to get where you need to go. Your therapist is there to support you and encourage you along the way. At times, you may feel your progress is slow, or you may not want to go through a certain part of the process, but keep in mind this is important for your overall success.

6. Follow recommendations for related services.

These days, most medical and related professionals view wellness from a holistic approach. If your therapist refers you to another professional, it's important to follow through. For example, a therapist may refer a child for an occupational therapy evaluation if they suspect they may have sensory integration problems, or they may refer an adult to a support group so they can receive extra support and validation.

7. Maintain realistic expectations.

Clients often want to know how long it will take for them to "get better." This is an understandable request, but therapists really can't say how long it will take someone to meet his/her goals. There will be times when you feel great and notice a lot of progress, and other times when changes seem to be coming slower. This is normal and expected. Talk with your therapist about your

expectations when you start to question your progress or the benefits of therapy.

8. Gather support from family and/or close friends.

Moving through the therapeutic process may leave you feeling different inside. These challenges will be handled more smoothly if you have support and understanding from people who care about you. Give them a heads up that you may be feeling or acting differently than normal, or ask for a shoulder to cry on if you are feeling down.

9. Be honest with your therapist.

Believe it or not, clients are not always honest with their therapist. There can be various reasons you hold back from talking to your therapist, but the most important thing is that you get the help you need. You may feel apprehensive at times, but sharing your inner world is valuable, helpful, and necessary.

About the Author

Kim Peterson, MA, LPC-S, RPT, is a Licensed Professional Counselor, Board Approved Clinical Supervisor, and Registered Play Therapist in Kingwood, Texas. In addition to her private practice, Kim is a mentor and educator in her field. Her passion for children and play therapy is reflected in her blog, www.kimscounselingcorner.com, where she shares ideas and resources for therapists and individuals alike.