

Your First Counseling Session

What you should know

Mental health and physical health are closely linked. This is why your primary care doctor, or PCP, is often the first person you talk to when you need help. PCP visits are usually short, so it helps to be prepared. Think about your symptoms, write down your questions and know your family's mental health history. You can bring a friend or family member for support and to help you remember what the doctor says. Most importantly, be honest about how you are feeling so your PCP can make the right referral.

Once you have a referral to a counselor, therapist or psychologist, remember that you have choices. You are a consumer. If the match does not feel right, it is OK to switch. You deserve a counselor who listens, respects you and supports your goals.

What to expect at your first appointment

Your counselor will use the first session to get to know you. You will talk about your goals and what you hope to work on. The counselor may also give you forms to complete, including insurance or demographic information. You should receive a privacy statement that explains how your information is protected.

Questions your counselor may ask

Your counselor will ask about why you came to therapy. Be honest. Your answers help them understand how to support you. They may ask:

- What is going on in your life right now?
- What symptoms are you having and how have you tried to manage them?
- Have you had counseling before? What was it like?
- How is your physical health? What medications do you take?
- How much alcohol do you drink? Do you use any drugs?
- Does anyone in your family have depression or substance use issues?
- What do you want from counseling?

Questions you can ask

You should ask questions. This helps you understand what to expect and whether the counselor is a good fit. You may ask:

- What is your training? How long have you been practicing?
- Have you helped people with concerns like mine?
- How can I reach you between appointments?
- Who covers for you if I need urgent help?
- What is your cancellation policy?

Your counselor should answer your questions clearly. Remember, this is your time. They are there to help you understand your challenges and learn new ways to cope.

#MentalHealthMatters

If you or someone you know is struggling with a mental health issue, help is out there. Contact the Mental Health America 24/7 Crisis Text Line (Text MHA to 741-741).

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