

## The Process of Psychotherapy

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For many people, the thought of beginning psychotherapy conjures up images of the satirized television psychiatrist asking the patient to “lie down on the couch and tell me about your mother”. Even my own children, when asking me about my profession, will break into giggles and ask, “Do you really say to people, ‘How does that make you feel?’”. For those of you who may be interested in pursuing psychotherapy, but have a bit of anxiety about what it is all about, I would like to give you a sense of what you will experience. First of all, you call and make an appointment. Sounds simple enough, but for many people the first hurdle they must overcome is calling the office. When you call the Ommani Center to make an appointment, the reception staff will not ask you any questions about your emotional functioning, the issues you are seeking to resolve, etc. You will simply be offered a choice of appointment times. You don’t need to talk about anything that makes you uncomfortable until we are alone in the privacy of my office.

For most clients, the first appointment is a chance for you to just talk. You can talk about what’s been on your mind or what’s bothering you. You are helping me to understand what’s not working in your life and what you would like to see changed. Sometimes clients end the first session apologizing for “talking the whole time”. There is no need for apology; the purpose of that first visit is for you to emotionally dump all that stuff you have been carrying around. This can, for some people, feel pretty cathartic. If you are confused, or don’t know really where to begin the story, I will guide you in the process. You can then take a deep breath, relax and feel proud of the fact that you have taken the first step on your path towards the changes you are seeking.

At the second appointment, I like to begin to understand some background to your story. We will talk a bit about your development, family history and the history of the current issues you would like to resolve. We will then begin to formulate your goals for therapy. We look at and quantify what changes you would like to see in yourself and in your life, and describe what those changes will look like. I find that we can be much more focused and targeted about creating change when we know what the goals are that we are trying to achieve. For example, a goal of “feel better” is very nebulous. How do we measure this? I would encourage you to articulate what “feel better” looks like for you. Does it mean, 1) having the energy to exercise 3x a week, 2) having 4 outings a month with friends, 3) engaging in weekly scrapbook parties that you used to love to attend 4) eating appropriate quantities at meals, etc. This picture of wellness is your personal definition. I am not here to tell you what “feels better” looks like. This is your goal. You name it and I’m here help you get there.

The process of psychotherapy is about building a relationship. It's about you telling your story and me acting as the sounding board. Sometimes the process for clients is about having a place to process their experiences and through this they are able to gain insight about themselves and the changes they need to make. For others, therapy is more like a teacher/student relationship where the client seeks to learn from the therapist. As in any relationship, the more we get to know one another, the deeper we can explore the issues. It can feel uncomfortable or scary to walk into a stranger's office and begin to tell your "whole life story". Thus, for some clients the unfolding of the story is a process whereby the more we get to know each other, and the more you feel safe in this therapeutic relationship, the more comfortable and able you become to talk about some of the challenges, pain, or trauma you have experienced in your life.

I also feel that the process of psychotherapy should go beyond the one session a week in my office. To further the process, I typically give clients "homework" to focus on between our sessions. The pace of therapy is something that is within your control. My general recommendation for new clients is that we meet once a week for 6-8 weeks as an opportunity to get to know one another, establish goals, and feel like we are gaining some ground moving towards the changes you seek. After that point, we reevaluate. Do you feel that you need to continue to meet weekly to meet your goals? Do you feel that meeting bi-weekly with homework between sessions works for you? The pace of the therapy is an on-going conversation I have with clients.

I hope this gives you an understanding of the process of psychotherapy that I follow. I also am available to speak with clients for a complimentary 15 minute telephone consultation if they have questions about working with me. Clients may reach me at the Ommani Center at (262) 695-5311 or [shdelmore@gmail.com](mailto:shdelmore@gmail.com).