

GRADUATION DAY! HOW TO TELL WHEN IT'S TIME TO END THERAPY

The two most recent Medical Minutes have focused on when you should change therapists and when you know therapy is working for you. Since the year has come to a close, it seems fitting to discuss how to determine if you have accomplished your therapy goals and it's time to say goodbye to your therapist.

When therapy comes to an end it is called termination and the last phase of treatment is called the termination phase. It is an important part of the therapy process. The function of termination is to give the therapeutic process a satisfying conclusion. Does that always happen? No, it doesn't, but in an ideal world, all therapy would provide a good ending.

Why is the termination phase so important? Termination is a time to evaluate the work you've accomplished, celebrate the progress, talk about which goals weren't reached and explore any disappointments with the process. It's reminiscing, an exit interview and saying goodbye wrapped up in one. Sometimes this overview brings everything together. Insights like "I'm glad you didn't tell me what to do," or, "Now I understand why I felt frustrated sometimes" are common to a good termination. Sometimes this discussion opens a new issue which may lead to more therapy. But it is worth exploring.

Having said this, the termination discussion is often avoided. People sometimes do not show for a final session as a way to not say goodbye. Why? Endings are difficult. The client or therapist may like the relationship and not want it to end. The client may fear they will be told they need to stay in therapy longer. They may think saying goodbye is emotional and they are uncomfortable. However, people who have a good termination usually feel a sense of satisfaction or at least a clarity about themselves.

Here are four ways to know you are ready to finish therapy:

1. You have achieved the goals you established at the beginning of therapy. You may have uncovered other issues during the course of therapy and addressed and resolved them as well.
2. As strange as this sounds you will have internalized the therapist. In other words, you find yourself thinking about what they have said outside of the session and are applying the best ideas they shared. You find they have become a mentor for your everyday life and you can utilize your expertise to continue to make positive strides on your own.
3. You find you are feeling calm even a little

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bored when you consider what you will talk about in therapy. In other words, there is not upsetting or new issues that you need to tackle.

4. Not all therapy works even if the therapist is a good match. Sometimes you are just not ready to make the next step. Sometimes circumstances interfere (a move is a good example). In this case you and the therapist discuss what has taken place in therapy and why it is necessary to stop. In the best situation there is an open door policy for you to return when the situation is more appropriate.

The positive ending of therapy is a very satisfying life experience. You feel good about what you have accomplished and the therapist shares those feelings. The changes you have made will continue and your life will be more satisfying. Everyone in your life wins as well.

The therapists at Affiliated Clinical services, Inc. value a meaningful counseling experience tailored to your needs and will help you successfully navigate the beginning, middle and termination phases of therapy.