

When It's Time To See a Therapist

Cheryl Deaner, LMFT

Mike knows these are supposed to be the best days of his life. After all, he lives in San Francisco, dates occasionally, has a job, a routine at the gym and friends to hang out with on the weekend. Yet lately he's been in a rut. He can barely tolerate going downtown to work anymore. Even on the weekend, he is frequently irritable and just wants to be left alone. At night, he wakes up with an anxious and restless feeling. He visits the fridge, pops a beer and falls asleep in front of the TV - again.

Alicia is a rising star at the downtown law firm she works for. Life had gone pretty much going according to plan until two months ago, when she began dating Sue. When Alicia told Sue she was falling in love, Sue said things were getting too intense. So Alicia simply tried harder to make it work. Finally, Sue finally said she was dating someone else, and the bottom fell out of Alicia's world. Six months later she wonders - what is wrong with me? Why can't I just get over her like anyone else would? When is it going to get easier?

Enough is Enough. People start therapy when they have exhausted their options for fixing a problem themselves. Because the problem continues to grow, they realize it's time to try something different - and they become willing to try to talk to someone other than their friends and relatives. It can be difficult to expose themselves to a stranger, and many of us were brought up to believe that talking about what hurts us is whining. However, talking to a professional about one's problems is actually the opposite of complaining - it is taking a fresh look at a reality that has become too difficult and it often activates resources that have been long overlooked or forgotten.

A professional therapist is aware of the risk a client is taking by coming in for the first time. They don't expect the person sitting in front of them to automatically trust them or say something clever. What impresses me personally is that the person has shown up for themselves and that they are trying something new, and that alone is enough to get started. Unfortunately, many people stop themselves from even trying therapy because someone once told them that therapy was for "crazy" people. However, it has been my experience that people with the courage to ask for help when they need it are seldom "crazy." What can really make a person crazy is not to be able to face or experience their feelings.

Licensed therapists go through years of education, training and thousands of hours of clinical work to learn how to provide a safe and supportive atmosphere in which people can begin to successfully face life's challenges. Yet, not all therapists are a good match for all clients. A client will probably know early on if the therapist they are beginning to work with is helping, because they will begin to feel differently, perhaps lighter. I would be delighted to speak with you about whether or not therapy might be of use to you. You don't have to face life alone. After all, enough is enough!

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