

## INTRODUCTION

# ~ WHY THERAPY? ~

We all have an inner world of feelings and thoughts, but we are not taught the language of that inner world. *Emotions are one of the most powerful drivers of our lives. Therapy is the primary space to understand emotions, a place where you can learn to express and manage them well.*

Therapy can help you in the toughest times – but not only when times are tough. Talking to the right “someone” is a way to get support and guidance at any time in life.

*Help might not seem to be necessary when things are going well and you’re happy, but it is essential when you are experiencing feelings of anxiety, depression, confusion, disappointment, loss or frustration.* Therapy is the place to sort things out, heal from emotional pain, and make important changes.

We all need support with our emotions and it is time for us to accept that fact. We accept that our bodies and minds need care, so why not our feelings? Comfort and advice might be easy to find, but therapy is much more than comfort or advice; it is a deep dive into who you are, and a chance to learn to work *with* your feelings instead of being taken hostage by them.

Think back . . . when you were a child maybe you felt “different” – or you *were* different in some way – and were bullied, or something was

happening at home that you were ashamed about. As a teen you had to navigate the pressures of family and friends, social media, alcohol and drugs, sex and love. You could have benefitted from some outside help.

As an adult you have to develop self-confidence, find a career, make money. Navigating a career is tricky business and it can go a lot of directions at any point. If you take a risk you'll need support. Or, you might be successful for years and gradually discover your needs have changed, and you want to do something entirely different. Technology has altered or totally eliminated many types of work, and you might find yourself in an unexpected predicament; your field has evolved in such a way that you have been left behind. Having someone to talk to is crucial in getting through events like these.

What about love? Do you want to get married, have children? Do you keep looking for love and not finding it? Or are you in a relationship or marriage now and it is more of a challenge than you thought it would be? In our culture love is romanticized to the point where people expect their partner to satisfy all of their emotional needs without doing any work at all. That is unrealistic, and the expectation leads to a lot of early and unnecessary breakups and divorces. But in relationships there are many things to deal with and talk about, including *realistic* expectations, compatibility, lifestyle, money, sex, parenting, and in-laws. Good communication between couples has to be learned, it doesn't just come naturally. These are all daunting tasks, and having some guidance makes it a lot easier.

If you have children you know that they are facing a tougher world than when you grew up. There is much more information available to them, more peer pressure, as well as more exposure to drugs and violence. Do you or your children face racial, cultural, gender, sexual or religious discrimination? When your kids have problems they need help – and you need help in order to best help them.

*You don't have to experience a defeat, a trauma or a big loss in your life to need therapy. That said, in life there are defeats, traumas, and losses for everyone.* There can be betrayals, addictions, breakups, divorces, loss of employment, money, health, or loved ones. *The vision you had of your life can collide with the reality you are experiencing. How do you deal with that?* You need help the most when you suffer the most, and the sooner the better.

Ask yourself, what is your go-to method now when you're hurting emotionally? Do you drink more? Eat more? Exercise or work more? Try not to think about it? Do you keep hoping that miraculously things will change. . .or do you just give up and resign yourself? Those are not your only options! We'd like to believe we can solve problems on our own, but sometimes we can't; when life is so frustrating or painful that you start to feel hopeless it's time to get help.

*Gettng help does not mean weakness or failure – in fact it is the opposite – it shows strength and and self-confidence to realize that help will work to your advantage, and then seek it out.* Therapy is not available to everyone; if it is available to you, take advantage of the opportunity.

In this book you will read stories of therapy sessions from my point of view as a therapist, and also from my clients' points of view. The stories will give you an insider's look, and although they are inspired by real events, names and details have been changed to protect confidentiality.

I hope to eliminate any fears or mistaken ideas you have about therapy, to reassure and inspire you to reach for what it offers. Therapy is a vehicle for change, but even people who are committed to taking care of their bodies often neglect their emotions. They deny, avoid, joke about, minimize or attempt to get over emotions rather than face them. Why? There are many reasons, and when I ask clients, "What took you so long to get here?" they say things like:

“I was embarrassed to talk openly.”

“I didn’t trust anyone.”

“I didn’t think it would help.”

“I didn’t know what it would be like.”

“We thought we should work it out on our own.”

Their answers remind me that there is still not enough information available.

Yet another reason that people shy away from therapy is the outdated belief that it is only for people with mental illness. That is simply not true. The earliest form of therapy was psychiatry, the branch of medicine which treated people with mental illness, and therapy combined with medication is still a core aspect of that treatment. But for a long time now therapy has become mainstream, oriented toward everyone and all of the struggles we face in life.

*Some people think that if they go to therapy it means they are “damaged”, but that is not true, and is an unfair and shaming label. This book is intended to contribute to eliminating any remaining stigma about therapy, and normalize the need for self-care.*

You are not alone if you are still hesitating to reach out. To illustrate, here is a brief example of my client Jessica in her first session, describing the inner conflict she had. She said, “I looked at your website for months before getting the courage to contact you. I literally started – and then deleted – a dozen emails. I thought it would mean I was crazy or that something was wrong with me, and I didn’t want to see myself like that.”

Although more and more people do enter therapy now, Jessica knew no one personally who had done it. She continued, “I couldn’t talk to anyone about my decision, and that made it worse.”

Her isolation intensified her feelings of shame because she was afraid that the people she knew wouldn’t understand. She lacked

support, so it took much longer than it might have for her to finally reach out. But once she got started she found it to be a very different experience than she had imagined.

But Jessica had waited so long that she had become desperate about the problem she needed to solve. “I’ve read so many books on relationships,” she cried, “but I’m still going after men who aren’t right for me. Everything starts out great and I get my hopes up, because it looks like this time it will be different – this time it’s real. Then somehow things take a turn and begin to fall apart – it may last a month or a year, but they all end the same. I can’t keep doing this. I get so depressed I can hardly function. It hurts too much.”

Jessica needed more than the insights gained through reading self-help books to change her choices and actions in relationships, and to heal the pain from her past. Therapy was the path she needed, and she wished she had begun it sooner.

The term “Emotional Intelligence” was introduced in the 1990s by Daniel Goleman. His was a perspective which, instead of seeing emotions as problems, started a larger conversation about their essential value. *He claimed that when emotions are understood, regulated and channeled properly, they are in fact an enormous asset in every area of life.* Many businesses have embraced this concept and now include coaches to assist their employees.

*Therapy is a place to enhance your life in ways you can’t predict.* Becoming emotionally intelligent is not possible without guidance, because unguided we still react from instinct, and defend ourselves automatically, which means we do not use our emotions intelligently at all. You must look for that guidance.

Even if you already believe that therapy can help you, there is still the instinct of self-protection to overcome. You know that revealing yourself creates vulnerability, and you may believe that vulnerability

makes you weaker. Men especially are taught to believe that unfortunate idea. While vulnerability is a liability in a *physical* survival situation, that is not true in other settings. In fact, becoming more open can actually *increase* your strength as you learn how to navigate your emotional world.

The media perpetuates misinformation by showing bad examples of therapists on TV and in movies. Those portrayals do not represent the majority of therapists, and are offensive to those who are ethical and caring.

My purpose is not to define all the forms of therapy available now. There are many approaches, and once you decide to begin you can investigate what approach you might prefer. *The common denominator is that you will be aligning with someone in the process of making your life better. My purpose is to encourage and support you in that decision, and give you a look at the experience itself.*

Most therapy explores the past, and moves forward with the information found there to clarify the present. But some people just don't want to look back. "The past is over, why dig it up?" is commonly asked. The answer is that we are formed by our genetics and early life environment. True, you can't change past events, but you have a better chance of changing the present if you understand how the past informs your beliefs, reactions and choices today. I say more about this in the chapter *Why Your Past Matters*.

If you have lived with unresolved emotional problems for a long time you know something is wrong. You may see the effects in your relationships or your work – you might experience depression, anxiety, stress-related illness, addiction, procrastination, or frustration. Avoidance is a stalling technique but not a solution – it just prevents healing.

*If you are acknowledging your unhappiness and wanting to change,*

*this is a turning point for you.* What you are feeling now is important, as it can lead you to accept the need for help.

Maybe you have been considering therapy, or maybe someone who cares about you has suggested you try it, and you still have questions and doubts. Every person's experience is unique, so no exact description of what will happen can be given beforehand. However, there are a lot of commonalities, and *the good news is that you can feel better, and make changes in your life.*

Have hope, and know that many others have gone before you and will go after you as well. Let this book accompany you through the process, to remind you that you're not alone, and to be a source of encouragement along the way.