

What to Expect in Your First Session

It is common to feel a little unsure or apprehensive before a first counselling or psychotherapy session. This is completely understandable. Beginning therapy means entering a new kind of conversation, often about matters that are personal, complex or difficult to put into words.

The purpose of this document is to give you a clearer sense of what the first meeting may involve.

The first meeting

The first session is usually an opportunity for us to begin understanding what brings you to therapy and whether working together feels appropriate.

The session may include:

- a brief settling-in period;
- an invitation to tell me what has led you to seek therapy;
- some discussion of the difficulties, questions or concerns you would like help with;
- consideration of what you may want from the work;
- any relevant background or previous experience of therapy;
- space for you to ask questions about how I work.

The first session does not have to follow a rigid format. Some people arrive with a clear account of what they want to discuss. Others are less sure where to begin. Some want to explain the situation carefully; others simply need to start speaking and be heard. We will proceed in the way that seems most helpful and appropriate.

Assessment and therapy

The first meeting may function as an initial assessment, as the beginning of a fuller assessment over several sessions, or as the first therapy session.

In practice, these distinctions are not always sharply separate. Understanding your situation is already part of the therapeutic work. Equally, therapy itself often begins with a process of clarification: finding out what is happening, what matters, what may be difficult to see clearly, and what kind of help may be needed.

For this reason, I do not treat assessment as a mechanical procedure or as a checklist. It is the beginning of a collaborative investigation into your experience.

How I work

My way of working is active, collaborative and investigative. It is based on the view that therapy is most helpful when it enables a person to reach a more accurate, grounded and in-depth understanding of what they are experiencing.

This involves careful attention to what you say, how you understand your situation, the words and assumptions you use, the feelings and bodily responses involved, the relational and social contexts that matter, and the deeper personal meanings that may be at stake.

Rather than fitting your experience into a ready-made theory, I work with you to describe and understand it as precisely as possible. This may involve clarifying what is confusing, distinguishing between different strands of experience, identifying patterns or structures, questioning inherited explanations, and gradually developing a more coherent understanding of what is happening.

The work is therefore not simply about talking, nor is it about receiving advice or being interpreted from the outside. It is a sustained process of shared inquiry.

What you may be asked

I may ask you questions such as:

- What brings you here at this point?
- What has been most difficult or troubling?
- How do you currently understand the problem?
- What feels unclear, unresolved or repetitive?
- What have you already tried?
- What would you like to understand or change?
- What would make the work useful to you?

These questions are not asked in order to force you into a fixed assessment structure. They are used to help us begin mapping the territory of your experience.

You do not need to prepare answers in advance. It is enough to come as you are and begin from wherever feels possible.

What if you do not know where to start?

Many people do not know exactly where to begin. This is not a problem. Sometimes the difficulty itself includes confusion, fragmentation, uncertainty or not knowing how to explain what is wrong.

Part of the work may be to help you find the right words, identify what matters, and gradually bring order and clarity to what initially feels vague, tangled or overwhelming.

What happens at the end of the first session?

Towards the end of the first session, we may reflect on whether it seems appropriate to continue. Where possible, I may share some initial thoughts about the direction the work could take. Sometimes this is clear quite quickly; at other times, it takes several sessions before a fuller picture emerges.

You are welcome to ask questions about the process, my way of working, practical arrangements, confidentiality, fees, or anything else that feels relevant.

Do you have to decide immediately?

You do not have to make a final decision immediately unless you already feel ready to do so. Some people know after the first meeting that they would like to continue. Others need more time to reflect.

If we decide to work together, we will usually agree a regular weekly appointment time. The duration of the work may be short-term or long-term, depending on your needs, aims and circumstances.

Final reassurance

No preparation is required. You do not need to arrive with a complete account of what is happening. It is enough to begin from whatever seems most relevant, pressing, or possible to say. The first session is the beginning of a process of reaching a clearer and more grounded understanding of what you are experiencing.