

How to Be a Good Psychotherapy Patient

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There is a multitude of books and articles devoted to teaching people how to become effective psychotherapists. However, there is a dearth of literature on how to become good psychotherapy patients. The purpose of this article is to offer you some practical guidelines, suggestions, and techniques that can help you to make the most out of your psychotherapy experience.

Conducting Yourself in the Psychotherapy Session: Twenty Easy "Dos" and "Don'ts"

By far, the most challenging (and yet potentially the most entertaining) aspect of being a psychotherapy patient concerns your relationship with your psychotherapist. It is crucial, from the opening moments of the first phone call, that you get your therapist to like you, to become dependent on you, and to become convinced that only he has the power to cure you. While your therapist is busy delving deep into the inner recesses of your psyche and of your wallet, just follow these 20 easy-to-learn techniques and in virtually no time at all, you'll have him or her eating out of the palm of your hand.

1. *Do* attribute all of your successes to your therapist, and all failures to yourself.
2. *Do* gaze reverently into your therapist's eyes as he pontificates about the nature of the human condition.
3. *Do* occasionally confuse something that your therapist said with something that Freud said.
4. *Do* complain about insensitive and judgmental parents, teachers, and, especially, prior psychotherapists.
5. *Do* apologize profusely to your therapist for not showing faster improvement.
6. *Do* casually inform your therapist that you're due to come into large sums of money in the near future.

7. *Do*, at random moments, say to your therapist, “You *really care* about me, don’t you?”
8. *Do* tell your therapist that you passed up a week in Tahiti, just so you wouldn’t have to miss your therapy session.
9. *Do* tell your therapist that when you win the Nobel Prize, you will announce to the world that you owe it all to him.
10. *Do* tell your therapist that you’re totally committed to sticking with therapy—even if it takes 50 years.
11. *Don’t* point out that your therapist constantly contradicts himself.
12. *Don’t* embarrass your therapist by waking him up when he dozes off in the middle of your session.
13. *Don’t* tell your therapist that his mind is obviously on everything else in the world, other than what you’re saying.
14. *Don’t* tell your therapist that his interpretations of your dreams are about as helpful as last year’s horoscope.
15. *Don’t* say to your therapist, “So, tell me something I *didn’t* know.”
16. *Don’t* say to your therapist, “For *this*, I’m paying you money?”
17. *Don’t* say to your therapist, “At least a plumber guarantees *his* work!”
18. *Don’t* say to your therapist, “What’s the matter? Not smart enough to get into law school?”
19. *Don’t* say to your therapist, “Is doing therapy the *only* way you can get your intimacy needs met?”
20. *Don’t ever* say to your therapist, “But what should I *do* about my problem?”

**Secondary Gains and Fringe Benefits:
Getting the Maximum Mileage from Being a Psychotherapy Patient**

Irrespective of what actually happens (or doesn’t happen) in the course of psychotherapy, the very fact of being a psychotherapy patient can proffer you powerful leverage in all of your interpersonal relationships. Here are four easy pointers.

1. Hide Behind Diagnostic Labels

You can deftly absolve yourself of all personal responsibility for your behavior by cloaking yourself in psychological diagnoses. For example, if someone is, in any way, critical of something you've done, just retort: "Hey, what do you *expect* from me? I'm a passive-dependent personality type with low-grade, uncrystallized borderline personality features!"

2. Use Therapy Against Your Mate

Having an argument with your mate? No problem! Regardless of the content of the argument, you're sure to render your opponent powerless by smugly delivering the line: "Well, at least *I'm* in therapy. What are *you* doing to help this relationship?"

3. Get Back at Your Parents

When your parents ask you why you're in therapy, you have your choice of two very powerful strategies, either of which is guaranteed to leave them speechless and riddled with feelings of guilt and self-doubt.

a. The Passive-Aggressive Maneuver

To execute this maneuver, simply follow this prescribed sequence: (1) look confused and disappointed, (2) emit a mildly exasperated, "some-people-never-learn" sigh, (3) walk away, slowly shaking your head and muttering under your breath.

b. The Direct Frontal Attack

For this tactic, just look them both straight in the eyes and shout with great vehemence, "I'll give you two guesses!"

4. Impress Your Friends

When in the company of your friends, make a habit of using psychological terms that you've picked up in your psychotherapy sessions and from watching television shows. Show them how "deep" you are by talking glibly about faulty introjects, repressed libido, inflated personas, irrational belief systems, incomplete gestalts, maladaptive learning patterns, ontological insecurity, dysfunctional family systems, your critical "inner-parent," your battered "inner-child," and your obnoxious "inner-aunt." Occasionally, squint your eyes, tilt your head, and ask people, "Don't you think you're projecting?"

A Final Word

Remember that *it's not easy* to become a good psychotherapy patient. Millions of people never learn. But, *don't get discouraged!* Trust that *you can do it!* Make these strategies a part of your life, and you're well on the way to complete recovery and true mental health.