

# The Importance of Therapy, Even If You're Not Ready

by Tamara Stevens

Starting therapy can be a daunting task, especially if you don't feel ready. When life goes wrong, it's hard to imagine piling on another stressful task. On the other hand, when life goes well, it's easy to put therapy off. As a therapist, I see first hand the benefits of clients starting before they maybe feel completely ready. Here's why you should start, even if you're not quite ready to face your demons.



## 4 Common Fears About Therapy

Apprehension is common when starting therapy. Although every client is different, there are some common themes that come up when someone doesn't want to start therapy. Below are four common worries about beginning the therapy process.

## 1. You're afraid of pain

No one enjoys rehashing old wounds. Usually, avoiding discomfort helps us survive, but sometimes temporary discomfort is better in the long run. For example, it's not much fun to get a shot, but we do it because we know it's good for us in the end.

## 2. You're anticipating judgment

Navigating social status is an integral part of human interaction, so we get nervous when others disapprove of us. Many people worry a therapist will judge them for what they share, or that their families will judge them for going to a therapist. The stigma around mental health has been decreasing, but depending on where you live, some may face greater barriers to care than others.

## 3. You're nervous about making things worse

Some wounds hurt so much, we worry we might have a complete breakdown if we open them up again. If you're already barely hanging on by a thread, it's hard to believe you can cope with more pain. However, a licensed therapist is trained to help you safely manage this pain and these tough emotions.

## 4. You don't feel ready for change

That old saying, "the devil you know is better than the one you don't" applies here. Sometimes it's more comfortable to face a negative, but familiar, situation than to face the unknown. Avoiding the unfamiliar is a normal survival mechanism, but not always the best plan. We tend to think it's in our best interest to choose what we can anticipate and plan for than when we don't know what to expect.

## Benefits of Therapy, Even When You Don't Feel Ready

When you're ready for therapy it can help with big moments like trauma, abuse, and anxiety, but it can also help with goal setting and self-acceptance. When you don't feel as ready for therapy, it can still be incredibly productive for working through issues like:

**Learning what's normal.** A professional therapist helps you understand what feelings are typical for your circumstances. Most of us keep our pain relatively close, so we don't realize how common our specific experiences might be. It can be reassuring to know you're not the only one dealing with these kinds of issues, or that your stress reactions make sense.

**Getting the support you need right now.** Even if you're not ready to get into really big matters, a therapist can offer strategies and support for your immediate needs. You can always address deep-seated issues later, when you're more comfortable doing so.

**Planning for the future.** Therapy provides a game plan, providing different options to address your needs over time. If you *want* to deal with complex issues but aren't ready yet, the therapist can help you develop a strategy to approach those challenges slowly and safely.

**Relieving the pressure.** Many times, people feel better just getting a few things off their chest in a safe space. Even if you're not talking with the therapist about the big stuff yet, you'll likely feel a sense of relief by just to get started.

**Establishing a relationship.** Starting therapy, even if you go very slowly, gives you a life-line in times of greater need. You have time to establish a strong therapeutic relationship that grows and supports you as you develop. Then, if serious problems arise, you have a familiar safety net in place to survive those tough times.

## How to Start Therapy When You're Not Quite Ready

If you've decided to make an appointment but still feel unprepared and anxious about therapy, you can tell the therapist about those feelings. A therapist won't be offended if you admit you're ambivalent about or even afraid of talking to them. It's a common reaction and we know how to help you through it.

You can start by explaining what you're comfortable discussing, and describing what topics make you uncomfortable. Although it's a therapist's job to push you beyond your comfort zone so you can grow, we're accustomed to adjusting the pace to fit your needs. Develop a plan with the therapist to address more sensitive subjects as you progress. Be sure to ask about the potential benefits you could gain from all your hard work, to help put it in perspective.

While therapy can be an intimidating and nerve-wracking to some, people usually people feel much more comfortable once they get started. Therapists don't just pick apart your pain, they're equally interested in what's going well. This means not every moment is miserable; even starting with small stuff boosts confidence and reduces stress. Like most anything, sometimes the hardest part of therapy is just getting started.

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