



A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO GOOD PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

WHEN TO CONSIDER SEEING A PSYCHOLOGIST?

All of us will experience grief and loss, relationship stress, work stress, tricky family situations, or change and transition at some point over the course of our lives. COVID-19 has also brought newfound challenges as we learn to navigate the ongoing uncertainties of pandemic life.

Beyond Blue says that one in six Australians are currently experiencing depression or anxiety or both. This is equivalent to 3.2 million people today.

Seeking support early from a psychologist when you are struggling with your mental health and wellbeing can assist greatly.

Counselling or therapy can help when:

- Talking to a friend is not enough to solve the problem.
- The feelings or problems seem beyond our control.
- Nothing we have tried seems to be making a difference.
- The problem is interfering with our daily life.
- The problem is distressing to ourselves or others.
- We need someone confidential and impartial to help.

Once we realise there is a problem, the sooner we seek counselling the better. Just like when we break a leg or an arm, the earlier we get treatment the better the outcomes. The longer we wait the harder the healing process becomes.

WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING A PSYCHOLOGIST?

Qualifications and experience

Make sure they have general registration as a psychologist without any conditions (i.e. They are in good standing without any complaints against them and are safe and competent practitioners). You can check this on the register of health professionals at: www.ahpra.gov.au.

Some psychologists have additional training in an area of practice endorsement, such as sports (work with athletes), organisations (work with organisations not individuals), clinical (work with mental health), counselling (work with couples, families), or educational and development (work with children). You may choose to see someone with the additional training in the specific area in which you are seeking support or not.

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HOW TO FIND A PSYCHOLOGIST?

Ask a friend who they would recommend.

Ask your GP.

Do an online search.

The Australian Psychological Association (APS) has a 'Find a Psychologist' service to find a registered psychologist in your area. [Find a Psychologist™ | APS](http://www.apa.org.au)

The Australian Association of Psychologists Inc (AAPi) has a 'Find a Psychologist' service to find a registered psychologist in your area: www.aapi.org.au/FindaPsychologist

Beyond Blue also has a 'Find a Health Professional Directory'. [Find a professional – Beyond Blue](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

Costs

The APS recommended fee is currently around \$267 for a 50-minute session. Many psychologists however charge less (between \$150 and \$190).

How to cover the fees:

- Pay out of pocket.
- Your private health insurance may cover some or all of the costs. Check with your provider to see if your policy covers psychology appointments.
- Medicare and bulk billed appointments may be available to you via a **mental health care plan** from your GP, psychiatrist, or paediatrician if you are eligible. To find out more **Better Access to Mental Health Care initiative under Medicare | APS**. New COVID-19 Medicare items have also been recently introduced. To find out more **COVID-19: Medicare funded psychology services | APS**.

Good relationship

More than with any other health profession or service the psychologist not only needs to be skilled, but there needs to be a good relationship between you and them. The research says that about 25% of clients will need to change therapists to find a better 'fit'. Therapists know this and expect that some clients will want to move to a different therapist. You can talk with the therapist about this if you feel comfortable and they can suggest a referral for you, or if not, just cancel and make an appointment with someone else.

While it might be okay to see a cardiologist with poor bedside manner but great skills, or a grumpy plumber who can fit in your roof and gets the job done, when seeing a psychologist, a sense of trust and respect is important. In fact, the better the rapport between therapist and client, the better the therapy outcomes.

WHAT MAY HAPPEN IN THE FIRST SESSION?

The first session is mainly about mutual information gathering for both you and your psychologist:

- **You:** Providing information about yourself, the problem, or issues that you are having, how long things have been going on, and what you have tried, including filing out some paperwork (contact details, etc.) and possibly a questionnaire about how you are doing on the day. There is also a chance to ask questions of the psychologist about how they work, and the therapy process.
- **Your Psychologist:** Listening and sharing information about the treatment they think might work for you including further information about confidentiality, making appointments, fees, re-scheduling appointments, etc.

You can go by yourself or take a friend or family member if you like. They can sit in the waiting room or attend in the counselling room—it is up to you. It can also be helpful to have a coffee after the session and take a moment to reflect on the session, making some notes in a journal.

The first session can feel a bit strange. It's new, and the process of telling a 'stranger' (although a professional) our problems can take some getting used to if you have never done it before. Some anxiety or apprehension about the process is completely normal, and the therapist will be expecting this. Telling our stories for the first time can bring up emotions we are not expecting (like anger, tears, grief). People generally feel better after their first session than they do before it. A sense of relief is not uncommon.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF THERAPY IS WORKING?

In measuring the efficacy of your therapy, it is important to consider the following:

- Be sure to establish clear goals with your therapist (e.g. I want to overcome feelings of anxiety when I am with others).
- Measure the progress to your goal with your therapist. Remember that it will take more time to reach some goals than others.
- It is often a 'two steps forward, one step back' process; however, you should start to be able to see differences in your thoughts, behaviours, emotions, or relationships.
- It is a good sign if you begin to feel a sense of relief, and a sense of hope.
- Sometimes other people notice changes in you (sometimes they love these changes, and other times they are confused by them).
- If you are still unsure about your progress, talk with your psychologist about other ways that you may be able to track this together.

HOW LONG DO YOU NEED TO SEE THE PSYCHOLOGIST FOR?

This is completely up to you. Usually, clients stop going to therapy when their goals are reached, and the initial problem or issues are resolved.

Sometimes this is a short time 5-10 sessions, and other times it may take longer. It depends on how long the problem has been around for, and whether it is a simple issue or a deeper one.

You and your therapist will discuss when it is time to begin the process of ending the work together.