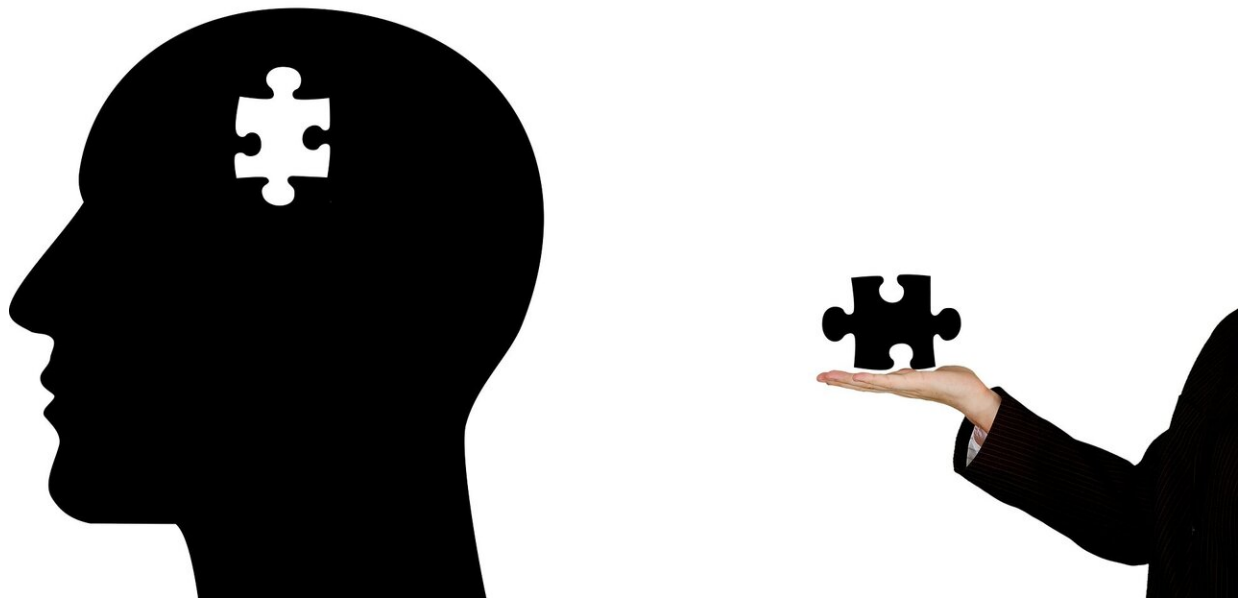


How to know when it's time to quit therapy

May 29 2024, by Simon Sherry



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Therapy is great. It gives you the space, time and resources to handle the most difficult challenges of life. Therapy can be especially helpful in the often-confusing life period of your 20s and 30s, when so much is changing and many of your peers have wildly different lifestyles.

The aim is to help you discover the thoughts, emotions and behavior that are negatively affecting you, determine where these come from, and

develop strategies to change them. But then, how do you know when it is the right time to quit therapy?

First, you must consider whether you want to quit therapy altogether, or just quit your current therapist.

Psychotherapy (therapy that specifically aims to treat mental health) is generally [equally or more effective](#) for treating mental health problems than [medication](#). Psychotherapy is also generally more effective at preventing relapse (a return to poor [mental health](#) after improvement) than [medication](#).

However, this is not always the case. Occasionally, in about 5%–10% of cases, therapy can have [adverse effects](#). These could be a deterioration in symptoms, physical well-being, ability to work and function, mood, [life satisfaction](#), relationships, sleep or self-esteem. Not all talking therapies come under the bracket of clinical [psychotherapy](#), but the principles of how and why you should stop them are the same.

Adverse effects can occur when there is a breakdown in the therapist-client relationship. If you do not trust your therapist, have experienced damaging interactions with them, feel they do not have your best interests at heart, think the therapy they provide is ineffective, or generally think they are not the right fit for you, then it might be [time to move on](#).

This does not mean therapy will not work for you—just that this particular therapist did not. It might also not mean the therapist is a bad therapist. They all have different specializations, personalities, styles and preferred therapeutic methods. Do not be afraid to search until you find a therapist who is right for you.

On the other hand, if you feel bonded with, supported and guided by

your therapist but are still not seeing the progress you would like, then you should consider whether your expectations are unrealistic.

Are you looking for quick, easy answers? Are you trying to achieve some "perfect" ideal? Are you applying strategies you have learned outside of therapy? And are you being honest with your [therapist](#) about what is or isn't working for you? Therapy takes time, effort, collaboration and an attainable goal.

Consider why you're going to therapy

If you are attending therapy for something that is timely—to help you deal with a particular problem or difficult phase in your life—then you can finish therapy whenever you feel you have met your goal. For example, if you are going through a nasty breakup, grieving a loved one, or trying to save a relationship, then you finish therapy once you have worked through those emotions and have the tools to move forward.

It can be more difficult to know when to quit therapy when the problem is ongoing. Mental illness typically is not something that can be "fixed" or "cured" with treatment. The goal then is not just achieving a state of emotional or psychological wellness, but also maintaining that state.

It can help to break therapy down into [two phases](#): the acute phase and the maintenance phase.

The acute phase is when you are not doing well. This includes your symptoms at their worst, and as they improve over the course of treatment. During this time, the duration, intensity and frequency of therapy is probably greater.

Once you have achieved a relatively stable state of wellness, you enter the maintenance phase where the goal changes to maintaining these gains

you have already made. During this phase, you probably won't need to be seen as often.

If you have reached this phase and are wondering whether this counts as "finishing" therapy, the answer is: sort of. Try cutting back to a session once every two weeks, then once a month and so on until you are seeking [therapy](#) only as often as you need to.

The important thing to remember is that [mental illness](#), and life, is full of ups and downs. If you find yourself falling back into old patterns or feeling anxious, depressed, out of control or otherwise mentally unwell, that is OK! It is not your fault. Therapy will be right there to pick you back up and get you on your way to feeling well again.

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