

## HOMEWORK IN THERAPY

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No matter what age we are, when we hear the word 'homework' it conjures up images of a dreadful school subject like algebra or essay writing. Seldom does the concept of doing homework bring a sense of well-being or healing. In the therapy process of treating depression, anxiety, relationship issues, or maladaptive behaviors, completing homework assignments is essential to achieving positive outcomes. The practice of assigning homework in psychotherapy is quite common and is not confined to any one type/style of therapy. Why is homework assigned? There are a variety of reasons a therapist may recommend homework to you:

- It provides an opportunity to apply the skills learned during sessions to various different situations that arise in your daily life.
- Practicing skills transforms the therapy process into a 24- hour experience for individuals, couples, and families.
- Completing homework empowers you to make and see progress on your own.
- It allows and encourages you to collaborate in your treatment.
- It helps the therapist assess your commitment and motivation to make a change.
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The main purpose of assigning homework is to recognize that real change takes place outside the therapy office.

What types of homework might be assigned? The content of the homework might be anything, depending on the issue of focus in therapy. Some examples of homework are:

- Bibliotherapy and/or audio therapy- Often times reading is assigned. It may be an article, a book or you may be recommended to listen to a particular CD.
- Goal setting – Asking you to determine some of the following:
  - What is the goal of your therapy process?
  - Why is this a goal?
  - What will you accomplish by reaching this goal?
  - Can anyone help?
  - What is the time frame you have in mind around this process?
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By setting the goal(s) it allows and encourages you and your therapist to develop a strategy and to break down the process into manageable steps.

- Keeping a mood diary – This is a written record of moods that arise between therapy sessions. It can help you to identify triggers, responses, and to learn about the dynamics of your moods.
- Affirmations – Working to develop a mantra that can be useful in daily life as a positive reminder of the goal(s). Positive self-talk is helpful in seeking change.
- Guided imagery – In a directed way, imagery may influence psychological processes that enhance healing. In a receptive way, visualization may help you access a deeper part of your inner wisdom. This process empowers you to participate in your own healing.
- Thought-stopping techniques – The goal is to interrupt and eliminate recurring thought patterns that are problematic.
- Journaling – this may be daily for a few minutes, it may or may not have a topic/focus.
- This is an excellent way to put words to your feelings and to express the feelings without having a specific person or audience present.
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The rule of thumb with psychotherapy is that you get out of it what you put into it. Ultimately, you are the only one who can make the choice to acknowledge your problems and

then do the hard work of implementing lasting change. You and your therapist will work to determine appropriate and manageable homework tasks that will fit your strengths and belief systems about the problem(s) and achievable goal(s). Once there is an understanding and agreement around the homework, your compliance with follow-through and completion of the homework may be viewed as an indicator of your commitment and involvement in your healing process. Recent research indicates that clients who comply with homework recommendations have been shown to benefit more than clients who do not. If you are determined to have positive results from your therapy process and incorporate the necessary changes to improve your quality of life, you and your therapist can work together to develop homework tasks to boost the impact of your therapy between sessions and to encourage you to experience your progress on a daily basis.