

When to Seek Professional Help

There may be times when sympathy and reassurance from a concerned friend aren't enough to help you handle a personal problem. A crisis may arise that's more than you can handle. Or lots of everyday problems pile up—and wear you down. If that happens, you may need a skilled professional to help you cope with your distress or solve your problems.

Therapists offer more than sympathy: They monitor their clients' conditions carefully and guide them through planned treatment. The goal of therapy is to help people develop skills to effectively deal with their problems on their own.

The following are signs that you may need the help of a therapist.

1. •Prolonged depression.
2. •Extreme shifts in mood.
3. •Panic attacks or other episodes of overwhelming fear and anxiety.
4. •Recurrent displays of anger.
5. •Abuse of alcohol or drugs.
6. •Abusing others or experiencing abuse from others.
7. •Eating disorders, including bulimia (binge eating followed by self-induced vomiting after eating).
8. •Obsessive-compulsive behavior (preoccupation with recurrent thoughts and senseless repetitive behavior that interferes with daily living).
9. •Learning that you have a debilitating or terminal disease.

Therapy is also helpful for people who have lost their jobs, experienced divorces, lost loved ones through death, or face similar crises. People who experience hallucinations, hear voices, or think about suicide, or who feel out of control and fear they'll commit a violent act, need help immediately.