

Mental health problems are often stigmatised, which can make choosing to seek professional help seem a daunting task. Society's views lag behind decades of research demonstrating that there is nothing inherently different about someone who is currently experiencing 'mental health problems,' and someone who is not. A large body of research clearly shows that human life involves continua: people who are currently having particular difficulties are simply further along particular continua at the moment (eg, more or less happy or depressed). There are also a lot of unhelpful stereotypes about what 'therapy' involves - but things have moved on a great deal.

### **WHAT TO EXPECT FROM PSYCHOLOGICAL THERAPY**

'Psychological therapy' involves five steps, which are described below. What therapy involves is flexible and tailored to each individual. Sessions usually last 50-60 minutes and are delivered weekly. Some clients may benefit from longer sessions or more frequent meetings. Relatively simple problems might be changed in just a few sessions. You may just want a one-off consultation. More complex problems may take 12-16 sessions, although some clients choose to continue treatment beyond 16 sessions.

#### **1. Assessment**

This involves talking about problems and how they affect your life (e.g. What do the problems involve? How do they affect your life? When did they start?). Assessment can take 1-3 sessions, depending upon the complexity of the problem. It is helpful to get really specific and detailed to ensure that you and I have the same understanding of what's going on. Completing questionnaires will help us gather information more quickly and add to our understanding. It may be helpful to gather information from different people (e.g. partners, parents) to create a holistic picture and think about what different people can do to help. We will also agree practicalities (e.g. frequency of meeting, length of meetings). It is important to create goals so that we work on what matters to you. We will discuss which goals are most important and which you want to work on in therapy. Anything and everything can be discussed, so do raise what you want and need to talk about.

#### **2. Creating a shared understanding of problems**

This starts from the first session. We work to ensure we understand your problems in the same way and how different difficulties relate to one another. This is a bit like putting the pieces of a puzzle together. My aim is to understand why problems developed and what stops them from improving. Once we have a clear understanding of the difficulties, I can suggest techniques and skills that can be used to change those problems.

#### **3. Working as a team**

You are the expert on you and your life. Nobody knows you better! I bring professional expertise and lots of ideas about things that might help you achieve your goals. There is lots of evidence demonstrating that psychological therapy can help a broad range of problems and I will use that to make suggestions for you specifically. An important part of working together is forming a trusting, positive relationship and collaboratively working on the things that matter to you. I can act differently depending on what you want. For example,

I could take an active role and make suggestions, or, if you prefer, I can just listen. Being honest and open with each other about expectations and progress will help things run smoothly.

#### **4. Making changes**

Change doesn't happen simply by being in the room with a Clinical Psychologist 😊. Change happens by trying something different, during therapy and outside of therapy in your everyday life. Change involves experimenting with new ways of thinking and behaving and stretching yourself. It involves taking 'risks' by allowing yourself to try new things and by

confronting the things you've been avoiding. We will work together to develop practical skills and solutions to your problems, breaking problems down so that they are easier to solve. Change will happen faster if you practice exercises and skills outside of therapy and we will talk about ways you can do this. When therapy ends, people are able to use the skills and tools they have learned in their day-to-day lives.

#### **5. Monitoring progress**

It is important to monitor how things are progressing, and to take a new approach if needed.