

# Preparing for a Therapy Appointment

## Getting the Most Out of Therapy:

Before you go to see a therapist or doctor about a behavioral health or substance use issue, it may help to know what to expect. We've put together some notes and suggestions to help you prepare for your first appointment and get the most out of therapy.

## Preparing For the First Appointment:

When you meet your therapist for the first time it is easy to get confused or forget important information. Writing a few notes to take with you can help. These might include:

- What do you hope to accomplish by going to therapy?
- How would you like things to be different at the end of therapy?
- What has been happening in your life that leads you to go to therapy? How long has this been happening and how troubling is it?
- How have you been feeling? Are you experiencing nervousness, depression or other emotions that are troubling?
- What have you done to try to feel better? What has made you feel better in the past?
- Who else have you seen about this problem, including another therapist, your doctor, a clergy or rabbi, or support groups such as AA?

- Bring a list of all medicines you are taking for both physical and behavioral health reasons. Include name, dose, frequency, and any side effects you are experiencing. Bring along contact information for all doctors who are giving you medicine.
- Bring copies of any documents you think might be helpful. These include previous psychological testing, hospital discharge summaries, or recent laboratory results. If you are bringing your child in for therapy, then bring copies of recent school progress reports and psychological testing results.
- Bring a list of any questions you have about how therapy works, including frequency, cost, and what you will need to do. Ask if you will have things you need to do between appointments.
- If you would like, ask if you can include your family or social support in some of the sessions.

### **The First Appointment:**

Try to arrive 15 minutes early for the first appointment to complete paperwork. Appointments usually last 30-50 minutes. You and the therapist will use the first appointment or two getting to know each other and deciding if the therapist can help you.

During your first meeting with a therapist, you can expect . . .

- To be asked to complete some forms. These will likely ask for information about yourself, your insurance coverage, and about what you are currently going through. You should also be given a statement of the therapist's privacy policy and a statement about your rights and responsibilities in therapy.
- To be asked some questions about yourself and what brought you to therapy. Answer in your own words or bring out the notes you wrote before the first appointment. Be as clear and thorough as you can be so that the therapist can help you.
- At the end of the session, to talk with the therapist about a plan to help you. This may include continuing to meet with the therapist on a regular basis, or the therapist may refer you to another specialist who may be better able to help you. If your therapist recommends that you continue to

come to appointments, you should have a clear idea of what to expect to happen during those appointments.

- To feel listened to and comfortable talking with the therapist. You should feel free to express yourself and talk about what is important to you. If you do not, let the therapist know so that you can discuss what to do about it.

### **If you Need Medicine:**

Some behavioral health and substance abuse issues are also treated with medicines. You may be asked to see a Doctor or Nurse Practitioner who can prescribe you medicine. When you meet with this person, it is important to talk to your doctor or nurse practitioner about:

- Any other medicines you are taking.
- Any allergies you have to medicines.
- Medicines you have taken in the past and whether they have helped you.
- Medicines that have been helpful to any other family members who have had the same problems.
- Any side effects you have once you start the medicine.
- Any positive effects you have once you start the medicine.
- Any problems in paying for your medication?

It is very important to be open and honest with your doctor or nurse practitioner so that he/she can make decisions with you about the best medicine for you. There are no lab tests that can be done to find the ideal medicine for you, so your doctor or nurse can only make decisions based on what you report.

Below are some other things to keep in mind when getting help:

### **Take an Active Role**

- Keep your appointments.
- Ask questions.
- Request that your doctors all work together.

### **Sooner the better**

- Go to appointments as often as recommended.
- Appointments may be more often when you start treatment.