

How to Break Up With Your Therapist

It's normal for therapeutic relationships to come to an end. You may decide you've gained tools to tackle the next season without therapeutic support, you may have discovered that you and your therapist are not a good fit or you may be needing someone equipped differently to provide you a different level of support. Whatever the reason, if you think it's time to discontinue your relationship with your therapist, make sure you do it in a way that is going to provide you closure and respect the relationship you've established together.

Determine What You Want

So many of us spend our lives concerned about what *other people* want, without actually asking what *we* want. When deciding to make a change to your therapeutic support, it's important to evaluate what it is *you actually* want.

- *Do you want to stop seeing your therapist completely?*
- *Do you think you've done everything you can do with your current therapist?*
- *Do you think you need to switch to a therapist that specializes in a specific modality to do a deeper level of work?*
- *Do you want to scale back your appointments and meet less frequently?*
- *Are you sure of where your therapy is going? If not, could clarifying help the relationship and make you want to stay? Be honest with your therapist about your confusion.*
- *Are you ejecting too early? Therapy is supposed to be a little uncomfortable. You are supposed to be pushed and asked questions most people in your life won't or don't know to ask. Growth typically does not happen when we are comfortable.*
- *Do you just feel like it's time to change?*

We want to remind you that therapy is completely voluntary, so if you decide that you don't want to continue your relationship with your therapist, you don't need a reason to stop.

Communicate With Your Therapist

If you've decided that you are ready to leave your current therapist, and you've been seeing them for a significant amount of time, we invite you to have a face-to-face conversation about your feelings with them.

It's tempting to exit a therapeutic relationship by simply not scheduling another appointment or missing an appointment and not rescheduling. However, doing this doesn't provide an opportunity for your therapist to enter into this transition alongside you and provide closure or set you up for success in your next therapeutic relationship. It is also not respectful of the trusting relationship you've entered into. Perhaps the most important reason to initiate an in-person conversation is the benefit of you practicing having hard conversations. Especially if you have a tendency to be conflict-avoidant or struggle with "disappointing people," having a clear conversation with your therapist is a great skill to practice.

Here are a few phrases to use when going into this conversation:

"I believe I have gained the tools and made a lot of progress with you, but I think it's time for me to move on."

"I'm not sure if I'm getting what I need from therapy."

"I really appreciate the work we've done together. I'm realizing I need something different in this season, but I appreciate your willingness to help me."

"I'm interested in working with a therapist who specializes in ____."

"I have different goals right now and I'd like to end our relationship."

Leave Well

These statements might open up the conversation for your therapist to offer suggestions for other resources that might be helpful, or to course correct in your current relationship and treatment plan. Depending on your goals, mental state, and progress, your therapist might want to discuss the reason for a change a little more in-depth and provide their professional opinion about the best next steps for you.

It's important to remember that a healthy and safe therapist will take this news with your best interest in mind. They will be able to come alongside you and help you transition well with closure in the current relationship. It is not the first time that someone has discontinued work with them, and it won't be the last.

If it's time to work with someone else, we've put together a few resources to help you find your next therapist and questions to ask in your first meeting to determine if you'll be a fit.

Research has shown that therapist/client connection directly impacts a patient's progress and success.

Your mental and emotional health matter, and we encourage you to approach your relationship with your therapist with the same intentionality, purpose, respect, and clarity, that you would any other important relationship in your life. It is your responsibility to make the change you know is going to be right for you in the long-run.