

What to Expect in an Initial Individual Session

Contributed by Laurie B. Freeman

If you decide to make an appointment for an individual therapy session, here is what to expect. The initial meeting will primarily consist of taking a thorough history of the problem and any precipitating factors. I will then take a history of your family of origin, going as far back as you can recall. I will be looking for family patterns as well as birth order and history of mental illness, substance abuse and violence.

I will ask questions about current relationships, work and social activities to get a clear picture of your life. Finally, we will mutually set goals for what you want to accomplish for therapy and when we will know therapy is finished.

Individuals come to therapy for many different meetings. There may be a specific crisis that prompts a visit or a long standing issue that you would like to resolve. Some people come to therapy for personal growth or because they just don't feel their life is how they want it to be. Therapy can be a place to learn how to modify one's thinking, think of problems in different ways or just have someone objective to talk to.

At times, individuals come to therapy to discuss problems in their marriage. As a general rule, this is less helpful than couples therapy unless there are issues of safety involved. If you are unhappy in your marriage yet want to stay married, I will encourage you to bring your spouse to sessions over time to work on the relationship together.

This concept may also apply in other family situations. While the individual may be the focus of attention, it may be helpful at times to bring in other family members and I will discuss this with you if the need arises.

As always the number of sessions depends on progress and readiness for change. Typically you will know when you are done and people frequently come for a series of sessions, take a break and return when they are ready to look at different issues or progress to another level.