

“Therapy For Beginners”: Or How to Be Your Own Therapist

by Harper West, MA, LLP
Psychotherapist
Great Lakes Psychology Group

Give yourself a pat on the back! You took the leap and came in to see a therapist. This can be a challenging step for many people. Perhaps you are hesitant to open up about past choices, your thoughts or feelings, or problems in your relationships. Or you feared getting labeled with some “illness,” or getting judged as inadequate in some way. Or you just didn’t know what to expect. These are normal fears, which many people experience when starting therapy.

I hope that therapy is a safe, caring, helpful environment, that helps you move toward your goals for yourself and your relationships.

However, coming to regular therapy sessions is just a PART of the healing process.

To make the most of the process I encourage you to consider adding these practices to your life as you are able:

- Reflect between therapy sessions on what you learn and experience.
- Learn to observe your thoughts and feelings through mindfulness. **IMPORTANT: Read my handout on “Developing a Meditation Practice.”**
- Become your own inner teacher by journaling about your ideas, dreams, feelings, and experiences (journaling immediately after therapy is great!)
- Make healthy lifestyle choices — get enough sleep on a regular cycle, eat well, exercise, practice yoga, avoid addictive behaviors.
- Choose daily exercise, especially walking in nature, because exercise reduces anxiety and depression.
- Take a good multivitamin with minerals. “Vitamins and minerals are well established as cofactors essential for the synthesis and metabolism of neurotransmitters. Furthermore, the link between insomnia and stress is well-established, and vitamin and minerals are intricately involved in the regulation of the stress response. Micronutrients may result in reductions in stress...” <http://www.madinamerica.com/2016/06/nutrition-sleep-and-mental-health/>
- Clear the mind, slow down, de-stress, simplify.
- Share with psychologically aware friends in an emotionally open and reflective way.
- Read philosophers, thinkers, poets and self-help books, then journal and meditate about what you learn.
- Live consciously, not reactively.
- Grow healthy friendships; shed unhealthy relationships.
- Be compassionate toward yourself and others; consider the motives and needs of others when judging their behavior. Read my handout on “Developing Self-Compassion.”

- Live in a way that reduces shame, that is — behave in ways that are moral, ethical, conscientious and caring.
- Give to others in a truly selfless way without need for self-aggrandizement.
- Practice vulnerability.
- Practice personal accountability.
- Practice gratitude.
- Be authentic.
- Discuss any of these experiences with me so we can integrate your learning into therapy.

This may all sound like hard work — but what better “project” can there be than becoming the BEST “YOU” you can be? Good luck on your journey!

Developed by:

Harper West, MA, LLP

Psychotherapist

248-464-1297

www.GreatLakesPsychologyGroup.com

www.PackLeaderPsychology.com

www.SelfAcceptancePsychology.com