

EDReferral.com
and the
American Eating Disorder Association
present

THE OPENNESS TO THERAPY ASSESSMENT (OTA)

The Openness to Therapy Assessment (OTA) is designed to help you feel comfortable about beginning therapy. Meeting with a person that you don't know in an unfamiliar setting can be difficult. You may not be exactly sure what is keeping you from making that call to a therapist. The OTA will help you to recognize the issues which create the wall between you and counseling. Once you have recognized the issues and they are no longer vague then they are frequently easier to handle.

The end of this article provides suggestions to help bring down the wall of inaction. But ultimately you have to take the first step by calling the therapist. Then he or she can help you to further deal with the issues that cause you discomfort. As you and your therapist work together on these issues, you will become more skilled in achieving the goals for which you entered therapy.

Note: If you are one of those people who reads all of the precautions on a medicine label and after taking the medication, you think you have each problem, then this assessment is not for you. This section is designed to help you to feel more comfortable, not to increase your anxiety.

DIRECTIONS: Read each numbered sentence. Then circle the number that feels most appropriate for you on the scale below the sentence. If you are unsure about what the sentence means, then read the paragraph below the scale. If the question seems pretty straightforward, then answer it and then skip to the next question. Continue through all of the remainder of the questions in this way. When you are finished, go back and thoroughly read the paragraphs below the questions that interest you. Pay special attention to the questions that received the lowest scores.

6. Will the therapist be able to keep what I say confidential? Are there any assurances?

1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10
concerned about confidentiality not concerned

7. What if my employer finds out? Will my career be affected? Will it be on my record?

1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10
concerned about career not concerned

8. Therapy is too expensive.

1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10
too expensive worth the expense

9. I might feel foolish.

1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10
feel foolish don't feel foolish

10. Therapy may bring up feelings that I can't handle or that my therapist won't be able to handle.

1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10
overwhelming feelings not a concern

11. I might lose control.

1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10
might lose control not concerned

12. The therapist won't be able to understand me.

1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10
won't understand can understand

13. What if this therapist isn't any good? What if he or she can't help me?

1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10
can't help me can help me

14. I don't deserve to have all this time devoted to me. The therapist should be helping someone who "really needs it."

1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10
don't deserve help do deserve help

15. I feel weak if I ask for help. I should be self-sufficient and able to figure things out for myself.

1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10
shouldn't ask for help okay to get help

16. The therapist will see things in me that other people can't see and will pass judgment on me.

1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10
too exposed not concerned

17. I'm concerned about what I may learn or reveal about myself.

1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10
concerned not concerned

23. Therapy may not be compatible with my spiritual beliefs.

1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10

beliefs are therapy & spirituality
incompatible can be integrated

24. The therapist may not like me.

1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10

won't like me will like me

25. My problem can't be fixed. This won't help. Nothing will help.

1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10

feeling hopeless things can change
there is hope!

Other _____
(write in any other concerns about therapy)

end of assessment

SCORING: Each statement covers an area that could cause you to feel uncomfortable about beginning therapy. The lowest scores represent situations which are causing you the most difficulty. On the left side of a sheet of paper, write those statements that really seem to hit home (usually the lowest scores). Then on the right side, try to counter the negative response with the opposite and a positive reason that you ought to seek help. For suggestions, refer to the paragraphs under the statements below as you write. Remember, you don't have to believe the part on the right side of the paper at first. Just pretend you are a debater and you are taking the opposite side and making the best case that you can. Or, consider this a trial in which you are the defense attorney and make a strong case for yourself seeking help.

After a while, the positives will begin to sink in, and the negatives will lose strength. TRY IT! IT WORKS! You may or may not want to share your answers with your therapist. But remember: the most progress in therapy is made by being open and honest with your therapist to the best of your ability. But don't push yourself before you feel ready.

1. I don't know what is going to happen in therapy and I'm not sure what I am supposed to do.

If you have never been in therapy before, then it is normal for you to feel unsure about what will happen and to be uncomfortable. Remember that you can take some time with your therapist to focus on the reasons that you are uneasy before getting into the reason you came for therapy. It will help you to feel more comfortable. Another way to help this situation is to tell your therapist what you expect will happen in therapy. Ask the therapist how his or her process differs from your ideas. In most cases, you will not be asked to lie on a couch. The therapist just expects you to tell him or her to the best of your ability what you see as the problem and some of your history. It is the therapist's job to listen attentively and try to establish a connection with you. As you start to feel comfortable, the more direct, open and honest that you can be, the more you will gain from being in therapy. Feel free to ask the therapist questions and to

make suggestions that might make you feel more comfortable. Remember that you should never do anything that goes against your values.

2. I don't see how therapy can help. How is it supposed to work?

This is a good question to ask your therapist because every therapist has a different view of exactly how therapy will be helpful for you. It really depends on what you want to accomplish. Your therapist will be in a better position to answer this question specifically after he or she knows you and your situation a little better. If you obtained a low score on this question then you may be feeling a little hopeless about your situation. If so, then tell your therapist.

3. I'm worried that I will have to tell the therapist things about myself that I am uncomfortable feeling or admitting to a stranger.

I understand your discomfort. Therapy is a place where embarrassing and painful emotions can be worked through. The goal of therapy is to help you to understand how difficult emotions may be adversely affecting you and as a result experience less conflict and pain in your life. You can always delay some discussions (in order to not feel too overwhelmed) until you are somewhat comfortable and able to trust your therapist before you begin expressing difficult emotions.

4. The therapist, my friends, family, neighbors, or coworkers might think I'm crazy. Only crazy people need psychotherapy.

Therapy is becoming much more accepted by a lot more enlightened people. If you are concerned about the stigma surrounding therapy, you do not need to tell anyone if this makes you feel more comfortable. The fact is that it is not only "crazy people" who need

therapy, everyone at some time can use a guide to help give them a clearer perspective on life. There are people out there who are experts on the emotional side of life. It is only the crazy people who do not take advantage of their expertise and wisdom.

5. I might find out I'm crazy.

This is a very common concern because many people are afraid that deep down inside they are somehow different than everyone else and "nobody thinks the way that I do." In fact, individuals who have lost touch with reality, are not concerned about whether or not they are crazy. You may have developed some very creative ways of dealing with difficult situations. But that does not mean you are crazy. Talk to your therapist about this for clarification.

6. Will the therapist be able to keep what I say confidential? Are there any assurances?

This is a good question. Most therapists are very diligent about making sure that what you say in therapy is kept confidential. But you should know about the times when confidentiality must be broken.

Discuss your worst fears with your counselor and ask what he or she would do in a similar situation. The laws are different in each state regarding confidentiality, but generally, if the therapist determines that you are a danger to yourself, or to another person, then you lose your right to confidentiality and the therapist is obliged to inform the authorities.

There are several instances which involve the court system which could also force the therapist to breach confidentiality. For example: if you file a lawsuit against your therapist or your therapist files suit against you; if you file a lawsuit against another person and are claiming mental or emotional damages; or if you die and your record contains information vital to settle estate issues; if you seek

treatment to avoid prosecution of a crime, if you are seeking therapy to determine your mental competence, or if your therapy is mandated by a court decision.

Insurance companies will ask about certain details of your progress, so be sure that you are clear with your therapist about what will be contained in your records and what will be reported to the insurance company.

Children have different rights, as do the elderly. For instance, if you are over 65 and the therapist believes that you are the victim of physical abuse, then he or she will have to report this to the proper authority.

Your therapist is not permitted to tell anyone you are in therapy without your written consent except in the above special circumstances. If you are worried about confidentiality, then discuss your specific concerns with your therapist.

7. What if my employer finds out? Will my career be affected? Will it be on my record?

If you are feeling worried about these issues then discuss them with your therapist. Research has consistently shown that mental health programs are cost effective because they reduce: absenteeism, tardiness, union grievances, medical costs, alcohol and drug related problems and treatment, and worker's compensation costs. Therapy can also help you to be a more productive, satisfied, and healthier worker. Hopefully your employer understands these benefits. If not, talk to your therapist to determine ways that you can feel more comfortable about this issue.

8. Therapy is too expensive.

Therapy may seem expensive at first, but what has more value to you than your mental health? What is more important than getting the most out of life? Your insurance coverage may help pay for therapy. Also you may be able to work out a payment plan or a

reduced fee program if you are having financial trouble. If you cannot work out something with your therapist, then ask for a referral to low-cost counseling.

Therapy can provide you with immeasurable rewards in well-being, greater energy, and a joy for living which will be more than adequate compensation for your personal expenditures.

9. I might feel foolish.

The chances are that you may feel foolish, awkward, and even scared when you begin therapy. You probably have never opened up to a complete stranger and expressed your deepest feelings, desires, and fears. It is a unique experience to have someone listen to you attentively for an extended period. At the same time, as a result of taking that risk, you will learn more about yourself and will eventually become more comfortable with revealing your feelings. When you have achieved that degree of trust, you will have unlocked your potential for growth, self-discovery, and you will find great relief from pain and suffering.

10. Therapy may bring up feelings that I can't handle or that my therapist won't be able to handle.

If you feel that therapy may bring up feelings that you won't be able to handle, then be sure to tell your therapist. He or she will help you develop skills to deal with your feelings before the "overwhelming" feelings are discussed. If you are concerned that the therapist won't be able to understand your feelings, then discuss this before actually bringing them up. You could say to the therapist, "How do you feel about working with someone who gets angry?" (insert whatever type of feelings you might want to express)

11. I might lose control.

If you feel that you might lose control, then discuss this with your therapist. Remember that you do not need to discuss anything that feels too overwhelming. It is always a good idea to learn some coping skills before you start unleashing powerful emotions.

12. The therapist won't be able to understand me.

You have to remember that a therapist is trained to understand and empathize with emotions. You may have not felt understood trying to explain your problems to family or friends in the past, but it is likely that when you are speaking with a trained professional, that you will be better understood. A low score may indicate that you have some fears or blocks associated with dealing with your feelings. Discuss these issues with your therapist.

13. What if this therapist isn't any good? What if he or she can't help me?

Not every therapist is a perfect match with each person who comes for assistance. Feel free to ask the therapist about his or her credentials and experience and evaluate what you feel in his or her presence. Be careful that you are not avoiding your problems by challenging the effectiveness of the therapist.

14. I don't deserve to have all this time devoted to me. The therapist should be helping someone who "really needs it."

The fact that you are reading this book and taking this test indicates that a part of you really does want help but you are not feeling good enough about yourself to feel okay with receiving comfort and

professional help. You may have learned from your family that "you should not be selfish" or that you "don't deserve anything good." Remember that you do deserve it.

15. I feel weak if I ask for help. I should be self-sufficient and able to figure things out for myself.

If something goes wrong with your T.V., do you feel that you have to fix it yourself? Once you've checked the plug and maybe hit the side, and the T.V. doesn't get better after several days, you probably will want to call a specialist--a technician who spends his days fixing televisions. People and emotions are much more complicated than your television set. But should you be expected to know how to fix yourself when you get stuck?! No classes in school were ever dedicated to learning how to solve emotional problems. Fortunately, there are people (therapists) who specialize in deciphering emotional problems in order to help people recover from emotional difficulties.

I know that it is hard to ask for help, but it is in fact a strong willed person who can put aside all of the issues raised by this article, and set aside all of the thoughts about what other people will think, and take that scary step that leads to growth and self-understanding. Smart people turn to the experts to help tackle a problem. Its okay to ask for help.

16. The therapist will see things in me that other people can't see and will pass judgment on me.

Therapists are not mind-readers. They are good at picking up on body cues and facial expressions, but they do not know what is going on in your mind until you tell them. Good therapists, will not blame, ridicule, or pass judgement on you. If they do, then they are not doing their job properly. If you feel that a therapist is being judgmental then discuss this with him or her and if you are not satisfied with the outcome, then find another therapist.

17. I'm concerned about what I may learn or reveal about myself.

If you scored low on this question, then you possibly have a strong inner critic telling you that deep down you are no good. Your therapist will help you to understand these feelings and to feel more comfortable with yourself.

18. I might find out that I am not lovable and/or that deep down I don't like myself.

If you scored low on this question then you probably have low self-esteem. You may not realize that there is another way of being-- some people actually feel good about themselves a large part of the time and you can feel that way too. It's not easy, but it is possible.

19. I will have to give up some aspect of my life that is important to me.

There is no doubt that living with healthy relationships means at times having to compromise, but you should never ignore your deepest values and morals. Therapy will help to understand what is important to you and help you to keep that sacred.

20. I am only going to therapy because other people want me to go. I don't want to change.

You may not want to go for therapy, but you are being coerced into it by parents, the court system, or your spouse. You have to consider that there could be more effective ways of handling yourself, and therapy may even teach you a few skills which will make things easier for you for the rest of your life. You are probably

very doubtful, but as long as someone wants you to go, you may as well see what it has to offer.

Remember that it is possible that your close friends and relatives may actually NOT want you to go for therapy. They could be unconsciously feeling, "If he has a problem, then that means that I have a problem...and that is too scary." This is something to remember when you notice how other people react if you decide to tell them about your therapy.

21. My problems are not my fault. I'm not the one that needs to change.

Whenever you live in a situation with more than one person, every encounter will always have actions and reactions. If things are not going well with parents, spouse, or friends, and it is all "their fault," then consider that you may be able to learn more effective ways of dealing with their reactions.

22. I have had a bad experience with a therapist in the past.

It is especially hard to return to a therapist after having a negative experience. Willingness to try again shows that you are very determined to make a positive change in your life. Hopefully reading this book will make you more "therapy-wise" so that you can easily identify situations which are improper and unhealthy. You have a great deal of strength to recognize your need to change after having been through a bad experience.

23. Therapy may not be compatible with my spiritual beliefs.

This is a common misunderstanding about therapy. Any good therapist will want to work with the strengths you derive from your spiritual life. You do not have to give up any spiritual or religious values or ideas to work on understanding your emotional life better. There are therapists who specialize in helping people to understand the spiritual aspects of life, but they do not offer any specific religious teachings, and they do not try and take away your personal beliefs.

24. The therapist may not like me.

There is always that risk. But why start off the relationship thinking that he or she won't like you? Maybe your therapist can identify deeply with your situation and maybe he or she will even fully accept you for who you are. Good therapists are very accepting and you owe it to yourself to give it a try.

25. My problem can't be fixed. This won't help. Nothing will help.

Feeling hopeless is very common with many types of emotional problems. Hopelessness appears when you have tried everything you know and it hasn't worked. Or maybe you have reached the stage where you have given up trying to make yourself feel better. You know your personal situation better than anyone and since YOU can't fix it, how could anyone else? The fact is that there are specialists available who have seen and treated problems similar to yours and who have been able to assist people with situations similar to yours and helped them GET BETTER! There is hope! You can change and make your life better. You can do it!

End assessment results

Discussion:

Everyone has their own specific concerns about therapy. Yours may or may not have been covered in the statements above. It is important to realize the reasons why YOU are putting off getting help when a small part of you knows that something is wrong. If one or more of these categories is keeping you from seeking help, then follow the suggestions above. Also, enlist the help of loved-ones to help you understand your concerns from an outsiders perspective. Consider discussing these issues with a therapist over the phone explaining that they are keeping you from making an appointment. Therapy can help. It is very hard to make that first step. You CAN do it.

Presented by the EDReferral.com and The American Eating Disorder Association. *We match clients with eating disorders and the professionals who can help.* www.EDReferral.com
www.americaneatingdisorderassociation.com

COPYRIGHT © DR. KEVIN GROLD AND AEDA

MAY NOT BE REPRODUCED IN ANY WAY WITHOUT WRITTEN PERMISSION.