

Important Information to Help Guide You in Therapy

By reading this, being informed and following this guide you will benefit more from therapy and achieve more of your goals of therapy.

What We Expect From You

1. Attend sessions consistently for the required duration of time

Attending sessions regularly is extremely important if you are going to make and sustain changes in your life. The research evidence shows that completing 12 weekly consistent sessions leads to more significant changes than 12 monthly sessions. Importantly research also suggests: 13–18 sessions of psychological therapy is needed for 50% of people to fully recover, and maintain these changes at 6 months follow up after therapy has finished. The remaining 50% of people will typically need 20–90+ sessions. In Australia, clients attend just 6 sessions of therapy on average, meaning sadly the majority of people do not attend enough therapy for a long enough period to achieve long lasting change and prevent relapse into poorer mental health.

Currently, at our practice, patients attend 12+ sessions on average with our psychologists; and, we are focussed on increasing this number. Thus, we understand the importance of you attending consistent sessions over the required duration of therapy to ensure you achieve the best treatment outcomes and will encourage you to book in weekly or fortnightly consistent sessions for a minimum of 13. If you are able to achieve your goals of therapy with less than 13 sessions, then great! But be informed that most clients require at least 13 sessions to benefit most and prevent relapse.

Thus, we focus on retaining our clients in therapy for the required duration of consistent sessions to help you achieve the best treatment outcomes + prevent you relapsing into previous poorer mental health. This means less of our clients choose to cease therapy before obtaining genuine, longer lasting benefits.

The number of (50–55 minute) sessions you decide to commit to varies, depending on your particular issues, goals of therapy and willingness to examine things, make change and stay the course of therapy when things get tough or difficult and are not changing or improving. As the person committing to therapy, you as the client make the decision as to how many sessions you are willing to commit to, over what period of time, and how often. We will inform you of the research evidence around number of sessions over time when you complete your intake (initial process over the phone) with us, and as we get to know you and work with you in therapy we can inform you of consistency and duration of therapy as we go along the journey together.

The data we have collected in our practice here at ST&A Psychology reveals that approximately 20% of our clients require 10–12 weekly sessions. Usually these people have issues which are very specific and easily identifiable. Furthermore, the issues usually are more transitory and situational as opposed to long lasting/persistent.

Approximately 30% of our clients may require 13 to 20 sessions which may also move to fortnightly in frequency and therapy will persist over a longer period of time (6–12 months). Approximately 50% of clients will benefit from more than 20 sessions over a longer period of time such as 12 to 24 months. You are likely to discuss the most appropriate duration and frequency of sessions during sessions 13. However, sometimes what is initially focussed on and worked on in the first 10 to 12 sessions and what you and your therapist initially, believe is most important to focus on, may not become the most important or relevant area for you to work on moving forward. So during therapy your therapist and you will review and manage what has been done, what still would be worthwhile to work on and what skills you still need to learn or apply better/more consistently in your life. Sometimes to achieve all of your goals of therapy and prevent relapse back into old unhelpful patterns and poor mental health, working consistently (i.e. once a week to once a fortnight) for 12 months+ is most helpful/recommended.

2. An openness and willingness

Being open to and having a willingness to talk about difficult things with emotional vulnerability is important in helping you achieve your goals of therapy. Also, practicing/working on new skills both during and between sessions is necessary to better manage your issues and perceived problems. Further, a willingness to try new things and try out new ways of doing things and exposing yourself to difficult things where uncomfortable thoughts and feelings may arise is also an important aspect to making changes.

3. Take notes, record and keep records of notes and handouts, and read over notes

Using a notepad/journal and folder to record, collect and keep all information and handouts from therapy will help you to remember what you are working on, why and how. Often we'll ask you to take notes and write down the commitments you make in session, to actions you'll take each week between sessions. We often also ask you to take photos of these handouts or notes or things you've written down onto your mobile phone where you can easily access them and refer to them. We will also ask you to make copies of this work and put it up at home to remind you of the importance of focusing on these things you want to change, improve or manage differently.

4. Stay informed about therapy, how therapy goes, flows and evolves

Being informed about how therapy usually flows, is structured and works is extremely important in knowing how to interact with your therapist and in the sessions to reach the maximum benefits possible. The initial session(s) are about assessment and involve you describing what is troubling you and how these problems or issues have arose and developed over time, and also what triggers them. Specific information about your developmental, family, work, social and health history is taken to better understand what is happening for you and why it is happening. We clarify the problems, then set goals and

expectations about what can be achieved, and a model of how those goals may be achieved over time if the work is done by you. A discussion about how consistently you need to attend sessions and an approximate timeframe may be discussed in the first few sessions. Then, we suggest appropriate ways of working on your issues, based on what the issues are, how they've developed and what has proven to be effective for others with similar issues or perceived problems (this approach is known as using Evidence Based Treatments). It is important to note that the assessment part of your therapy continues throughout your therapy. Because each session you come in to therapy, the more your therapist gets to know you and your personality style and ways you cope with and manage issues, and also the more information you provide them about your issues, what triggers them, and how they are maintained and develop. Importantly, as new or old or different issues arise or become evident, therapy may need to be extended if you are to achieve change in these areas also.

Your therapist and you then begin working on your issues in session. And you also begin working on your issues out of session. In session, you will be asked to commit to activities and tasks which you and your therapist set together to help you make the changes you want to see in your life. Some of these tasks and activities may be new psychological skills/tasks, and some will be daily activities like getting to bed at a helpful time to allow you to get enough sleep, or increasing your cardiovascular exercise to 3–4 times per week for 35–40 minutes. Each person is different so your tasks you and your therapist set will be uniquely individual to you and your specific issues and goals of therapy.

Evidence-based treatments are those shown to have significant impact in helping people reduce psychological symptoms (e.g. symptoms of depression, anxiety, stress), and improve and enrich their lives, relationships and their satisfaction with life. We use these and other models in an integrative approach, tailored to each client's needs. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT), Dialectic Behaviour Therapy (DBT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Schema Therapy, Motivational Interviewing (MI), Solution Focused Therapy, Interpersonal Psychotherapy (IPT), and Psychodynamic and Psychoanalytic models are used. Each of the therapy models involve you learning new ways of coping and managing difficulties so that you can cope more helpfully, leading to a reduction of psychological symptoms and improvements in satisfaction with life.

What To Expect From Us

5. Measuring and tracking progress and change or lack thereof

At ST&A Psychology, we consistently track and measure your progress in therapy through a number of measures including the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS21), the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS), our Service Evaluation and your Goals of Therapy you initially set to help you stay on track in improving your mental health, wellbeing, satisfaction with life and achieving your goals of therapy. We also track particular individual behavioural changes like reductions in alcohol use, being more assertive and less passive, or exercising more regularly, or procrastinating and avoiding less, or better coping with your difficult thoughts and feelings. Sometimes change can be fast.

Sometimes change takes time and a lot of work, and sometimes you may not change everything in the first 6–12 months.

6. How we work together to facilitate change

As one of our clients, we will naturally care a lot about you, your health, wellbeing and your suffering. We will care a lot about how satisfied you are with your life and the different areas of your life that really matter to you. We feel strongly about human suffering and will want to help you reduce your suffering. We strongly believe in the strength and ability within you, to change your life, and manage your issues more effectively. As experts on mental health and change, we will respect you as the expert of your life. Thus, we will help you to work towards what is important, meaningful and purposeful for you, to better meet your psychological needs. To facilitate positive change, we will help you develop greater self-awareness and the necessary psychological skills + strategies to better manage and deal with difficult thoughts, feelings and situations. We also help you reconnect with your values (how you want to be as a person, what matters to you, what is meaningful, purposeful and valuable to you) and help you commit to take action in line with your values.

We are caring, warm, open, helpful, respectful, supportive, encouraging, hardworking and compassionate people in the practice. We are very passionate about helping people reduce their suffering and all of us as psychologists in the practice will want to understand the unique way you are suffering or struggling to cope. We will work hard to help anyone who decides to work with us. We understand the importance of engaging you with warmth and compassion from the moment we say hello in the waiting room of our practice and the importance of working collaboratively with you to help you change your life for the better. We look for these values when we employ colleagues and staff to work with us in the practice to help you and others who come to our service.

We are also motivated in the process of continual growth and improvement to help reduce more people's suffering, improve more people's wellbeing, satisfaction with life and mental health with excellent treatment outcomes and customer service. This growth and improvement relates to us as people in our community, as psychologists with our clients, as psychologists trying to help people in the community via presentations, workshops and e-learning videos, and in our practice as a whole at ST&A Psychology. We believe a team approach in the practice supporting each other in the goal of continual growth and improvement to help more people suffer less is an ever-evolving process to reflect on and work on. Having spent 13 years in the practice working with others, and in consciously seeking out, recruiting, helping support, encourage and shape like-minded individuals with similar values (see our culture statement) to work with in the team, as the Clinical Director, I believe we at ST&A Psychology, are on the right path with the right team members embracing these values and culture statement.