



# 9 WAYS THERAPY TRANSFORMS YOUR LIFE

BEYOND ENDING YOUR ADDICTION



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**BEHAVIORAL THERAPIES ARE  
THE MOST COMMONLY USED  
FORMS OF TREATMENT, AND  
THEY'RE THE FOUNDATION  
OF ANY HIGH-QUALITY  
TREATMENT PROGRAM.**

Living with addiction affects every aspect of your life. It can cause or worsen a range of physical and mental health problems. It saps your motivation and energy and leads you to neglect hobbies and activities you used to enjoy. It causes relationship problems, financial difficulties and legal troubles.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, professional therapy is almost always needed to help an individual overcome an addiction.<sup>1</sup> That's because addiction is a complex disease that changes the structures and functions of the brain, and to break the cycle of remission and relapse, the underlying causes of the addiction must be addressed. These may include trauma, stress, family dysfunction or mental illnesses like anxiety and depression.

Addiction is treatable, and there are common elements to effective therapy, but no single treatment is appropriate for everyone.<sup>2</sup> The best approach to treatment is one that's holistic and attends to the multiple needs of the individual—not just the drug abuse.

Behavioral therapies, including individual and group counseling and family therapy, are the most commonly used forms of treatment, and they're the foundation of any high-quality treatment program. Behavioral therapies address a wide range of issues and help people with an addiction reclaim their lives across the four dimensions of recovery.



A young woman with brown hair is shown in profile, looking out a window. She is wearing a red cable-knit sweater and a black necklace. The background is a bright, out-of-focus window with white frames. A dark blue horizontal bar is positioned across the lower right portion of the image, containing the title text.

# THE FOUR DIMENSIONS OF RECOVERY



The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration cites health, home, purpose and community as the four dimensions that support a life in recovery.<sup>3</sup>

**Health** encompasses your physical and mental well-being and involves making informed, healthy choices that support good overall health.

**Home** relates to having a safe and stable place to live and includes a high level of family functioning.

**Purpose** means engaging in activities—a job, school, volunteering, creative projects—that fill your life with meaning. Purpose also includes having the financial and personal independence to participate in society.

**Community** means having relationships and social networks that offer friendship, love, hope and support.

Therapy addresses all of these dimensions of recovery through a holistic approach that addresses issues of body, mind and spirit to promote authentic happiness and better functioning across all life domains.





# TYPES OF THERAPY

## IN TREATMENT



A high-quality, holistic treatment program will offer a range of therapies to address the unique needs of an individual. Therapy takes place in both individual and group settings and with immediate family members or a significant other.

Both traditional and complementary therapies are used to treat a range of issues. Traditional therapies include motivational interviewing and cognitive-behavioral therapy, while complementary therapies may include art, music or outdoor therapy, meditation, acupuncture and yoga.

All of these therapies combined serve to improve your life far beyond helping you to end your addiction. Here are nine areas in which therapy works to improve your well-being and increase your quality of life in recovery and beyond.



A photograph of two women laughing heartily. The woman on the left is seen in profile, her head tilted back and eyes closed in laughter. She has light brown hair tied in a bun and is wearing a grey button-down shirt. The woman on the right is facing her, also laughing with her mouth wide open. She has long brown hair and is wearing a floral patterned top. The background is a bright, out-of-focus window. A dark blue semi-transparent banner is overlaid at the bottom, containing the title text.

# NINE WAYS

THERAPY IMPROVES YOUR LIFE



# 1. RESOLVING AMBIVALENCE

Not everyone who enters treatment is totally ready to give up drugs or alcohol for good. They may know that something needs to change, but overcoming an addiction can seem an insurmountable task and one they're just not ready to fully commit to.

A commonly used approach to resolving ambivalence toward recovery is motivational interviewing, a therapy that helps people identify and engage their intrinsic motivation to recover. Motivational interviewing is a client-centered therapy in which the therapist uses open-ended questions to facilitate the client's own discovery of important reasons why they want to change destructive behaviors. Once the motivation is identified and engaged, the therapist helps the client develop a plan of action for change, including setting goals and working through roadblocks that stand in the way of successful recovery.



## 2. DEVELOPING ESSENTIAL COPING SKILLS

People suffering from addiction may lack the skills needed for coping with cravings, stress, trauma and other triggers that underlie the addiction and which can quickly lead to relapse. They may be in denial about the addiction and the ways in which it has affected various aspects of their life.

They may use avoidance as a coping mechanism, or they may use passive-aggressive behaviors to deflect anger and hostility away from themselves. They may trivialize significant problems and rationalize drug use and the

negative consequences of the addiction. The addiction itself may be a coping mechanism for dealing with anger, stress, mental illness, damaged relationships and other negative aspects of life with addiction.

**Therapy helps to develop the coping skills needed to deal with negative emotions, dysfunctional relationships, chronic stress and intense cravings to help prevent relapse and improve overall well-being and happiness. These new coping skills may include:**

- ◆ Focusing on the positive to improve the way the world is perceived
- ◆ Engaging in deep breathing exercises to reduce stress and other negative emotions
- ◆ Exercising to reduce stress, improve sleep and increase feelings of good health and well-being
- ◆ Meditation to increase mindfulness, heighten self-esteem and improve the way the body responds to stressful situations

**THERAPY HELPS TO DEVELOP THE COPING SKILLS NEEDED TO DEAL WITH NEGATIVE EMOTIONS, DYSFUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS, CHRONIC STRESS AND INTENSE CRAVINGS.**





### 3. CHANGING SELF-DESTRUCTIVE PATTERNS

Self-destructive patterns of thinking and behaving are at the heart of an addiction, and the central idea behind cognitive-behavioral therapy is identifying these harmful patterns of thought and behavior and replacing them with healthier ways of thinking and behaving.

Without realizing it, we engage in internal conversations constantly throughout the day. When these conversations take on a negative tone, psychologists call it "stinking thinking." The most common patterns of stinking thinking include:

**All or nothing thinking**, in which everything is black or white. A situation that isn't perfect is considered a disaster, and all is lost. This is what leads many people to a full relapse after using just once in recovery.

**Overgeneralization**, in which a single negative event becomes an endless pattern of defeat. People who overgeneralize use words like always and never, such as "I always get the short end of the stick," or "Things never go my way."

**Discounting the positive**, in which you discount positive things because they "don't count." If you do something well, you say, "Well, anyone could have done that," or "I could've done better." This leads to feelings of inadequacy and joylessness.

**Jumping to conclusions**, in which you interpret things in a negative light when there's no evidence to back it up, such as by making assumptions about what other people are thinking or assuming that things will turn out badly even though there's no real reason to believe so.

**Labeling**, in which you attach a negative label to yourself, such as when you label yourself a "failure" or "loser" when you don't get a job you applied for.

These ways of thinking have little or no basis, and they lead to a running negative commentary that affects your mood, behavior and outlook on life. Therapy helps you become aware of these negative thought patterns and replace them with thoughts that are based in reality.



## 4. REDUCING STRESS

Stress is a major trigger for relapse. Even mild life stressors during recovery can stimulate the HPA axis—a complex relationship between the hypothalamus, pituitary glands and adrenal glands—to elicit powerful memories of the effects of the substance of abuse and trigger intense cravings, according to an article published in the journal *European Neuropsychopharmacology*.<sup>4</sup>

Learning how to reduce and cope with stress is a major focus of a range of treatment therapies, including cognitive-behavioral therapy and art, music and outdoor therapy. Biofeedback is another therapy used in treatment settings to help you learn to control the way your body responds to stress. During biofeedback therapy, you're hooked up to a monitor that displays your heart rate, body temperature, blood pressure and other body functions that are part of

the stress response. As you engage in various exercises, such as deep breathing or visualization, you can watch on the monitor as your body functions move from an elevated state back to normal. This teaches you to reduce your stress response on demand.

Lowering your stress affects all areas of your life, including your physical and mental health, your sense of happiness and well-being and your continued recovery.

**LEARNING HOW TO REDUCE AND COPE WITH STRESS IS A MAJOR FOCUS OF A RANGE OF TREATMENT THERAPIES.**

## 5. IMPROVING FAMILY FUNCTIONING

The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence stresses that addiction is a family disease that indelibly affects the functioning of the family system.<sup>5</sup> As normal routines are interrupted by upsetting and even frightening experiences, family members cope by manipulating or denying reality and developing unhealthy coping skills. This leads to dysfunction in the household, which can spin out of control as big problems get minimized and little stressors push the family to the breaking point.

Like stress, family dysfunction is a major trigger for relapse. Family therapy is a mainstay in high-quality treatment programs and works to address a variety of issues that affect the family system. Family therapy helps families learn to communicate effectively, cope with family stress in healthy ways, rebuild trust and repair damaged relationships for a more functional and happy household, which can go a long way toward preventing relapse and improving the overall happiness of family members.





## 6. FINDING PURPOSE AND MEANING

Finding purpose and meaning in life is an important factor for long-term recovery. When you're addicted to drugs or alcohol, getting high is the main focus in life, and meaning and purpose elude you. But once you're in recovery, the void left by the addiction needs to be filled with activities that promote long-term sobriety and erode indifference to and detachment from life.

Finding meaning means making peace with the past, and finding purpose means giving value to the present and connecting present activities to a desired future. One of the most common fears that keeps people from seeking help is the fear of who they will be without the addiction. What meaning will life have when the drug-seeking and using behaviors end? Who will you be without drugs or alcohol?





The human mind and spirit crave creativity, fulfillment and accomplishment, and the desire and search for these things helps us become our true selves. Without meaning and purpose, it's extremely difficult to resolve conflict, plan for the future and make sense of suffering.

Therapy helps you identify your inherent strengths and values, your overarching beliefs and your hopes for the future. Using your strengths every day and adhering to your values are the seeds from which purpose and meaning grow. In therapy, you'll learn a variety of ways to get back in touch with yourself to regain a sense of satisfaction in your life and enjoy personal growth in the face of adversity. Finding purpose in life and reinventing yourself around it leads to authentic happiness and an important sense of fulfillment.

**FINDING MEANING MEANS MAKING PEACE  
WITH THE PAST, AND FINDING PURPOSE  
MEANS GIVING VALUE TO THE PRESENT.**



## 7. SETTING GOALS

Setting goals in recovery is crucial for success. Goals give you something to aim for, and they promote accountability for achieving them. Striving to reach your goals should be an enjoyable journey, and doing so helps you maintain momentum and motivation in recovery. Achieving your goals increases your confidence, improves your self-esteem and helps you establish a new sense of purpose.

Goal-setting takes place primarily in therapy, where it's a natural extension of delving into the range of issues that underlie substance abuse. Goal-setting in therapy isn't just about your recovery. It's about helping you find joy and meaning in life, rebuild relationships, stabilize your finances and regain what was lost to you during your addiction.

Goals set in therapy are clear, relevant, measurable, actionable and attainable. As you work toward them, you'll celebrate your successes and dissect your setbacks with your therapist or group therapy members. In the process, you'll find renewed motivation and resolve to achieve your goals.



## 8. IMPROVING SELF-AWARENESS AND SELF-ESTEEM

A high level of self-awareness is crucial for successful recovery. Self-awareness means having a clear understanding of your own personality, including knowing your strengths and weaknesses and being aware of your thoughts, attitudes, beliefs and emotions and where they're taking you. Self-awareness helps you relate better to other people, interpret events more accurately and make better life choices.

Therapy is central to developing a higher level of self-awareness, which occurs through evaluating your thoughts, ideas, beliefs and attitudes and recognizing those that are destructive or not based in reality. Therapy helps you come to terms with your expectations for the future, accept responsibility for your actions and make adjustments to your behaviors before they become problematic. You'll learn to let go of feelings of victimization and develop emotional competence and a sense of self-reliance.

Along with improving your self-awareness, therapy will also help to increase your self-esteem. Self-esteem is a measure of how confident you are in your abilities, how valuable you feel you are and how much respect you have for yourself. Low self-esteem is associated with social isolation, self-doubt, self-criticism and shame. Therapy will help you become more confident and assertive, and it'll help you evaluate your thoughts and feelings toward yourself and re-think your attitudes in a way that's based in reality. You'll set realistic, achievable goals, develop compassion for yourself and learn to treat yourself with kindness.

Increased self-esteem and a higher level of self-awareness will positively affect all areas of your life, from improving your relationships and helping you find meaning and purpose in life to setting and achieving personal, financial and educational goals.

## 9. CAPITALIZING ON SETBACKS

Setbacks in recovery are inescapable, but they're an opportunity to identify and develop missing skills to help prevent the same type of setback in the future. The relapse rates for addiction are similar to those of other chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease: between 40 and 60 percent. How you approach a setback that leads or nearly leads to a relapse of the addiction can make an enormous difference in ongoing recovery.<sup>6</sup>

**SETBACKS IN RECOVERY ARE INESCAPABLE, BUT THEY'RE AN OPPORTUNITY TO IDENTIFY AND DEVELOP MISSING SKILLS TO HELP PREVENT THE SAME TYPE OF SETBACK IN THE FUTURE.**







An article published in the *Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine* stresses that people who view setbacks as a confirmation of their negative self-view are more likely to feel overwhelmed by recovery and may give up on it altogether.<sup>7</sup> Conversely, those who consider their past successes, approach the future with hope and acknowledge the strengths they bring to recovery are more likely to get back on track quickly, stronger and more motivated than ever.

Therapy helps you evaluate setbacks and look at them realistically, identify the missing skills that led to the setback and develop those skills to prevent a similar event in the future. While these skills focus on addiction recovery, they translate seamlessly to other areas of your life where setbacks can occur, such as your career, finances, relationships and personal goals.



A photograph of two women sitting and talking in what appears to be a therapy or counseling session. The woman on the left has long, wavy blonde hair and is wearing a green top with a yellow scarf. The woman on the right has long, dark hair and is wearing a blue and white plaid shirt. They are both looking at each other and smiling. A semi-transparent dark blue banner with the text 'THERAPY WORKS' is overlaid on the bottom right of the image. There is also a thin vertical blue line on the left side of the banner.

# THERAPY WORKS





If you're struggling with substance abuse or addiction, you may feel like your life is out of control. Through a holistic regimen of traditional and complementary therapies, treatment can help you regain control of your life and dramatically improve your sense of happiness, fulfillment and well-being across all areas of your life.

Making the decision to enter treatment or engage in individual therapy is often the hardest part of recovery, especially for those who fear the unknown. But once you're in therapy and working through a variety of issues, change occurs naturally as you develop a higher level of self-awareness and develop essential skills for optimum functioning. Putting in the time and effort will reap tangible rewards as things begin to make sense and pieces of your life begin to fall together in harmony.



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