

## **WHAT IS PSYCHOTHERAPY AND HOW CAN IT HELP ME WITH MY TREATMENT RESISTANT DEPRESSION?**

Psychological therapy, or psychotherapy, can be an important part of treatment for individuals struggling with depression, anxiety, and emotional/life concerns broadly. Different providers are trained in providing psychotherapy, including psychologists, counselors, psychiatrists, and other mental health professionals. In the case of severe or treatment resistant depression, psychotherapy can play a critical role in helping to improve emotional states, improve close relationships, and decrease the likelihood of depression relapse.

**If you find yourself asking, “Will therapy help me reach my goals right now?” then here are some areas that therapy can help you with:**

- Concrete skills to more effectively cope with life’s challenges and stresses, particularly persistently down or anxious mood
- Identify life values so we can find more fulfillment in day-to-day lives
- Interact with others and express feelings in a healthier way
- Cope with past traumas and painful experiences
- Reduce the effects of stress on your wellbeing
- Address substance use concerns
- Gain awareness of how environment, past history, and physiology interact
- Among many other topics (e.g., how to schedule our days, face our fears, accept sadness)

**Some common questions/concerns about therapy:**

### ***But I’ve tried therapy before, and it hasn’t worked***

You aren’t alone in this experience. There are many reasons why therapy might not feel helpful at certain times. For instance, some people might benefit from biological treatments first before pursuing therapy. Biological treatments may provide some lifechanging improvements that are necessary for effectively engaging in therapy. These improvements may include the following:

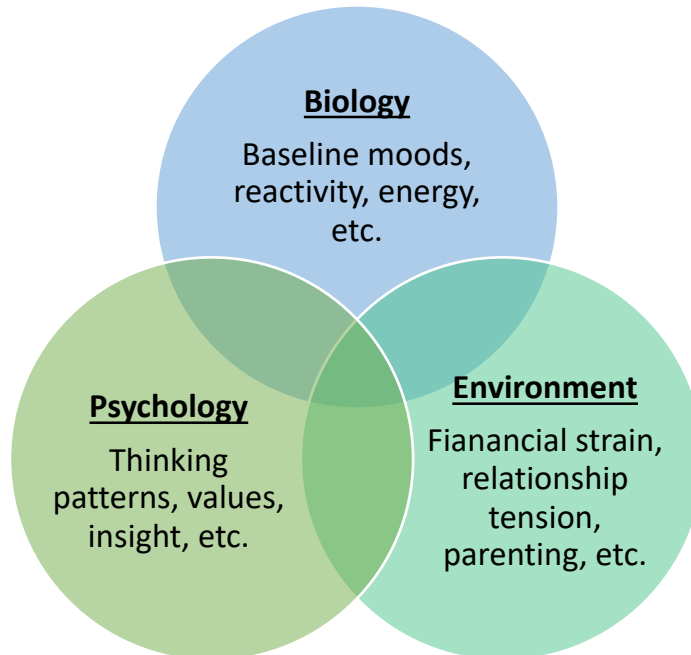
- Boosting baseline moods and energy levels
- Improving sleep
- Increasing concentration and improving our thought processes
- Increasing our motivation or ability to feel enjoyment

Once some initial improvements are made, then it might make sense to start therapy at that time, as you’ve had some weight lifted off your shoulders for you to pursue therapy. Biological treatments also provide a powerful opportunity for therapy gains, as these treatments can help us rewire old patterns of thinking in a supportive and safe therapeutic environment.

***My problem is biological, I don’t think I can talk my way out of my depression***

It's true that there is a biological/genetic component to our moods and reactions to stress, and therapy isn't a "magic bullet" that will solve all of our problems. Nevertheless, therapy provides us with a roadmap for change that we can use in moments of calm and moments of stress to feel like we are working towards finding fulfillment and meaning. In addition, psychotherapy is important for maintaining the gains that biological treatment can provide. Again, biological treatments may give us that boost we need to begin working on our goals. Therapy may help us more effectively and more quickly reach those goals and integrate gains into our day-to-day lives.

***Visualizing maintaining factors for depression:***



***Both biological treatment and therapy collectively target these critical areas of overlap to improve our moods, functioning, and well-being.***

**Evidence-based therapy.** Some people prefer to start a biological treatment first and then pursue therapy, and some people prefer the opposite timeline. **There is no “one size fits all” approach.** When it is possible, we encourage our patients to seek out providers who engage in evidence-based practice. **The phrase “evidence-based” refers to a provider making use of multiple sources of research evidence in their selection of interventions, and then integrating that data with your unique characteristics and your preferences and goals for treatment.**

**Providers who have training in some or all of the following psychotherapies may be a good fit to work with you on your treatment resistant depression:**

- **Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT).** This is a well-studied and common treatment that helps us identify and address the inter-connection between feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. This approach may help identify and change unhelpful thinking patterns and teaches skills to respond effectively to life's challenges.
- **Behavioral activation therapy.** This form of therapy is very closely related to CBT, and it focuses even more closely on the links between behaviors and moods. This approach helps us see what our days actually look like and where we can make changes to live according to our values and find fulfillment, even alongside sadness or low motivation and fatigue.
- **Acceptance and commitment therapy.** Also related to CBT, acceptance and commitment therapy helps us to engage in effective behaviors, even when we still have negative thoughts and emotions. In essence, it helps us find meaning and joy even if things still feel hard.
- **Mindfulness therapy.** Also stemming from CBT, mindfulness therapy is focused on how we can reengage with the present moment. With depression and anxiety, many people can find themselves stuck in the past or waiting for a negative future, losing track of where they are now. Mindfulness can help ground us to cope more effectively and enjoy our lives.
- **Dialectical behavioral therapy.** This type of therapy helps us validate our intense emotional states and identify whether and how we want to act on these emotions in a safer way. Dialectical behavior therapy may refer to a skills group or a combination of individual therapy with a skills group.
- **Psychodynamic psychotherapy.** The aim of this type of therapy is to help us understand and resolve underlying problems linked to our mood states. In this treatment, feelings and beliefs are often explored in-depth and our past experiences are often drawn upon in order to process our current feelings and beliefs.
- **Trauma focused psychotherapy.** Also related to CBT, trauma focused therapy is centered on processing the links between a traumatic event(s) and our moods, thoughts, behaviors, and beliefs. Through describing and processing the traumatic experiences in a safe environment, we can gain a greater awareness of how they have impacted our present functioning and how we can move forward to find joy again.
- **Group psychotherapy.** This can be a helpful adjunct to individual therapy, as you can work alongside those who feel similarly to you. Group therapy often focuses on

concrete problem-solving and/or interpersonal skills, which can further reinforce what you learn in your own therapy.

- **Family or marital therapy.** This type of therapy involves family members or your spouse/partner. For some people, working through relationship stressors alongside a loved one can significantly help with mood-related concerns.

**Useful links for beginning the search for a therapist:**

*American Psychological Association* <https://locator.apa.org>

*Psychology Today* <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us>

**Tips for finding a therapist:**

- Check out the links provided above, call your insurance provider, and/or ask for referrals from trusted providers
- Check the therapists' websites and profiles to get a sense of what they do, their training, and their approach
- Call therapists that seem like they have potential and engage with them on the phone to ask your questions and perhaps schedule an initial appointment/get on a waitlist
- If you're not sure about the first session, maybe give it another try and see how the second session goes.
- Be assertive about your wants and needs. Collaborate and openly share if this provider is not a good fit. It's ok to try someone new. Providers care about what's best for you and your healing.