

## **Surviving your First Therapy Session or a Difficult Therapy Session**

- Never schedule anything for at least an hour after any session. If that's not long enough clear your schedule for as long as you need.
- If you know ahead of time that it will be difficult, give yourself as much time as you think you'll need to cope afterwards.
- Plan a treat for yourself afterwards; reward yourself.
- Breathe.
- Remember that you are in control of how much you tell or don't tell at any given time.
- It's ok to start to talk about something and then stop.
- You don't have to go into your first session (or any session) and tell everything that happened
- Only tell what you are comfortable with.
- Be gentle with yourself.
- Bring a husband or friend along to the initial appointment.
- Ask a trusted friend or spouse to make the needed phone calls to set up the appointments.
- Have your therapist remind you that you are safe now and in a safe place.
- Have a list of issues that you want to deal with/ goals that you have made so that if you are too anxious to get your words out your therapist has somewhere to start to guide the session.
- Write a note to your therapist if things aren't going the way your wish they would; have open communication.
- Take a comfort object with you: a stuffed animal, a stone, beads, etc.
- Be in familiar surroundings, seeing things that belong in your therapist's office that make you feel comfortable.
- Have a safe place in your mind you can go if your feelings become too much.

- Set aside quiet time after your session for yourself to let yourself have the feelings you need to have instead of pushing them away.
- Speak with the therapist on the phone before the first session: don't just set up an appointment with the secretary.
- For the initial appointment ask your therapist what to expect (generally it is get to know you stuff, nothing too deep).
- Interview your therapist on the first session to make sure they are right for you. Ask them questions about what they would do in certain situations and ask them about their experience and credentials. Also ask about their confidentiality agreement.
- Write things down that you want to tell your therapist. If you get nervous you can read it or allow your therapist to read it. This is a big help.
- If you can't say, but something is important, ask for a pen and paper to write it down. Some therapists keep notepads in the office specifically for this reason.
- Use agreed upon hand signals to convey things to your therapist that you cannot say.
- You could say I have something I would like to talk about but I'm finding it difficult. This will help your therapist to know you have something planned, but will also give you time to talk about why it's difficult.
- If you aren't comfortable answer something tell your therapist. Be open and honest.
- Ask for winding down time at the end of the session. Don't just leave being upset.
- Wear something that is comforting or grounding so that you feel safe.
- Take something to drink.
- If you aren't comfortable where the pillows and stuff are on the couch/chair just move them. Your therapist won't mind.
- If you can, e-mail your therapist ahead of time and tell her what you want to work on and ask if she will bring it up at the next session.

- If you don't know what to focus on in therapist, tell your therapist that you need guidance.