



## Why Psychotherapy?

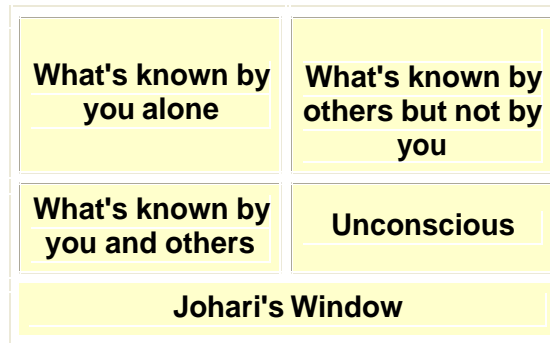
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There seems to still be a stigma attached to the idea of acknowledging the need for, and getting, emotional help. In 1999 a report by Dr. David Satcher, United States Surgeon General, estimated that about 20%, that's one in five, Americans suffer from some form of emotional distress—such as depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety or panic disorder. It goes on to say that two-thirds of this group never seek treatment. “Attitudes, fear and misunderstanding” were listed as the major barriers to getting help.

The fact is that sometimes emotional health needs professional attention in the same way that physical ailments do. If a problem is affecting your functioning in daily life, either in relationships or work, it needs attention. Your marriage may be in trouble and need objective help; you may be feeling overwhelmed trying to deal with a difficult boss or co-worker; you may be dealing with a disruptive child and not know what to do next; or you may feel a constant sense of dread or foreboding, or a sense of shame overshadowing everything you do.

Human beings have differing degrees of emotional strengths and vulnerabilities just as they have differing degrees of physical strength and stamina. Some can lose a loved one and go through a normal and healthy grieving process, while others might drop into a major depression. Ignoring a problem doesn't work, because, when ignored, a problem often grows and begins to affect more and more of your life. It is important to address what's bothering you. Some problems can be dealt with on your own, others need help from friends and/or family, still others need the help of a professional.

In graduate school, I learned a way of looking at consciousness and unconsciousness called Johari's Window (see below). This four-paned window represents all there is to know about oneself: the information you and others know; the information you alone know; the information others have about you of which you aren't aware, and finally, that which resides in your unconscious mind. Seen in light of this diagram, it's clear that one of the goals of psychotherapy—and life—is to bring what's unconscious into consciousness. It is usually the unconscious material, for example, internalized rules and messages about ourselves that we live out but are unaware of, that causes us pain and problems in our lives.



To help us uncover this unconscious material, each of us needs at least one person in our lives who is willing and able to ask probing questions about what we do and say, think and feel. We also need to trust this person enough to explore the answers to their questions. If you have one or two really trustworthy friends who know how to ask the right questions to help you uncover what's behind your actions, reactions, feelings and attitudes, then you are very fortunate. However, if your friends aren't able to ask these questions, or if you have difficulty trusting, or if there is still too much about yourself in general—or in a specific situation—that you don't understand, then psychotherapy can be helpful to you.

Here's an overview of what happens in my office. The first time someone is in my office I ask what prompted them to call at this moment in time and make the appointment. This helps them begin to articulate the immediate problem. If the person has difficulty organizing his or her thoughts and history, I have an intake questionnaire, which I've fine-tuned during my 18-plus years in agencies and private practice which can help. It asks about everything from how well you sleep and what you eat, to who taught you the facts of life and if you pray, to how you would change your life if you were willing to take the risk. The questionnaire gives me a fairly good snapshot of your life in all its aspects.

> Because my primary training is in Bioenergetic Analysis, I see my client as a whole person—

thoughts and feelings, yes, but also the impact those thoughts and feelings have on the physical body. I want to know about a person's spiritual beliefs or disbeliefs, whatever forms these take, because they play an important part too. While I help people explore what's happening in their lives and how they feel about their lives, I also help them begin to observe what's happening in their bodies: the way they breathe, how and where they hold tension in the body, and how this may affect how they feel. I give them breathing techniques to help with relaxing or energizing and, when they're willing, we get up on our feet to do some physical activity that helps them better experience themselves in the moment.

People have said my style of therapy is different from other therapists they've known. They tell me they get more feedback from me and more help with brainstorming ways to respond to the day-to-day situations that are causing them confusion, discomfort or pain. It isn't that I give people answers, but we do look at situations together and explore possible approaches. We might role-play a new behavior or script a new way to respond to a difficult situation. I'm trained in Reiki and in Thought Field Therapy too, both of which work with energy. I would never insist someone experience either of them, but both are available and can be an excellent complement to the rest of the work.

Many of us grew up with parents who could not teach us all the emotional skills needed for dealing with life, because they had never been taught them either. So, part of the psychotherapeutic process is learning these skills, and being encouraged and supported as you begin to practice them. Some of the skills I'm talking about are recognizing the difference between a feeling, a sensation and a fact, knowing how to respond to someone's strong feelings (anger, rage, hurt, blaming) without becoming defensive and caught up in them, or knowing how to respond to invalidation from others without being devastated by it.

The general goals in psychotherapy are to come to know ourselves better, to stop judging and fighting our feelings, to stop trying to change others, and to learn to make and keep appropriate boundaries that help define where we stop and others begin. The combination of dealing with mind, body and spirit in the exploration of unconscious material, while also helping to problem solve with the day-to-day problems is the most effective way I've found for helping people no matter what the specific presenting problem happens to be.

If you are in emotional pain and have been struggling with a problem alone, I urge you to seek appropriate help. If it's someone you love who is struggling, see if you can encourage them to talk with you about it or, if that's too uncomfortable for them or you, then express your support and encouragement for their seeking professional help. You might even give them this article to help them with the decision.

Calling to make the first appointment can feel like a frighteningly huge step if the unwritten family rules have required that you keep your troubles to yourself, or if you feel your problems are 'stupid' or that no one could possibly understand them, or if you believe you don't deserve to spend the money therapy costs on yourself. At a time in our lives when we are in emotional turmoil and have difficulty making any decision at all, we need to not only decide to reach out to someone but also to make a sound choice about who that someone will be. No wonder only one-third of those who need to, manage to do it.

Don't let yourself be among the two-thirds who struggle alone. Take the step. Ask a friend for the name of his or her therapist, call the local hot line, ask your medical doctor for a suggestion. Then, however, trust your own gut instincts and only stay and work with someone with whom

you feel some affinity and trust, because trust and a good working relationship are going to be essential for your success.

To talk to an APS psychologist today, ask your GP for a referral to PBP Consultancy or simply write to [prabul@pbpconsultancy.com](mailto:prabul@pbpconsultancy.com) or visit [www.pbpconsultancy.com](http://www.pbpconsultancy.com) or T/+61 41639056