

10 Things I wish Clients Knew Before Starting Therapy



As a therapist, there is no better feeling than cultivating trust with a client, and hearing about your innermost thoughts and feelings. Creating a relationship with you is the most foundational part of treatment, and it takes time to build a sense of trust and safety. With that said, there are some ways to build that trust and get to the real work more quickly. Here are some things that will help guide you, as a client, towards meeting your goals. It's not easy, but it is ultimately worth it!

1. **There is no topic off limits in therapy**

Unlike in your daily life, there are no stigmas attached to anything, not even the most nitty gritty “keep it to yourself” kind of themes. I encourage you to talk about money, sex, politics, body image, or anything else you may want to bring in. In fact, I think the more you open up about the *hardest, most shame-filled* topics, the more we can squeeze the juice out of treatment.

2. **I don't judge, I promise**

In my years as a therapist, I've heard it all. I've worked with clients who admitted to me their most regretful actions, from cheating to lying to hurting others. We've all made mistakes, and I hold compassion for even the “worst” things that you've done. Just the fact that you are bringing it here shows a lot of hope, and there is nothing we can't work through if you're honest about it.

3. **Therapy happens *with* you, not *to* you**

Therapy isn't like a regular dentist or massage appointment, where you allow the provider to take the reigns. In fact, it requires your full engagement and participation both during and in between sessions. The more you give, the more you're gonna get.

4. **In therapy, it is better *overcommunicate* than *undercommunicate***

Therapy includes a *lot* of talking (obviously), but it's not like the usual chit chat you have at a party, or even with your closest friends. We communicate about what's happening *right in the present moment*, between me (therapist) and you (client). I find that the more we can get everything out in the open, the more we can recognize and work through longstanding patterns you'd like to change.

5. **Talk about the hard thing!**

You'll frequently have to choose whether you talk about something that feels emotionally easy or something that feels emotionally hard (aka risky, vulnerable, overwhelming). You'll get the most out of your therapy if you say the hard thing. What does this look like? Say the thing you've never said out loud before. Say the thing you worry nobody will understand.

6. **Let's agree that all your feelings are valid**

In order to build trust, you'll have to **know** that your therapist treats your feelings as real and valid, and this will take time. In fact, overexplaining your emotions, or justifying them to others can be a trauma response that once protected you. However, if we can agree from the start of treatment that you don't have to justify your feelings to yourself or to your therapist, you can move beyond the need to prove your feelings are "right" into exploring deeper and more impactful questions about what's actually best for you.

7. **The therapy work happens outside of session too**

If you're spending time and money on regular therapy sessions, that is a big investment on yourself and I want you to get the most out of it! Together, we will discuss practical ways to incorporate our work together into your day to day life. It takes time and repetition to build new habits, and even just a few minutes per day can make a huge difference!

8. **There is no "wrong" way to do therapy!**

I often get questions like "Am I doing this right?" and while I appreciate people wanting to get the most out of therapy, there is no wrong or right way to do therapy! Although I list some ways here that may help, therapy is ultimately about trusting yourself, and allowing yourself to not be perfect all the time.

9. **Therapy is sometimes ~just a tad~ uncomfortable**

I know you already know this, but change only happens when you're outside your comfort zone. I try to help you find *small, accessible* ways to build new habits, so as not to overwhelm your nervous system. Who knows, you might even find that the thing you were so scared of wasn't even as hard as you thought? Trust yourself, you can tolerate a little discomfort!

10. **Therapy can be *fun*!**

Last but not least, therapy isn't always all about tough conversations, or delving into childhood trauma. I like to have some fun with my clients, bringing in laughter, humor, and talking about pop culture or our favorite TV shows! Whatever topics light you up, I want to hear about them!