

Psychotherapy, also known by some as “talk therapy,” is when a person speaks with a trained therapist in a safe and confidential environment to explore and understand feelings and behaviors and gain coping skills.

Studies have found individual psychotherapy to be effective at improving symptoms in a wide array of mental health conditions, making it both a popular and versatile treatment. It can also be used for families, couples or groups. Best practice for treating many mental health conditions includes a combination of medication and therapy.

## **Types of Psychotherapy**

Therapists offer many different types of psychotherapy. Some people respond better to one type of therapy than another so a psychotherapist will take things like the nature of the problem being treated and the person’s personality into account when determining which treatment will be most effective.

### ***Cognitive Behavioral Therapy***

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) focuses on exploring the relationship between a person's thoughts, feelings and behaviors. During CBT a therapist will actively work with a person to uncover unhealthy patterns of thought and how they may be causing self-destructive behaviors and beliefs. By addressing these patterns the person and therapist can work together to develop constructive ways of thinking that will produce healthier behaviors and beliefs.

### ***Dialectical Behavior Therapy***

Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) was originally developed to treat chronically suicidal individuals with borderline personality disorder (BPD). Over time, DBT has been adapted to treat people with multiple different mental health conditions, but most people who are treated with DBT have BPD as a primary diagnosis. DBT is heavily based on CBT with one big exception: it emphasizes validation, or accepting uncomfortable thoughts, feelings and behaviors instead of struggling with them. By having an individual come to terms with the troubling thoughts, emotions or behaviors that they struggle with, change no longer appears impossible and they can work with their therapist to create a gradual plan for recovery.

### ***Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing Therapy***

Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing therapy (EMDR) is used to treat PTSD. A number of studies have shown it can reduce the emotional distress resulting from traumatic memories. EMDR replaces negative emotional reactions to difficult memories with less-charged or positive reactions or beliefs. Performing a series of back and forth, repetitive eye movements for 20-30 seconds can help individuals change these emotional reactions.

### ***Exposure Therapy***

Exposure therapy is a type of cognitive behavioral therapy that is most frequently used to treat OCD, PTSD and phobias. During treatment a person works with a therapist to identify the triggers of their anxiety and learn techniques to avoid performing rituals or becoming anxious when they are exposed to them. The person then confronts these triggers in a controlled environment where they can safely practice implementing these strategies.

### ***Interpersonal Therapy***

Interpersonal therapy focuses on the relationships a person has with others with the goal of improving their interpersonal skills. The therapist helps people evaluate their social interactions and recognize negative patterns, like social isolation or aggression, and ultimately helps them learn strategies for understanding and interacting positively with others. Interpersonal therapy is most often used to treat depression, but may be recommended with other mental health conditions.

### ***Mentalization-based Therapy***

Mentalization-based therapy (MBT) can bring long-term improvement to people with BPD, according to randomized clinical trials. MBT is a kind of psychotherapy that engages and exercises the important skill called “mentalizing”. Mentalizing refers to the intuitive process that gives us a sense of self; when people consciously perceive and understand their own inner feelings and thoughts. People also use this skill to perceive the behavior of others and to speculate about their feelings and thoughts. Mentalizing thus plays an essential role in helping us connect with other people.

### ***Psychodynamic Psychotherapy***

The goal of psychodynamic therapy is to recognize negative patterns of behavior and feelings that are rooted in past experiences and resolve them. This type of therapy often uses open-ended questions and free association so that people have the opportunity to discuss whatever is on their minds. The therapist then works with the person to sift through these thoughts and identify unconscious patterns of negative behavior or feelings and how they have been caused or influenced by past experiences and unresolved feelings. By bringing these associations to the person’s attention they can learn to overcome the unhelpful behaviors and feelings that they caused.

### ***Therapy Pets***

Spending time with domestic animals can reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression, fatigue and pain for many people. Hospitals, nursing homes and other medical facilities sometimes make use of this effect by offering therapy animals. Trained therapy pets accompanied by a handler can offer structured animal-assisted therapy or simply visit people to provide comfort.

See more at: <http://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Treatment/Psychotherapy>; Updated March 2015; April 2017