

Types of Psychotherapy

In terms of personal growth and questions of identity, your university years are a formative time. During your studies, you may not only face academic challenges, but personal ones as well. Such obstacles are a part of life and can bring about positive changes if they are successfully overcome. If you are struggling, you can contact our psychological counseling center or support points at the study departments to arrange a session. Should your problems still persist after a few sessions, we recommend seeking psychotherapy. In the following we would like to inform you about some central aspects of psychotherapy.

1. What is psychotherapy?

In psychotherapy, mental illness is treated through scientifically backed approaches. In Germany, there are 4 types of psychotherapy that are recognized and financed by statutory health insurance. These are: systemic therapy, behavioral therapy, psychodynamic therapy and psychoanalytic therapy (psychoanalysis). For publicly insured individuals, the psychotherapy guidelines (*German: Psychotherapie- Richtlinien*) apply. They determine how to seek treatment and the number of sessions your health insurance will cover. If you are insured privately, the conditions may be different. In this case, we recommend consulting your contract or contacting your health insurance provider.

2. Types of Psychotherapy

Systemic Therapy

Systemic therapy focuses on the social context in which an individual's problems form. A primary attribute of systemic therapy are the needs of the client. It aims to promote growth using an individual's strengths and potential. The goal of systemic therapy is to question maladaptive relationship dynamics and structures and to develop a healthier approach to them. In this process, important members of the client's social system can be involved, meaning sessions can also take place with other members of a "social unit". Within this approach, there are also other methods to imagine others in the same room, such as the "System Board", a method by which members of a family are represented by figures placed on a board. Overall, systemic therapy is a viable option if you would like to understand your symptoms within your relationships and if you are open to creative interventions.

Behavioral Therapy

The principal idea behind (cognitive) behavioral therapy is that humans have learned to respond to inner and outside situations in a dysfunctional way. In behavioral therapy these maladaptive behaviors can be relearned, giving way to new behavioral patterns. At the beginning of behavioral therapy, the presenting problem is categorized into thoughts, feelings and behaviors as well as the interactions between them. Behavioral therapy has scientifically proven to be particularly effective for disorders with clearly defined symptoms. If you are suffering from panic attacks or phobias for instances, such as avoiding taking the train to university, the behavioral therapist would aim to address that directly. Your therapist would then help in confronting you with the avoided situations and their corresponding emotions. In exposure therapy (a form of behavioral therapy), the patient would take the train until their anxiety is significantly reduced. At the same time, more adaptive behaviors are learnt. Generally, behavioral therapy is most profitable when you are aiming to reduce

symptoms and assume an active role in doing so. If your psychological issues are hard to define, behavioral therapy will prove less effective.

Psychodynamic Therapies

The idea behind psychodynamic therapy is that conscious or unconscious conflicts underlie our symptoms. From birth to adolescence, conscious and unconscious thought, feelings and behaviors are internalized to adapt to the surroundings we are born into and become reliant on. We all acquire different ways of responding to undesirable feelings or thoughts. When these ways of responding don't function in surroundings other than our family and no longer fulfill our needs, conflicts form. This is where psychodynamic treatment comes in. By understanding an individual's development in life, the most important areas of conflict are recognized as well as the combination of wishes, impulses and the defense mechanisms which ward them off. These can be regarded as an issue one has in relation to themselves or certain parts of their identity, such as feeling, thoughts, impulses, behaviors, but also to other people. In the therapeutic relationship, these issues are brought to life and made comprehensible and tangible for the patient. Together with their therapist, the client can find solutions for conscious or unconscious conflicts.

Psychodynamic therapy

Present day conflicts are at the core of this approach, for which a clearly defined goal is set together with the therapist. In contrast to psychoanalysis, the patient and therapist sit opposite each other.

Analytical Psychotherapy (Psychoanalysis)

The goal of psychoanalysis is to create fundamental change in your personality and to achieve improvement or healing through far reaching changes in your experience and behavior. In this approach, the patient traditionally lies on a couch.

If you, as mentioned in the example above, have anxiety when taking the train to University, but also are struggling in other areas of life and these problems are rooted in your biography and interpersonal experiences, we recommend seeking psychodynamic or psychoanalytical treatment.

3. General Framework of Psychotherapy in Germany

Individual Therapy, Group Therapy

The guidelines of German health insurance ("*Krankenkassen*") allow for psychotherapy to take place in an individual or a group setting (or a combination of the two). A group setting is particularly recommended if you struggle with interpersonal skills. Groups usually consists of 8-12 participants that meet weekly for 1,5 hours over a time span of 1-2 years.

One individual psychotherapy session lasts 50 minutes, usually once a week. In systemic therapy, bigger gaps between sessions can also be arranged. Psychoanalytic sessions take place 2-3 times a week.

How long does psychotherapy take?

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Short-term therapy (*German: Kurzzeitherapie*) entails 12 or 24 sessions for all approaches. Together with your therapist you will apply for these sessions 12 at a time in two steps. Your therapist will prepare and hand in all the necessary documents to your medical insurer. If needed, you can apply for long-term therapy (*German: Langzeittherapie*) during an ongoing short-term therapy. The number of sessions covered by statutory health insurance depends on the approach. In systemic therapy, up to 48 sessions are covered, in behavioral therapy, 80 are possible, and in psychodynamic therapy 100 sessions are possible. In psychoanalytical therapy, up to 300 sessions are covered.

How do I find the right therapist?

You can begin therapy with anyone who has the necessary qualification and is licensed within statutory health insurance. They are psychologists or medical doctors with an additional qualification in psychotherapy. You can consult qualified practitioners at counseling centers, health insurers, or the Association of Statutory Health Insurance Physicians (*German: Kassenärztliche Vereinigung*). For further information on finding a therapy spot you can consult this website: [How to find a psychotherapist in Berlin • Center for Academic Advising and Psychological Counseling • Freie Universität Berlin \(fu-berlin.de\)](#).

Before you start psychotherapy

When you have finally found a psychotherapist, you will first have trial sessions (*German: Probatorische Sitzungen*) with them. It is important to pay close attention to your first impressions and gut feeling when considering if the psychotherapist is the right match for you. You should feel comfortable enough to bring up private and intimate topics with them. If this is not the case, this can be a barrier to making progress in therapy. The therapist will also in this time evaluate whether therapy is indicated. If it is, you apply for therapy with the assistance of your psychotherapist through your medical insurer and visit your General practitioner (*German: Hausarzt*) to clarify if there are any other somatic issues present.

Final remarks

A crucial factor in psychotherapy is your active participation, whether this means facing your fears in behavioral therapy in order to overcome them, or being honest about what is happening within you in psychoanalytic therapy. If you don't make an effort, you will not achieve much progress. Dry spells can occur in psychotherapy, as well as phases in which your symptoms worsen. But persevering is worth it. After a successful psychotherapy, you will not only have gotten rid of or reduced your distressing symptoms, but also have a deeper understanding of yourself and your relationships to other people. This will ultimately benefit you in your private as well as your professional life.