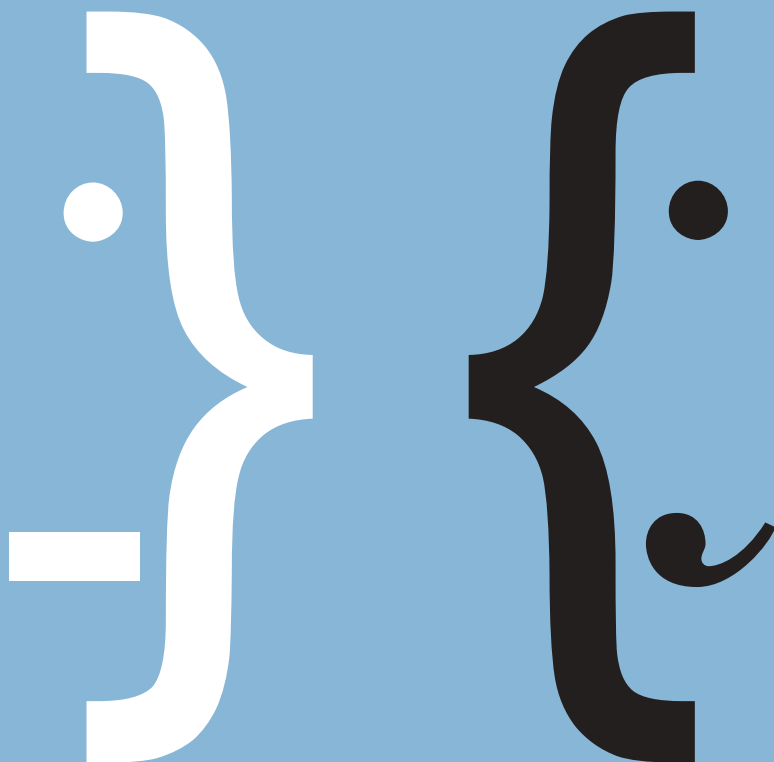


Understanding

▶ talking treatments

Mind
Publications



This leaflet gives a brief guide to the different talking treatments that are available. It also provides information on who might benefit from them, and who to contact about getting this type of help.



Why try talking treatments?

Talking treatments can help you to overcome emotional difficulties and free yourself from self-destructive ways of feeling, thinking and behaving. They work by providing an opportunity for you to talk in a way that assists you to understand yourself better. Having gained this understanding, you can work out ways of living your life in a more positive and constructive way.

This way of changing your life is very different from using drugs, such as tranquillisers and antidepressants, which doctors often prescribe for people who are emotionally distressed. These drugs change your mood by affecting the balance of chemicals in your body, but do not help you to deal with underlying problems. People who use mental health services often prefer talking treatments to drugs, but it can be hard to find them, especially if you can't afford to pay very much.



What are the different talking treatments?

There is a wide variety of talking treatments. Some last for several years, while others take just a few sessions. You may see someone on your own or be part of a group.

The self-help group

This is usually for people who want to overcome a problem shared by members of the group. It may be alcohol abuse, depression or being scared to go out of the house, to give some examples. Often these groups are led by people who have overcome the difficulties themselves. The people in the group are able to share their experiences, and learn from and encourage each other.

The support group

This is similar, but for people with a common background or interest. For example, it could be a group for mothers of young children, for gay men or for people doing similar, stressful jobs.

Individual counselling

This is an opportunity to be listened to while you talk about whatever is troubling you. It is generally face-to-face, but can also take place over the phone or via the internet. If you decide to see a counsellor in person, it may be for one session, or you may arrange for regular appointments, perhaps an hour a week for several months. Telephone, and now internet counselling is also obtainable from a variety of organisations, and is especially valuable in a particular crisis (see the list of *Useful organisations* on p. 11).

Counselling tends to focus on your current problems, with the counsellor helping you to find the best ways to tackle them. The counsellor's most important skill is the ability to listen. The aim is not to tell you what to do, or to offer a personal opinion, but about helping you to arrive at your own solutions.

Individual psychotherapy

The overall aim of psychotherapy is to help you to understand why you feel the way you do, and what lies behind your responses to other people and to things that happen to you. Talking about your experiences can help you to release painful feelings and find better ways of managing situations you have been finding difficult. This should enable you to reach a greater understanding of events that have shaped your life, and of self-destructive patterns of behaviour. It may, therefore, enable you to overcome specific problems, such as compulsive eating and lack of confidence, or simply allow you to become happier.

Psychotherapists have many different styles of working, and the number of sessions required can vary from one to five times a week. Each session may last for 50 minutes or an hour. You may agree to a fixed term of treatment, or the therapy may be open-ended and could continue for several years.

Some therapists will want you to talk mainly about your early childhood, and others will be more interested in what can be learnt from the relationship you make with them (known as 'the transference'). The psychotherapist may want to know how you feel about yourself, as a woman, a black person or someone with a physical disability, to give some examples. Others will be more interested in your dreams and fantasies. Some will encourage you to get rid of bad feelings by crying or getting angry, as well as talking.

There is a great deal of overlap between psychotherapy and counselling, and there are many different types of psychotherapy. For more information about how different therapies approach their work, contact the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), the British Confederation of Psychotherapists (BCP) and the UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP), details under *Useful organisations* on p. 11.

Relationship counselling and family therapy

Relationship counselling is for couples who want to sort out problems in their relationship. They attend sessions together and the counsellor helps them to express their difficulties, listen to each other, develop an understanding of each other, and find ways of making their relationship work better. They may decide to end the relationship, but, with luck, having gained more understanding of why it was not working, and what lessons they can learn for the future. Family therapy works in just the same way, with the entire family attending.

Group therapy

Group therapy enables people to deal with inter-personal problems and develop self-awareness. There are generally eight to 12 people in the group, who meet together regularly with a therapist and talk about their concerns. The idea of group therapy can be intimidating, however most people find it reassuring that others may be in a similar position to themselves. In a group environment, opportunities may arise to behave differently, to be more assertive or more vulnerable. It is also helpful for people to hear other points of view about their concerns, the way they appear, how their behaviour comes across and in what way it affects other people. Social skills training is taught in a group and helps people to relate better to others.

Cognitive behaviour therapy

Behaviour therapy, also known as exposure therapy or desensitisation, is often practised by psychologists. It is used to help people overcome fears, such as feeling too scared to go into a shop, or obsessive behaviour, such as washing many times a day. An opportunity is usually given to discuss the problem, and then to face your fear gradually, so that you learn to cope with it.

Cognitive therapy helps to identify connections between your thoughts, feelings and behaviour. It is a practical treatment that focuses on specific problem-solving techniques, and enables you to develop practical skills, which will act as coping mechanisms. Behaviour and cognitive therapies are often combined, and practitioners of either may refer to their approach as cognitive behaviour therapy. (See Mind's booklet, *Making Sense of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy*. For details of this and other booklets mentioned, see *Further reading* on p. 14.)

The therapeutic community

This is a place where you can either live full-time or attend regularly during the day. Usually, there is a mixture of individual and group therapy, and informal support from other members of the community.

Who are talking treatments for?

Prejudice about emotional distress sometimes stops people from using talking treatments they could benefit from. They may feel that it is a sign of weakness or inadequacy to seek assistance in this way. The truth is very different; it is not your fault if you experience emotional difficulties, and it takes courage to face up to them and find better ways of coping.

Most people can benefit from talking treatments. They can do for the mind what exercise does for the body. They liven you up, help you to think more flexibly, make you stronger, emotionally, and help to stop more serious problems from occurring. Just like taking exercise, it is important to find what suits you best.

Unfortunately, it is also true that doctors are more likely to suggest talking treatments if you are white and middle-class. Talking treatments work just as well for working-class people, black people and people from minority ethnic communities. The only difficulty is that most counsellors and psychotherapists are white and middle-class, and they may not have a good understanding of what it is like to be you. It can help if they have made the effort to learn about cultures that are different from their own. People with learning disabilities, lesbians and gay men, older people and people with chronic illness are also under-represented when it comes to receiving talking treatments. Good psychotherapists and counsellors listen and learn from their clients, and don't try and impose their values on them. There are some organisations that offer talking treatments to specific sections of the community. There is now much more awareness of this issue, and more effort has been focused on tackling it.



When are talking treatments not suitable?

There are some good reasons (as well as bad ones) for not offering talking treatments. In groups, for instance, it is important that people should be prepared to listen to, and support each other, as well as to talk about themselves. If you aren't able to do this, or are violent or abusive towards others, then you may be asked to leave.

Psychotherapists and counsellors may decide they can't help you. If you are abusing alcohol or other drugs, they may say you first need specialised care to help you stop. If your doctor has prescribed you psychotropic (mood-altering) drugs, such as tranquillisers, some psychotherapists and counsellors will not mind, but others will say that you need to come off them for the treatment to work. They may be able to help you do this as part of the treatment.

There is no general agreement among psychotherapists and counsellors about whether they can assist people who are diagnosed as having serious mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. Some will say, 'Yes, but only if you stop taking the drugs'. Most will say that whether they can help depends on the person, not on the diagnosis they have been given.

Generally, successful treatment depends on the person being prepared to try and make their life better, using the support that is offered. If you blame all your difficulties on other people, or expect the counsellor, psychotherapist or fellow group members to 'make you better' without putting in any effort yourself, then you will not be able to benefit.

Talking treatments can assist people to overcome many different sorts of problems, but some difficulties are better helped by other treatments. For example, if you find it hard to sleep, learning relaxation techniques would probably be your first priority. Sometimes, talking treatments are best used alongside other treatments.

Do talking treatments work?

Talking treatments certainly do work, but not always. There are many people whose lives have improved beyond recognition as a result of attending a group, or seeing a counsellor or psychotherapist. It may have been a struggle and taken a long time, but it has been worth it. Profound changes have taken place and they know, whatever happens, they will not experience their old problems again.

Others know that they have, at least, experienced some benefit. They may understand themselves better and have some clues about how they can lead more positive lives. The good periods may last longer and the bad times may be more manageable.

Some people are disappointed. They may have found their counsellor or psychotherapist never really understood them, or felt that they did not fit into their group. A bad experience of talking treatments may have left them feeling more hopeless than before.

Talking treatments vary in their quality. Some professionals are simply better at their jobs than others. They all have strengths and weaknesses. Some may be better at helping women than men. Others may have a great deal of understanding of depression but not of addiction. They use different methods, and some may be more effective than others. Or one may particularly suit you when another one does not.

Your own attitude will also make a difference. Some people find that just knowing that their therapist is there and focusing on their concerns makes them feel valued. If you go along determined to make the most of every session and to be completely honest about yourself, it is more likely to work. If, as a result of what you learn about yourself, you are prepared to face your fears and risk making changes in your life, you are much more likely to achieve good results.

It is useful if you can be clear about how you hope to benefit from the talking treatments. It will help you to make the best use of your sessions and, also, to decide if it is proving to be useful for you.



How can I get started?

Talking treatments are sometimes available free through the NHS, through social services or from independent organisations, such as local Mind groups. What is available varies a great deal from place to place. Unfortunately, there is not always something suitable on offer. What services do exist are often not well publicised, and it is worth asking about them in as many places as possible. Try your local Mind group, your GP, the social services department, the community health council, citizens' advice bureau (CAB) or the other organisations listed on p. 11. If you are a student, you may find you can see a counsellor at your college. Large companies sometimes employ counsellors for their staff. Some therapeutic communities are free. Sometimes, counselling organisations ask for a donation, based on what you can afford.

The cost of private counselling or psychotherapy can vary a great deal. A fee of £15 to £50 per session is quite common. Groups may be cheaper. Sometimes you can pay less if you are on a low income, or if you are prepared to see a student (who should be supervised by an experienced therapist).

At the moment, there is no government-regulated body for either counselling or psychotherapy, although the prospect is coming closer. The UKCP has been set up by the psychotherapy profession to regulate standards of training and practice. The BCP has a similar function.

The counselling profession has set up The United Kingdom Register of Counselling (UKRG) via the BACP. There are currently no nationally recognised qualifications. Instead, there are many diplomas and certificates, each requiring different amounts of study and experience.

Word-of-mouth is one of the best ways of identifying good practitioners. If you know people who have seen counsellors and psychotherapists, it is worth asking them if they can recommend someone.

It is usual to have an initial interview so that the group leader, psychotherapist or counsellor can decide if they can help you, and you can decide if you want to see them. Don't be afraid to ask questions about their training, experience and anything else you want to know, and whether, or not, they are receiving supervision from someone more experienced. If you are religious, you may want to ask how the person feels about your beliefs.

If you have the choice, it may be worth seeing several people before you make up your mind. The most important question to ask yourself is, 'Can I make a good relationship with this person?' Research suggests this is the most important ingredient in successful treatments.

If you can't find the talking treatment you want, there may be other solutions – a self-help or support group, or a befriending scheme in your area. This is not as formal as the talking treatments described here. You will be introduced to someone who will listen to you sympathetically and help you in whatever ways they can. If there are none already in existence, a social worker or community centre worker may be able to help you set one up.

What should the relationship be between client and therapist?

The relationship with a psychotherapist (or indeed with counsellors, psychologists and group leaders) is very different from the one you make with a friend. You will find out very little about their personal life and their own difficulties and struggles. But you will reveal a lot about yourself. The psychotherapist will be an important figure in your life. You are likely to develop strong feelings about him or her, which could be positive or negative. Either way, it is easy to feel that the psychotherapist is stronger and more powerful than you.

This need not cause any difficulties, but it can leave you vulnerable to exploitation. A psychotherapist may persuade you to carry on seeing them (and paying for your sessions) even though your best judgement is that the sessions are not working. Psychotherapists have also been guilty of sexual harassment.

Remember that you are the customer, as well as a client or patient. You may need to discuss practical arrangements, review how your sessions are going, or air a grievance. You have every right to do this, as one responsible adult to another. If a psychotherapist can only relate to you as a neurotic patient, treat them with suspicion. Remember you can always leave.

It is worth remembering that your psychotherapist or counsellor is a real person, doing a challenging job. They have good days and bad days, like the rest of us. You can help them to do their job to the best of their ability by treating them respectfully – by being on time for your session and paying your bills. If you appreciate their efforts, tell them so, and give them feedback, so they know when you can see their work is producing results.

Useful organisations

Association of Therapeutic Communities

Barns Centre, Church Lane, Toddington, Near Cheltenham
Gloucestershire GL54 5DQ

tel./fax: 01242 620077, e-mail: post@therapeuticcommunities.org

web: www.therapeuticcommunities.org

Directory of therapeutic communities available online

British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies (BABCP)

PO Box 9, Accrington BB5 0XB

tel. 01254 875277, fax: 01254 239114

e-mail: info@babcp.com web: www.babcp.com

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

1 Regent Place, Rugby, Warwickshire CV21 2PJ

tel. 0870 443 5252, fax: 0870 443 5160

minicom: 0870 443 5162, e-mail: bacp@bacp.co.uk

web: www.bacp.co.uk

British Confederation of Psychotherapists (BCP)

37 Mapesbury Road, London NW2 4HJ

tel. 020 8830 5173, fax: 020 8452 3684

e-mail: mail@bcp.org.uk web: www.bcp.org.uk

A linking body of psychoanalytical psychotherapy societies

Careline

Cardinal Heenan Centre, 326 High Road, Ilford IG1 1QP

helpline: 020 8514 1177, fax: 020 8478 7943

e-mail: careline@totalise.co.uk

Crisis telephone counselling service for children, young people
and adults on any issue

The Institute of Group Analysis

1 Daleham Gardens, London NW3 5BY
tel. 020 7431 2693, fax: 020 7431 7246
e-mail: iga@igalondon.org.uk web: www.igalondon.org.uk
The main training centre for group therapists in the UK

Association for Family Therapy

12a Executive Suite, St James Court, Wilderspool Causeway
Warrington, Cheshire WA4 6PS
tel. 01925 444414, fax: 0870 1383881
web: www.aft.org.uk

Miyad – National Jewish Crisis Helpline

23 Ravenshurst Avenue, London NW4 4EE
helpline: 0845 7581 999, fax: 020 8203 8727
e-mail: info@jmc-uk.org web: www.jmc-uk.org
Telephone helpline, run by Jewish Marriage Council, for
anyone from the Jewish community who is in distress

Muslim Women's Helpline

tel. 020 8904 8193 or 020 8908 6715, fax: 020 8291 2005
e-mail: mwhl@amrnet.demon.co.uk
web: www.amrnet.demon.co.uk/related/mwhl
Telephone listening service providing emotional and culturally
appropriate support

Nafsiyat

278 Seven Sisters Road, London N4 2HY
tel. 020 7263 4130, e-mail: nafsiyat-therapy@supanet.com
An inter-cultural therapy centre

PACE (Project for Advocacy, Counselling and Education)

34 Hartham Road, London N7 9JL
tel. 020 7700 1323, fax: 020 7609 4909
e-mail: pace@dircon.co.uk web: www.pacehealth.org.uk
Advocacy, counselling, family therapy and youthwork for lesbians,
gay men and those questioning their sexuality

Relate

Herbert Gray College, Little Church Street, Rugby CV21 3AP
tel. 01788 573241, fax: 01788 535007

e-mail: enquiries@relate.org.uk web: www.relate.org.uk

Offers counselling for adults with relationship difficulties. See telephone directory for local branches. Sliding scale of fees

The Samaritans

The Upper Mill, Kingston Road, Ewell, Surrey KT17 2AF

helpline: 08457 909090, fax: 020 8394 8301

minicom: 08457 909192, e-mail: jo@samaritans.org

web: www.samaritans.org.uk

Telephone helpline offering emotional support for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those that may lead to suicide

Sign

13 Station Road, Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire HP9 1YP

tel. 01494 816777, fax: 01494 812555, minicom: 01494 816777

e-mail: info@signcharity.org.uk web: www.signcharity.org.uk

Range of services for deaf people with mental health problems

Westminster Pastoral Foundation (WPF)

23 Kensington Square, London W8 5HN

tel. 020 7937 6956, fax: 020 7631 4808

web: www.wpf.org.uk

Head office of a network of counselling services

UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP)

167–169 Great Portland Street, London W1W 5PF

tel. 020 7436 3002, fax: 020 7436 3013

e-mail: ukcp@psychotherapy.org.uk

web: www.psychotherapy.org.uk

UKCP is the umbrella organisation for psychotherapy in the UK, and maintains a voluntary register of professionally qualified psychotherapists

Further reading

- Beyond Prozac: Healing mental suffering without drugs* Dr T. Lynch (Marino Books 2001) £7.99
- Counselling Services for Asian People – A directory* (CVS 2002) £10
- Factsheet: *Counselling* (Mind 1999) 50p
- Factsheet: *Psychotherapy* (Mind 2000) £1
- How to Cope as a Carer* (Mind 2001) £1
- How to Cope with Relationship Problems* (Mind 2001) £1
- How to Cope with the Stress of Student Life* (Mind 2001) £1
- How to Deal with Anger* (Mind 2000) £1
- How to Help Someone Who is Suicidal* (Mind 2002) £1
- How to Improve your Mental Wellbeing* (Mind 2002) £1
- How to Increase Your Self-esteem* (Mind 2001) £1
- How to Look After Yourself* (Mind 2002) £1
- How to Rebuild Your Life After Breakdown* (Mind 2000) £1
- How to Recognise the Early Signs of Mental Distress* (Mind 2002) £1
- Making Sense of Antidepressants* (Mind 2001) £3.50
- Making Sense of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy* (Mind 2001) £3.50
- Making Sense of Herbal Remedies* (Mind 2000) £3.50
- Making Sense of Homeopathy* (Mind 2001) £3.50
- Making Sense of Traditional Chinese Medicine* (Mind 2001) £3.50
- The Mind Guide to Managing Stress* (Mind 2002) £1
- The Mind Guide to Relaxation* (Mind 2001) £1
- The Mind Guide to Physical Activity* (Mind 2001) £1
- Understanding Anxiety* (Mind 2001) £1
- Understanding Bereavement* (Mind 2001) £1
- Understanding Childhood Distress* (Mind 2002) £1
- Understanding Depression* (Mind 2002) £1
- Understanding Manic Depression* (Mind 2002) £1
- Understanding Mental Illness* (Mind 2002) £1
- Understanding Phobias* (Mind 2002) £1
- Understanding Postnatal Depression* (Mind 2001) £1
- Understanding Post-traumatic Stress Disorder* (Mind 2000) £1
- Understanding Schizophrenia* (Mind 2002) £1
- Understanding Self-harm* (Mind 2002) £1

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For interpretation, *MindinfoLine* has access to 100 languages via Language Line. TYPETALK is available for people with hearing or speech problems who have access to a minicom.

To make a call via TYPETALK dial 0800 959598, fax: 0151 709 8119.

Scottish Association for Mental Health tel. 0141 568 7000.

Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health tel. 02890 328474.



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