

Starting Therapy: A Simple Guide to Getting Help

Mental Well-Being

When something feels off physically, you call a doctor. But mentally, when you feel anxious, foggy, or not like yourself, you may not know how to get help.

Mental health care is health care. But if seeking mental health care new to you, taking the first step can be hard. You might not know where to start. Perhaps you worry your problems aren't "serious enough" to seek help. You might not know how to research your options or which experts can help you. Or maybe you're too exhausted to figure it all out.

This guide breaks things down simply and clearly, so you can take that first step with confidence.

Step 1: Know That You Deserve Help

You don't need to be in the middle of a crisis to seek mental health support. Therapy can help you learn ways to manage stress, deal with life changes, or cope with anxiety, depression, or mood changes.

You may benefit from a therapist if:

- You're sleeping too much or having trouble sleeping
- You've lost interest in things you used to enjoy
- You feel disconnected from others
- It's harder to concentrate or get through the day
- Your mood feels harder to manage than usual

Step 2: Think About What You Want Help With

If you know exactly what you're struggling with, great. But maybe you can't put it into words. Or there may be several things affecting you.

Therapy can help with:

- Managing anxiety or stress
- Working through grief, trauma, or difficult memories
- Changing thought patterns, habits, or behaviors
- Improving relationships
- Coping with depression or burnout
- Parenting or caregiving support
- Substance use or recovery

Even if you don't know exactly what's wrong, it's okay to say, "I just haven't been feeling like myself."

VNS Health Can Help

If you or someone you care about is struggling, VNS Health can help you take that first step.

[Learn more about our Behavioral Health Services](#)

Step 3: Understand What Therapy Is

Therapy is a safe, private place to talk about what's going on in your life and how it's affecting you. It's a conversation with a trained professional who listens, offers support, and helps you find tools to cope and feel more in control.

There are different styles of therapy. You don't need to pick one yourself, but learning a little about them can give you a sense of what might work for you:

- **Talk therapy:** You and your therapist talk through what you're feeling and explore reasons why you might be feeling that way. Talk therapy helps you understand yourself better and find ways to cope.
- **[Cognitive behavioral therapy \(CBT\)](#):** This is a type of talk therapy that helps you notice thinking patterns and behaviors that make life harder. It teaches you how to change

them. For example, if you often think, “I’ll never get this right,” CBT helps you recognize that way of thinking and replace it with something more helpful.

- **Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR)**: This form of therapy can be used to help you work through trauma or painful memories. During sessions, you revisit an upsetting memory while a therapist guides your eye movements or uses tapping or sounds to help your brain process memories in new ways. EMDR can help traumatic memories become less upsetting over time.
- **Play or art therapy**: This form of therapy uses activities or creative tools to help you express emotions. It is often helpful for children who may not have the words to describe their feelings or for anyone who finds it hard to talk.

Again, you don’t have to know what kind of therapy you need to get help. A therapist can guide you.

Step 4: Look for a Therapist

Therapists often have experience working with certain challenges, like stress, anxiety, depression, trauma, or substance use. But if you aren’t sure how to find a therapist, you don’t have to figure this out alone. Once you feel ready, here are some ways to start your search:

- If you live in New York City, call VNS Health Behavioral Health Services for help finding someone who fits your needs
- Ask your primary care doctor if they recommend a therapist
- Use your health insurance website to find an in-network therapist
- Ask someone you trust if they know a good provider

If cost is a concern, help is still within reach. Some nonprofits, community health centers, and clinics offer sliding-scale fees based on what you can afford. VNS Health’s [Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic \(CCBHC\)](#), for example, provides a wide range of mental health care and substance use treatment services. The clinic accepts Medicare, Medicaid, and many commercial insurance plans, and is committed to offering care regardless of your ability to pay.

Step 5: Contact Therapists (Even If You’re Not Sure What to Say)

Reaching out to a potential therapist can feel scary, but what you say doesn't have to be perfect. You can start with something as simple as: "Hi, I'm looking for help. I'm not exactly sure what I need, but I'd like to talk to someone."

Here are some helpful questions to ask during the conversation:

- Do you work with people who have the kinds of problems I'm dealing with?
- What kind of therapy do you use?
- Do you offer virtual appointments?
- Do you take my insurance or offer a sliding scale?

You may need to talk to a few therapists before you find one who meets your needs. Once you do, your first session is usually called an "intake." The therapist will ask questions to get to know you and understand what you're looking for. They'll then work with you on a plan for your sessions together.

Step 6: Give It Time — and Permission to Try Again

Finding the right therapist can take time. If the first one you work with doesn't feel like a good fit, you're allowed to keep looking. What matters most is that you feel safe, heard, and respected.

Therapy isn't a quick fix and it's normal to feel unsure at first. But even just starting can bring a sense of relief. Over time, you'll gain a better understanding of yourself — and tools to help you feel better and move forward.

Source: <https://staging.vnshealth.org/patient-family-support/health-library/how-to-get-mental-health-help/>

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