



HOW TO SEEK THERAPY





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Seeking therapy is never easy as many people are concerned about how it would affect their job prospects and future plans. However, seeking professional help is very much confidential! Your future employer and other organizations do not have access to this information so do not be afraid to seek help.



1) WHY SHOULD I GO FOR THERAPY?

First of all, therapy isn't just for people with mental health conditions. *Many people without mental health issues visit the therapist too!* After all, no one is perfect and everyone faces stressors and has their own healthy (and unhealthy) coping mechanisms.

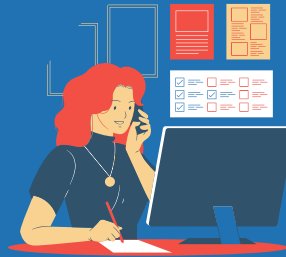
Therapy helps you:

- Gain self-awareness and discover things about yourself you may never have known about
- Explore events in your life that have made you upset and how you can overcome these struggles in a healthier way
- Illuminate blind spots in your life you may not have considered

However, do note that psychotherapy is not intended for you to solve your problems. Neither is it a session where answers are provided to you. In therapy, you collaborate with the therapist to understand your concerns better and seek views you may not have thought of about the issue. In addition, therapy is intended to give you the tools to cope with your problem and unhelpful thoughts, rather than resolve them.



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2) WHERE CAN I SEEK THERAPY?

Did you know that the Institute of Mental Health is not the only hospital which provides psychotherapy? In Singapore, psychotherapy is also offered in other public hospitals, polyclinics and private institutions.

PUBLIC HOSPITALS

- Changi General Hospital
- National University Hospital
- KK Women's & Children's Hospital
- Singapore General Hospital
- Tan Tock Seng Hospital
- Ng Teng Fong General Hospital
- Sengkang General Hospital
- Khoo Teck Puat Hospital

POLYCLINICS

- Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic
- Hougang Polyclinic
- Toa Payoh Polyclinic
- Woodlands Polyclinic
- Yishun Polyclinic

PRIVATE HOSPITALS

- Farrer Park Hospital

So many options but which should I go for?

	PUBLIC HOSPITALS/POLYCLINICS	PRIVATE SERVICES
PROS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Heavily subsidised by the government so it is more cost-efficient• Psychologists and clinicians are better regulated	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shorter waiting times• Choice of clinician
CONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Longer waiting times• You don't get to choose your clinician	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limited or no subsidies available and can go up to hundreds per session• Psychologists may not have proper certifications to give psychotherapy



HOW TO SEEK THERAPY

3) IMPORTANT POINTS TO LOOK OUT FOR WHEN DOING YOUR RESEARCH (PT. 1)

Firstly, it's important to note the differences:

A psychiatrist is different from a clinical psychologist

- A **psychiatrist** has a background in medicine and is able to prescribe medication. Currently, in many cases, particularly within the public health setting, they usually tend towards prescribing medication rather than giving psychotherapy.
- A **clinical psychologist** has a background in Psychology and is trained in giving psychotherapy. Unlike a psychiatrist, they are unable to prescribe medication.

A clinical psychologist is different from a counsellor

- While both focus on mental health, **counsellors** guide clients in coping with daily life situations and stressors. They may not be trained to administer psychometric tests as well.
- **Clinical psychologists** are trained to provide treatment for and focus on the prevention of major mental health disorders and issues.





HOW TO SEEK THERAPY

3) IMPORTANT POINTS TO LOOK OUT FOR WHEN DOING YOUR RESEARCH (PT. 2)

In Singapore, there is a lack of regulations regarding the registration and licencing of clinical psychologists. This means that a psychologist you see may potentially be not as qualified to provide psychotherapy! However, this is mainly an issue in private institutions and practice. If you're intending to look into private practice for psychotherapy, here are some tips for you:

- a. Ensure that the clinical psychologist has **at least a Postgraduate Degree** which is accredited by the psychology society in the country. In Singapore, this would be the Singapore Psychological Society (SPS)
- b. Even if the counsellor or therapist has a Postgraduate Degree, **ensure that the degree is relevant**
- c. Another way to check is to look up the name of the psychologist in the SPS's Directory. Presently, while registration in Singapore is optional, SPS ensures that practising clinical psychologists have proper qualifications before including them in a publicly accessible database: <https://singaporepsychologicalsociety.org/srp-membership-directory/>
- d. If you prefer to go for counselling over psychotherapy, you can check if the counsellor is registered and qualified through the Singapore Association of Counselling: <http://sacsingapore.org/registry/find-a-counsellor/>





HOW TO SEEK THERAPY

3) IMPORTANT POINTS TO LOOK OUT FOR WHEN DOING YOUR RESEARCH (PT. 3)

Apart from qualifications, certain hospitals and private practice are also known for certain types of psychotherapy. There are different types of psychotherapy such as Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) which differ in the way they are delivered. However, the goal is the same-- that is to help you! If you are unsure which type of psychotherapy to go for, fret not as this will be discussed together with your psychologist.

If you wish to find out more about the types of psychotherapy offered in the various hospitals, you can give them a call through their hotlines, as listed below:



Changi General Hospital

6782 6885

National University Hospital Neuroscience Clinic

6772 4850

KK Women's & Children's Hospital Mental Wellness Service

6239 4044

Singapore General Hospital Psychological Department

6321 4377

Tan Tock Seng Hospital Department of Psychology

6889 4343

Ng Teng Fong General Hospital

6716 2000 (general enquiries)

6716 2222 (appointments)

SengKang General Hospital

6930 5000 (general enquiries)

Khoo Teck Puat Hospital

6555 8000 (general enquiries)



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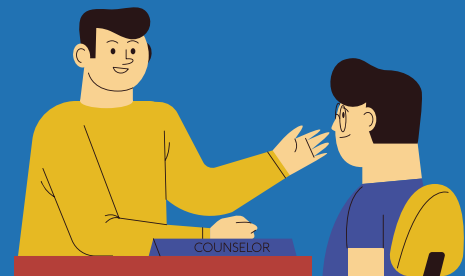
3) IMPORTANT POINTS TO LOOK OUT FOR WHEN DOING YOUR RESEARCH (PT. 4)

What type of treatment should I go for?

Psychotherapy or counselling?

Although both help you understand your thoughts and behaviours, psychotherapy is often long term, gives long term solutions for recurring problems and lastly has an in-depth focus on internal thoughts/feelings, the source of them and how it affects you as a person. It is also often better to see a therapist if you have a diagnosed mental health condition such as depression, anxiety and/or obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Counselling is typically used for adjustment related issues and is often short-term, and provides short-term solutions to current problems. Counselling also provides guidance, support, and education around a said problem.



Medicine and psychotherapy?

Medication given during your course of therapy is not mandatory to take but psychotherapy and medication are often used in combination to effectively treat many mental health conditions. Just like psychotherapy, if you're intending to go for medication, do research on potential side effects or ask your psychiatrist/doctor for medical advice.



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4) WHAT SHOULD I DO NEXT?

Do note that psychotherapy is by appointment. If you wish to be referred to a hospital, you have to obtain a referral letter from the polyclinic. If you are intending to do psychotherapy in the polyclinic itself, do let the doctor know and they will write a letter to the polyclinic's psychiatrist.

After your visit and the doctor's referral, you might have to wait a few weeks for the hospital/polyclinic to get back to you. A phone consultation (or in some cases, face-to-face) may be arranged.

During this phone consultation, a psychologist will speak with you to understand more about your concerns in-depth, as well as assess your situation.

Questions they may ask include:

- Your past psychiatric history
- Your current situation
- Your concerns
- Your triggers
- Why you've chosen to seek therapy

This process is essential as it helps the psychology department decide which psychologist to assign you to. Do note that the psychologist on the phone may not be the psychologist eventually assigned to you.

After the consultation, the department will assign a psychologist to you based on your needs and profile. Your psychologist will then set an appointment date with you for your first therapy session.





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5) HOW SHOULD I PREPARE FOR MY FIRST THERAPY SESSION?

Starting therapy for the first time can be nerve-wrecking. After all, it is not easy to be vulnerable in front of a stranger and speak about the problems you face. However, remember that your psychologist is there to work with you to resolve the issue you face. They are also trained to suspend judgement. If you are worried about how your psychologist would react to your sharing, remember that your psychologist has heard many narratives and met clients from varying walks of life. Your sharing may not surprise or shock them as much as you think. In addition, every session is kept confidential so you do not have to worry about your sharing being leaked to others.

However, do note that there is an exception to the confidentiality rule. In cases where the client is assessed to be of high risk to self and/or others (suicidal/homicidal), it is imperative for the psychologist to contact emergency services or bring in other professionals. This is the ONLY exception to the confidentiality rule.

You don't need much to prepare for therapy. Just an open mind and the willingness to be vulnerable. Your psychologist is only able to help you if you're willing to share. It is a type of relationship which requires time to build and the willingness to break down your walls and open up to the other party. Having said that, do not feel pressured to share instantly as it is up to your level of comfort and the pace you are comfortable with.



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6) WHAT TO EXPECT DURING YOUR COURSE OF THERAPY?

a. Therapy is not once-off. Depending on the type of therapy that is used, it can be over a period of years depending on the frequency of the sessions

b. Each session will roughly last 45mins- 1 hour

c. You may need to confront thoughts or past events that are traumatic or cause great sadness, although this may not be necessary

d. The outcome of therapy isn't solely dependent on what happens in therapy but also how you apply techniques you've learnt out of therapy. It is also important for you to apply techniques learnt in therapy to your day-to-day life

e. It is a two-way street and requires commitment from both you and the therapist

f. You are the focus in a therapy session and the therapist is there to help you. If you feel any discomfort or dislike parts of the session (such as pace, tone of voice, etc.), do voice out your concerns. Your psychologist has been trained to accept your feedback and work on it to better help you

g. It is very common for psychologists to give homework at the end of every session! Your psychologist will ask you if you are willing to do it before assigning you homework so don't feel obliged to accept it. Homework is also not intended to take up a large portion of your time

h. It is useful to keep track of whether techniques learnt in therapy help you. If they don't, you can always bring it up during your next session so the psychologist can work on other techniques to help you





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Written by: Xavierlyn Tan, Tan Kai Peng

Designed by: Yong Yong Qing

Edited by: Jonathan Kuek