

Is Therapy Working?

Relief and healing are both valuable, but they serve different purposes.

Relief: helps you feel better right now and can make difficult moments more manageable

Examples:

- Feeling calmer after talking
- Receiving reassurance
- Feeling less alone
- Learning a coping skill

Healing: creates lasting change in how you relate to yourself, others, and your experiences.

Examples:

- Responding differently to stress
- Setting healthier boundaries
- Feeling emotions instead of avoiding them
- Becoming less reactive
- Recovering more quickly after setbacks

Sometimes therapy feels good because you're receiving support, comfort, or reassurance. Those experiences are an important part of therapy. However, if therapy only provides temporary relief without helping you develop new ways of thinking, feeling, or responding, long-term change may be limited.

For example:

- Talking about the same problems without trying something new
- Receiving reassurance over and over
- Venting without exploring what comes next
- Leaving every session calmer but returning to the same patterns each week

Some sessions feel harder because you're doing difficult work.

You may:

- Talk about painful experiences
- Feel emotions you've spent years avoiding
- Notice patterns that are uncomfortable to acknowledge
- Sit with uncertainty instead of rushing to fix it
- Begin reorganizing old memories and beliefs

Bringing painful experiences into awareness may temporarily increase discomfort before your brain and nervous system have had time to integrate them. Feeling more emotional after a session does not necessarily mean therapy is making things worse.

Reflection Questions

- What have I learned about myself?
- Am I becoming more aware of my patterns?
- Did I move toward something difficult instead of avoiding it?
- Did I practice doing something differently?
- Am I becoming more flexible, even if today felt hard?
- Looking back over the past few months, how have I changed?

*Healing is usually easier to see across months than across individual sessions.

Is therapy helping me become the person I want to be?