

M. PATRICIA HOGAN, PH.D.
LICENSED PSYCHOLOGIST

P. O. BOX 49268
CHARLOTTE, NC 28277
(704) 442-0035
www.DrPatHogan.com

WHAT IS THERAPY?

Therapy is designed to help people solve problems and build skills by making changes in thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors. The therapist is a guide who helps people build needed skills and learn how to solve problems that have resisted other efforts.

WHAT KINDS OF PEOPLE USE THERAPY?

All kinds. Everyone faces problems throughout their lives, and no one easily solves all their problems. Today, it is even harder because we live in such a complex and demanding society. It is common now to be faced with problems we have had no chance to prepare for and never expected. When that happens, our coping skills can become overwhelmed, leading to “symptoms” of distress in various forms. A few examples include:

- *Feeling deeply discouraged and defeated.
- *Doing poorly on the job or at school.
- *Having problems getting along with people you care about.
- *Becoming anxious about the wrong things.
- *Becoming too anxious about the right things.
- *Having habits that hurt you.

Regardless of the nature of the symptoms that lead someone to call, I have usually found that these symptoms are a way people have tried to solve normal human problems.

Some people have misgivings about therapy. They believe it is for the seriously disturbed only. It is true that many therapeutic techniques were developed in response to people who were having severe problems. However, today these techniques can be helpful to many people struggling with problems that are not responding to other efforts. Also, therapy can provide a positive place to explore options and build on previous skills in order to obtain maximum satisfaction in one’s life.

WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF THERAPY?

The connection between symptoms and the underlying problem is often unclear. One therapy goal is to figure out what problem(s) the symptom is an attempt to solve. Symptoms that lead people to seek therapy are ineffective ways of dealing with the problem, and they are often quite painful. Another therapy goal is to find better problem-solving strategies. A third goal is to explore ways to make life more satisfying and peaceful.

HOW DOES THERAPY WORK?

Therapy involves thinking and talking about one’s life and problems. We pay attention to feelings that arise, both in and outside of the office. The effects of your behavior on

yourself, others, and situations are considered. Sometimes we look into your past and sometimes we stick to the present. Sometimes people come to therapy hoping for a quick answer. While this is understandable, it rarely happens.

Some people wait for their therapist to solve the problem. This approach guarantees disappointment. Therapy is hard work. While there are times I ask people to try out new ideas or new behaviors, answers to problems will be the result of our mutual exploration and effort.

There are three ways you can increase the benefit of our work:

1. Push yourself to talk about the things you find the hardest to discuss. What you want to discuss least is probably what we need to discuss most. Issues kept secret tend to grow larger. Bringing them out into the light of day is a big step toward making them manageable, and will help us finish sooner.
2. Honesty with yourself and with me is essential. Being dishonest in therapy is like asking a CPA to do your taxes without disclosing your financial records. Honesty also includes talking with me concerning your thoughts and feelings about the therapy process itself.
3. Do task assignments made within the therapy sessions. Changing one's thoughts, feelings, or behaviors requires practice in the "real world", not just in the consulting room.

IS THERAPY EFFECTIVE?

Research shows that therapy is helpful to most people willing to invest the required effort. Therapy can be painful at times, as issues long avoided or hidden are raised. This pain should not be endured for its own sake, but only in service of your therapeutic goals. It is unrealistic to expect to feel better after each session. There might be times when you leave feeling somewhat upset or anxious. If this happens regularly, however, please tell me.

Sometimes, however, therapy is not helpful. This can be for several reasons:

1. Poor rapport between client and therapist, or poor fit between the type of problem presented and the methods that the therapist uses. If, after a few sessions, you do not feel comfortable, then discuss this with me so we can try to work it out. If we cannot, I will try to help you find someone better suited to work with you.
2. There are some problems in life that are not changeable by therapy.
3. Finally, the limits of one's financial resources can lead to frustration in therapy. While in therapy, one might identify goals beyond those that led to the initial sessions, yet finances might preclude continuing in therapy to meet those goals.

Working together, we can best identify the obstacles that have gotten in your way, as well as the most effective ways to overcome them and to build on your strengths.