

Get to the real stuff

# Psychotherapy Cheat Sheet

*It's a common saying that relationships can only move at the speed of trust. In therapy, that means we have to respect that it takes time for you to build a sense of trust and safety with your therapist, and that this foundation is **essential** if you want to experience genuine change. Only after you feel trust will you be able to open up and bring your full self to therapy.*

*That said, there are some ways to build trust and work deeply more quickly. This handout will give you guidance on how to do that.*



## 1 Therapy happens with you, not to you

From the first session it's important to recognize that therapy is not like a massage, dental procedure, or chiropractic appointment. Therapy is not something that happens to you; it is something that requires your full participation. What are some ways to make sure you're participating fully? Keep reading.

## 2 Be honest

It may sound easy or obvious, but it's neither. Most of us are not able to be fully honest with ourselves, let alone be fully honest with somebody else. What does this mean? No white lies. No sugar coating.

## 3 Tell on yourself

You know yourself better than anybody else in the world. You know your accomplishments, your mistakes, your strengths, and your weaknesses. If you are coming to therapy to grow as a person, then you need to talk openly and honestly about all of you. Tell us the full story. We'll certainly celebrate your wins, but you need to tell us the unflattering moments as well.

## 4 Talk about the hard thing

People often start sessions by saying, "I'm not sure what to talk about today." You'll frequently have to choose whether you talk about something that feels emotionally easy or something that feels emotionally hard (aka risky, vulnerable, overwhelming). You'll get the most out of your therapy if say the hard thing. What does this look like? Say the thing you've never said out loud before. Say the thing you worry nobody will understand.

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## 5 Let's make an agreement that your feelings are valid

In order to build trust, you'll have to **experience** that your therapist treats your feelings as real and valid, and this will take time. But if we can agree from the start of treatment that you don't have to justify your feelings to yourself or to your therapist, you can leapfrog over the need to prove your feelings are "right" into exploring deeper and more impactful questions about what's actually best for you.

## 6 Be curious about yourself

Rather than using therapy to vent as you might to a friend or family member, try using therapy to be curious about yourself. Whether you're mad about something your partner did, proud about something that happened at work, or feeling righteous about an interaction with a stranger, don't just talk about what you're thinking and feeling: be curious about those things. A simple act of curiosity is to genuinely ask, "Why do I feel this way?" Curiosity is a necessity if you want things to change.

## 7 Take your therapy seriously

You're spending your time and money on therapy; this is a real investment in yourself. If you feel like your investment isn't paying off then you need to look hard at the "why." If you're not getting what you need from your therapist, then it's important to talk to them about it. But if you're not putting your best effort into therapy, then you may need to step up. The effort you put into therapy is the effort you put into yourself.

*By following these seven tips you can make sure you're doing your part to get the most out of therapy.*

*And if you read something here that sounds worth trying but you're not sure how to do it? Bring your questions to your next session. It may start a conversation that leads to a deeper, more meaningful treatment.*

