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# The Value of the Therapeutic Relationship — Part One

Why Therapists and Therapy Can Be Helpful



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**I have always considered therapy a “gift” and the decision to work with a therapist a proactive sign of self-compassion and courage as well as a healthy statement about one’s desire to learn, grow, and heal.** However, for countless people the idea of seeking out therapy and opening up about painful emotions, intimate or shame-based thoughts and behaviors is too daunting, and sadly, keeps them from the getting the guidance and support they deserve. If you or someone you know feels ambivalent about starting treatment here are some reasons why a therapist and therapy can be so beneficial.

**Getting outside support breaks the cycle of handling pain alone.**

One of the reasons you might be resistant to getting outside support is because you’re

so used to dealing with your feelings and overwhelming experiences alone. It won't occur to you to ask for help if you grew up feeling alone or "invisible," were neglected by caretakers, or had parents who were overwhelmed, distracted, or unavailable. When needs and feelings are discounted, ridiculed, or ignored, it makes sense that the template for life is it's unsafe to ask for help and difficulties must be handled "on your own." Therefore, seeking out therapy may feel unnatural because it challenges your core belief about the futility of reaching out. Finding the courage to let a safe person support and guide you in your healing journey is a way to break free from a powerful cycle of neglect. And once you experience the comfort of being helped by a nurturing, safe therapist you'll be able to open your heart to the love and support of other safe people in your life as well.

### **Therapy helps you see yourself and your situation from a different angle.**

The expression "you can't see the forest for the trees" applies to anyone overcome with negative thoughts and feelings. A therapist is able to "stand back" from those thoughts and feelings providing a more objective, clear, and often more accurate take on your situation as well as your progress. You may tend to downplay your accomplishments as not important and exaggerate the seriousness of your mistakes. This is common in people who experience depression, anxiety, or have a history of unresolved pain. Or you may have people in your life who didn't celebrate your accomplishments and inflated your missteps. Sometimes, we can't see ourselves in the same way that others see us because of self-esteem issues. You might have gotten the message that it's "selfish and egotistical" to think well of yourself, making it impossible for you to accept accurate compliments about your abilities. With these damaging messages, seeing the glass as "half empty" becomes an automatic response. But automatic responses are often rooted in the past and aren't accurate reflections of current situations. An honest, objective therapist can help you sort out your automatic assumptions, separating the past from the present. He or she can help you look at your experience from a different angle, re-framing the way you think about a current situation, measure your progress, or unfairly assign self-blame.

### **Getting outside support breaks the cycle of secrecy and shame.**

If you're struggling with issues that embarrass or shame you it's understandable that you've tried to keep those issues hidden from everyone else in your life. This often results in having to invent and keep track of complicated lies, and lying only adds another layer of guilt. Keeping secrets adds fuel to the belief that there is something

“wrong” with you or “bad” about you. Your lies may leave you feeling dishonest and fake and that can further compromise self-esteem. The ongoing fear of being “caught” or “found out” can add to your anxiety. Working with a therapist is a way to break the secrecy and reduce the lying and guilty feelings. It makes sense if you feel the need to lie and keep secrets especially if those behaviors got modeled and reinforced in a dysfunctional family. Children are taught to keep secrets or lie about sexual abuse, domestic violence, addiction, and any other issue that is not being openly talked about within a family. Keeping secrets becomes a way to cope and survive and is “normalized” in families where grown-ups don’t take responsibility for their actions, or don’t want to deal with what’s really happening.

**Therapy gives you the "cheerleader" you deserve.**

This is an idea that may be hard for you to believe or relate to when you think about what you actually deserve. It’s possible that you haven’t had too many “cheerleaders” in your life. Yet, everyone needs support and encouragement with no strings attached, especially when it’s hard to conjure feelings of optimism or hope. Repeated negative, frightening, or painful experiences can make it more difficult to believe in yourself or believe things can actually get better. A supportive, non-judgmental therapist can maintain a level of hope for you until you are able to feel it for yourself and believe it! A good therapist is also able to point out your progress, including the baby steps. Even when this positive feedback feels uncomfortable it's important to experience someone praising you and taking pride in your growth. Eventually, you’ll be able to hold these positive messages inside and learn how to be your own best cheerleader.

*What reasons might you suggest for a client to develop a therapeutic relationship for him or herself?*