Therapy's working, but I don't always feel like going

Dear Alice,

I've been going to therapy for some time now for general anxiety and obsessive tendencies, since about October last year. My question is do people always want to go to therapy or is normal sometimes to feel like "ugh, I don't feel like going/care to go tomorrow" like if it's more a burden or a... "Nuisance" than anything else. I can confidently say it's been helping me! But why do I feel like that sometimes? Is it normal? Shouldn't I know that I need it. That it's good for me?

Answer

Dear Reader,

It's wonderful to hear that therapy is helping with your general anxiety and obsessive tendencies. As you've experienced, sometimes going to therapy may feel like a chore, and this isn't out of the ordinary. After all, many seek therapy to address tough topics in life? some weeks you may feel ready to tackle them head-on and other times you might simply want to take a break. To make going to therapy feel less like a burden sometimes, it could be worth asking yourself the following questions to see if there are any changes you might like to make:

- **How do you feel about the frequency of your therapy sessions?** When you have nothing new to discuss with your mental health professional or if all of your therapeutic goals have been accomplished, going to therapy may seem like a nuisance.

- **Was there a specific time your feelings about therapy changed?** Not every session makes you feel good; in fact, some sessions may be challenging and difficult. Those sessions are a common part of the therapeutic process. Thinking back on your time with your current mental health professional, has there been a distinct shift in how you felt about your therapy sessions?

- **Do you feel comfortable with your mental health professional?** The bond you have (or don't have) with your mental health professional may have a huge impact on the effectiveness of your work in therapy. Maybe you faced some difficulties establishing an
initial connection with them. Or perhaps something happened to impact the trust you have been building together. Research has shown that the more aligned clients feel with their mental health professional, the better they are able to work together.

- **If you're on medication, are you experiencing uncomfortable side effects and do you feel it's helpful?** If you're taking medication prescribed by your mental health professional or health care provider that doesn't feel beneficial, this may also be a reason you don't feel inclined to attend appointments.

- **Do you feel uncomfortable during your appointments?** Depending on the topic at hand or the type of therapy, actively dealing with anxiety or obsessive tendencies may stir up a number of unpleasant emotions or physical responses. Many times, this is the hard work needed initially to find relief down the road.

- **Are there other factors that make getting to therapy feel more challenging?** Sometimes factors like commute time, appointment time, or even the amount you pay per visit may become deterrents to attending therapy regularly. Compromises you may have felt okay with initially may wear on you over time, making appointments feel more burdensome than helpful.

If any of these questions seem to ring true, consider these suggestions to hopefully ease some of the concern you feel:

- **Discuss the duration of your therapy with your mental health professional.** Consider discussing with your mental health professional how to schedule your sessions to best fit your needs, such as weekly, monthly, or only when you're in distress. Depending on the reason for therapy and your therapeutic goals, attending therapy may be long-term or short-term in order to handle different concerns. Remember, there's no set beginning or end with therapy (check out How long should I be in therapy? to learn more about this!).

- **Give feedback to your mental health professional.** If you're feeling like the style of therapy isn't working for you, something happened in a therapy session that you didn't like, or you just aren't connecting with your mental health professional, begin addressing these in your sessions. Talking about how something isn't working for you or giving constructive feedback may sometimes feel daunting, but often times it's an effective way to help improve the relationship. And, most mental health professionals welcome your input (after all, they're working to help you). Talking about your experience of coming to therapy in a therapy session may also potentially increase your self-understanding.

- **Talk about side effects and medication options.** If you think your feelings of aversion may be due to discontent with prescribed medication, consider making a list of side effects or ask about alternative treatments or medications. It's good to note that some undesirable side effects may go away over time, but keeping your mental health
professional in the loop about what you’re experiencing and potentially exploring your medication options can hopefully lead to the most effective treatment.

- **Change it up!** If you think your appointment time isn’t a good fit, try thinking about a less stressful time or day of the week to attend. If your commute is a bummer, you may want to consider other forms of transportation to get you to and fro. And if your fee for therapy has been a deterrent, consider asking about your payment options. Some mental health professionals may be able to offer sliding scale or reduced fees.

- **Shop around.** If you think you haven’t found the right fit with your mental health professional, try exploring your options. Just like medications, your first try with a particular mental health professional may not be the best match. A lot of mental health professionals encourage new clients to explore their style for a few sessions before committing to long-term work together. If you decide to switch mental health professionals, you may ask your current mental health professional for a referral or check out How to find a therapist [4].

Hopefully a few of these suggestions might help you find a balance that helps strengthen your therapeutic relationship. Rest assured, dear Reader, your comfort and enthusiasm with therapy may continue to ebb and flow? this is a part of the therapeutic process.

Alice!
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