

## Why I Need a Psychotherapist Like a Hole in the Head

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Here's the ultimate "chicken and egg" problem facing me and my fellow psychotherapists. Good psychotherapy can work wonders in people's lives. But most people won't ask for it when they could benefit from it. Something is usually in the way, that probably won't vanish without some psychotherapy or peer support. So you need to have some, before you will want some. That doesn't bring many people in the door.

There are a thousand reasons why psychotherapy is not that popular right now. They all make sense at the time. Here are some common ones, along with my rebuttals. Let me know if I have missed any.

1. **Not Cool.** *Everyone I know will think I am crazy if I go to a shrink of any kind. There's really nothing that much wrong with me, but the therapist will find something, I am sure. I feel bad enough without having "crazy" stamped on my forehead forever.*

The irony of this objection is that virtually all of my clients are not crazy in any sense of the word. Most people end up feeling anxious, or depressed, or stressed, because of the actions of other people and of the society around us. I have to start with the very basic premise that my clients are not crazy. But I have to also be aware that in many ways, our society and culture are.

2. **Too expensive.** *No way am I going to pay money to straighten out my head or improve my personality or fix my relationships. Yeah, I know I will pay for haircuts, car repair, house cleaners, dog walkers, takeout meals, yoga classes, night courses, spa treatments, gym coaching and snow shovelling. But this, no way. Absolutely not.*

No one can argue with a person's economic choices. Sometimes that is all the power we think we have. But if you knew for sure that your life could change dramatically for the better, would that not be worth something? Yes, therapy can seem expensive. But you are buying a level of attention from a well-studied, sane human being, the likes of which may never show up in the rest of your life. We cost, but because we are a precious, powerful commodity.

3. **Too hard.** *I am so depressed right now I have no energy for anything. How on earth am I going to drag myself out to see a psychotherapist on a regular schedule? I know it might help, but I just can't face doing it right now.*

I know everything feels dark, but there is usually a way. Did you know that some therapists (myself included) are willing to come to you if necessary? When things are blackest, it is important to let some light in, even if you can't take a step. If making that phone call to arrange some attention is too much, try a short text. Even just getting the reply can feel good. Same goes for being between appointments, when the darkness settles in. Check in by text and get a free boost.

4. **No hope.** *I don't think my situation can be changed anyway. It would just be a waste of time and money.*

Of course you feel hopeless. Who wouldn't if they were feeling like you are or if they were in your situation? But hope is the therapist's job - you don't have to bring it with you. As an incurable optimist, I have lots of extra piles of hope in my office and I am more than willing to

share as much as you need. Good therapy is built on the solid fact that many things we thought we couldn't change are in fact highly changeable. Effectively accomplishing change is the very purpose of therapy. Needing hope is a great reason for engaging a good psychotherapist.

5. **No idea.** *How on earth do I find the right person to help me with this problem? I don't even know where to start looking. And how can I trust that they are the right one if I do find someone?*

It is not always easy to find a therapist with the appropriate skills to match your circumstances. But we are out there. Usually if you take the plunge and spread the word that you are looking for someone, your network will come up with recommendations by word of mouth. And determining if they are the right one is a matter of experiment. Spend some time with them and trust your instincts. If they make the right noises right off the bat, it may be worth investing a little more time. If they don't, there is always something to be learned from each short contact, if only what isn't suitable. With many therapists (myself included) the introductory session is free so that you can get to know us without cost or obligation.

6. **No way!** *My encounters with professionals have always been bad. They have often been arrogant and oppressive. You are all the same.*

I am sorry you have had such a bad time at the hands of so-called professional therapists. Sometimes it really does take some shopping (and rejecting) in order to weed out the unsuitable ones and find the gems. For therapy to work well, there has to be a good match. If there isn't, feel free to move on immediately, but don't give up looking. Someone suitable is out there. And do “kick the tires” before signing any consents.

7. **It's OK.** *I am fine enough, actually. I can bear this. This state will do, at least for the meantime. Besides, I don't deserve much more than this anyway.*

The feeling that you have already accepted this state of affairs for too long is exactly what got you thinking about therapy. No one deserves to feel less than themselves. If there is any room for improvement in your situation, your therapist will help you find it. We get a real thrill out of clients experiencing positive change and we will work very hard to get that satisfaction. Of course you deserve it. Given how you got where you are, not feeling your best about something, it is not a stretch for me to declare that society literally owes you better times. Challenge us to help you improve your life and to change how society treats us all.

8. **I can't.** *My (boyfriend, husband, parents, partner, etc.) says I don't need therapy and that I am forbidden to attend appointments. (He, she, they, etc.) watches my every move and I can't just sneak out and get a therapy session.*

This is a classic sign that you might benefit greatly from the attention of an understanding therapist who recognizes when you are being abused. Once it has gone this far, it is hard to break out. Seek out a therapist who is adaptable to starting out by telephone or internet. Meanwhile get on the internet and search under “abuse” to understand how unfair your living situation is and how much you deserve support to help change it.

9. **I don't trust anyone.** *How can I share my inner feelings with anyone? No one in my life has ever accepted who I am and what I feel. I can't even imagine working with a therapist.*

This is a tough feeling to fight. It keeps you from getting help. But you came by it honestly, by living with people who were not trustworthy and who did not understand who you are and what you felt. Your natural reaction to such ill treatment was to be wary of all others. So try taking a tiny step at a time. Find some therapists. Pick one. Test him/her/them out. You don't have to trust them. Let them earn some trust. If they are worth their salt, they will achieve that for you. If not, pick another and try again.

*10. **I am a man.** We aren't supposed to need any therapy. There is nothing wrong with me. I am strong by myself. I need therapy like I need a hole in the head. Go away.*

The real truth is that everyone thrives with support. A few can go it alone, but not as well as with support. Everyone deserves to find support and to be able to offer some in turn to others around them. Men are no exception. They may have been taught to build more armor than others against revealing their true selves. But no amount of programming can surmount the simple fact that human beings do better when they support each other.

Male programming can seem intimidating, because that's exactly what it is designed to achieve. But once a few of those walls start to come down, men can benefit just as much as women from therapeutic or peer attention, and will even admit they are better off for it. In the meantime, do recognize that a good therapist knows what that macho stuff is all about and won't look down on you for still being affected by it. One of the most important jobs of a therapist is to help individuals challenge society's norms and undo the internalized messages that all of us have inherited from our past.

It is important for men to know that cleaning house in our own heads is honourable work, and leads to improvements in our relationships with others as well as to many unanticipated benefits for all other aspects of our lives.

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