

The therapy edit



From painting to spending time with horses, journalist and counsellor **Sally Brown** reveals the surprising ways to get therapy today

Illustrations VICTORIA SCOTT

Therapy is changing. It's no longer simply about lying on a couch and dissecting your childhood. These days, it can entail anything from splashing paint on a canvas, spending time with a horse, or drawing a mind map of your dreams for the future. It can take place outdoors or from the comfort of your own home via Skype. And it might last only six sessions, rather than years.

Many of today's new therapies are offshoots of more established techniques, says Amanda Hawkins, chair of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP, itsgoodtotalk.org.uk). 'People will always benefit from having time to talk, explore and make sense of their experiences in a safe, confidential environment,' she says. 'But as we have become more in tune with psychology as a society, people are looking for therapy that suits them as an individual, rather than one-size-fits-all.'

This means it's OK to shop around, says Sam Challis, information officer for mental health charity Mind (mind.org.uk). 'Most therapists are happy for new clients to come for one session first to see if it suits them,' he says. 'Having a connection with someone

is so important. You need to feel comfortable with your therapist.'

But what if you're not sure where to start? We asked the experts for the most effective techniques – old and new – for tackling the biggest challenges to our mental wellbeing. Some suit a range of problems. If so, we've allotted them to the issue they have gained a reputation for treating, but have also indicated where else they can help.

Anxiety

WHAT IS IT? Anxiety can vary from excessive stress to panic attacks, and one in 10 of us is likely to suffer a disabling anxiety disorder at some point in our lives. Symptoms can include aching muscles, sleeplessness, headaches, exhaustion, lack of appetite and agitation. After divorce and bereavement, work is the biggest cause of stress and anxiety, according to the Mental Health Foundation.

THE CORE THERAPY Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) Recommended by NICE (The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, who decide which treatments are available on the NHS) as a first-line treatment for anxiety, CBT is about how the way you think (that's the cognitive bit) affects the way you feel and behave

(the behavioural bit). So you'll look at your unhelpful thought patterns, then do exercises to replace them with more positive ones. It's a structured form of therapy that includes homework, such as filling in a 'thought record'. Between six to eight sessions are available on the NHS, although there may be a waiting list. Alternatively, find a private therapist through the British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies (babcp.com).

THE NEW THERAPIES Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) Based on the theory that suppressing anxious thoughts only makes them stronger, ACT (pronounced 'act') involves practical strategies – such as 'defusing' stressful thoughts by singing them to the tune of *Happy Birthday* – and big-picture stuff, such as identifying values to guide your life. It's usually limited to 10 sessions or less and is being used by a growing number of NHS mental health services, but you can find a private therapist at counselling-directory.org.uk.

Ecotherapy Involves working on a conservation or gardening project while psychological support is provided by team members who have experienced similar issues and, in some projects, qualified counsellors. Research by the University of Essex found spending time in nature can reduce stress and anxiety. ➔



The Ecominds programme initiated by Mind aims to make ecotherapy available nationwide. Sessions are free, and courses typically run for 12 weeks. Visit mind.org.uk/ecotherapyworks.

ALSO RECOMMENDED FOR ANXIETY
Psychodynamic counselling, person-centred counselling and art therapy (see below).

'IT WORKED FOR ME!'

Debbie Edwards, 41, from London, tried ecotherapy for anxiety.



'I took redundancy after getting very stressed at work and, while at first I was relieved, the reality of being unemployed soon sunk in and I

felt low and anxious. I had a course of CBT, but it didn't click with me. Then a doctor suggested ecotherapy at the PoLLeN Ecominds project at London's Bromley-by-Bow Health Centre. I went once a week, and talking to others in similar situations made me feel I was being listened to for the first time in years. Gradually my self-confidence grew and my anxiety became more manageable. Not only has it improved my mental health, I've also learnt new skills. I've done my level two diploma in practical horticulture, and now I'd like to work in garden design!'

Relationship Issues

WHAT ARE THEY? Research shows the birth of the first child and the youngest leaving home are two of the most common crisis points in a long-term relationship. There has also been an increasing demand for sex therapy. Most relationship counsellors also deal with wider family problems, such as conflict with teenagers, stress of caring for elderly parents or issues in blended families (those with stepchildren).

THE CORE THERAPY Couples' counselling Usually involves six to eight sessions, although some choose to carry on longer term. The first sessions are about removing guilt and blame

– problems are rarely one partner's fault. In the short term, the focus is on managing the current situation but longer-term work can help couples understand how their deeply held and unconscious beliefs impact on the relationship. Available on the NHS in some areas, while subsidised sessions are offered by the charity Relate in some places (relate.org.uk). For a private therapist, visit ukcouplescounselling.com.
THE NEW THERAPY Imago couples' counselling New to the UK, but big in the US and Europe. Couples are taught a specific style of talking to each other called the Imago Dialogue. The focus is on 'detoxing' the way you communicate, so both partners feel more comfortable about being honest. Conflict is seen as a source of growth rather than a problem. The technique also works between parents and children. Unlike traditional therapy, sessions are longer – 90 minutes to two hours. The number required varies depending on the problem. Not currently available on the NHS, but you can find a private therapist at gettingtheloveyouwant.co.uk.

Depression

WHAT IS IT? One in four women will need treatment for depression at some point in their lives. Perfectionists and those prone to self-criticism are most at risk from depression, while some types, such as bipolar, have a strong genetic link. Depression makes ordinary life seem like hard work or simply pointless, as things you normally feel interested in or motivated by leave you flat. Other symptoms include changes to appetite, sleep disturbances and avoiding social situations.

THE CORE THERAPY Psychodynamic therapy Recommended by NICE as a first-line treatment for mild to moderate depression. It unpicks how your past is affecting your present, so you should expect to spend some time exploring your childhood. The dynamic between you and the therapist is also used to gain insight into patterns in your close relationships.



Usually a long-term commitment (minimum of six months), it's available on the NHS in some areas. Alternatively, you can find a private therapist at itsgoodtotalk.org.uk.
THE NEW THERAPIES Dynamic interpersonal therapy (DIT) A new, express version of psychodynamic therapy, developed specifically for treating depression. DIT operates from the viewpoint that relationship problems cause depression so the aim is to help you improve how you relate to others. Available on the NHS, depending on the availability of therapists in your area. Or for private practice, see psychoanalytic-council.org.
Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) A 'third wave' therapy that blends CBT-style techniques with mindfulness. There's an emphasis on noticing unhelpful thinking patterns, being more in touch with the detail of life around you and cultivating a compassionate outlook. Recommended by NICE for people who have recurrent

depression, research shows that MBCT reduces the risk of it recurring by 50%. It's often run as a group course of 10 sessions and is available in some areas on the NHS. To find a private course or therapist, visit bemindful.co.uk or mbct.co.uk.

Art therapy Takes place in a studio rather than a counselling room. Art therapists have a degree in art and postgraduate counselling qualifications. It's a non-directive therapy, so it's up to you to choose from a selection of art materials – such as watercolours, pastels or clay – and create what you want. Your therapist won't critique your work, but will talk through the thoughts, feelings and emotions it creates. Sessions last 60 to 90 minutes and are offered in blocks of 12 to 15 or ongoing over the course of a year. Some local authorities offer art therapy via local community care services (ask your GP). Alternatively, find a private therapist at baat.org.

Also recommended for depression
CBT, ACT (page 26) and **EAP** (right)

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

WHAT IS IT? According to research by NICE, around 30% of people who experience or witness a traumatic event, such as an accident or assault, will go on to develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It's now also thought you can develop PTSD after childbirth. Symptoms include difficulty sleeping, problems concentrating, flashbacks, feelings of anger, guilt or depression and emotional detachment.

THE CORE THERAPY CBT (page 26).
THE NEW THERAPIES Eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR) Approved by NICE for treatment of PTSD. While holding an image in your mind that represents your traumatic event, you perform a series of rapid, left-to-right movements with your eyes. It's not entirely clear how it works, but it's believed it helps the malfunctioning part of the brain (the hippocampus) process memories properly, in a similar way to REM sleep. The effects of one-off traumas can usually be shifted in three to five sessions; ongoing trauma or abuse may take longer. There are around 20 studies showing its effectiveness and it's available on the NHS in many areas. For private therapists, visit emdrassociation.org.uk.

Equine-assisted psychotherapy (EAP) Well established in the US, and growing in popularity in the UK. By engaging with a horse through various therapeutic exercises, you can heal previous traumas. As a prey animal, horses are attuned to the feelings of their herd members, which includes us humans, and so they can act as a mirror for our deepest, often unconscious, thoughts and feelings. Learning to influence the direction and speed of a loose horse also boosts confidence. Most of the therapy is done from the ground rather than riding the horse. Although currently not available on the NHS, social services fund sessions in some areas (ask your GP). For private sessions, visit leap-etc.co.uk or eagala.org.uk.

'IT WORKED FOR ME!'

Paulette McQueen, 48, from London, tried art therapy for depression.



'I was diagnosed with thymoma in 2011 – a rare form of cancer that starts in the chest and spreads throughout the body. I'd felt healthy but was told

I had this cancer that there is no cure for. After the shock wore off, depression hit. I'd pretend I was OK, but I was scared. My GP recommended the Trinity Hospice (trinityhospice.org.uk), which offers free therapies for those with serious illness. I've never been good at art, but went to an art therapy session to watch. Before I knew it, I was drawing a picture. I've been once a week ever since. It's a way of expressing emotions that can't be put into words. I was given four months to live and three years later I'm doing OK. I think one reason is that art therapy gives me an outlet for the stressful emotions that build up.'

Low Self-Esteem

WHAT IS IT? Three elements are considered essential for healthy self-esteem: feeling you are making a difference in life; having a sense of identity; and having a sense of purpose. A common sign you're suffering from low self-esteem is spending a lot of time comparing yourself to others and deciding you're not attractive, funny, clever or good enough. Low self-esteem often develops from childhood, but people can also experience a dip after a traumatic event such as divorce, redundancy or serious illness.

THE CORE THERAPY **Person-centred counselling** Based on the theory that everyone can achieve their potential given the right conditions, it's a non-directive form of counselling in which the client's thoughts and feelings lead the session and the counsellor is seen as a facilitator rather than an expert. It's currently not available on the NHS, but you can find a private therapist through the British Association for the Person-Centred Approach (bapca.org.uk).

THE NEW THERAPIES **Compassion-focused therapy (CFT)** Blends the latest neuroscience with Buddhist philosophy. Studies show CFT techniques, such as 'loving kindness' meditation, can lead to greater optimism and contentment in everyday life. Like CBT, it's a structured, short-term therapy and a growing number of NHS mental health services are incorporating CFT techniques. Alternatively, find a private therapist via The British Association of Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies (BABCP, babcp.com).

Therapeutic coaching Bridges the gap between coaching and counselling. It's solution-focused and can help you work towards specific goals, including feeling more self-confident. A therapeutic coach is more directive than traditional counsellors, and you'll be given tasks between sessions, such as mind mapping your dreams for the future. Most people need five one-hour sessions, but it can be done via Skype or phone, as well as face to face. It's currently not available on the NHS.



To find a therapist, visit counselling-directory.org.uk and look for counsellors registered with the BACP's Coaching division.

ALSO RECOMMENDED FOR LOW SELF-ESTEEM **CBT and psychodynamic therapy** (see above).

'IT WORKED FOR ME!'

Linda Sears, 65, from Bedfordshire, tried therapeutic coaching.



'Five years ago, I was caring for elderly family members while running a business and was becoming stressed and negative. I tried

counselling, but continually talking about my situation made me feel even worse. Then I saw an ad for therapeutic coaching and signed up. I walked out of the first session feeling happier than I had for years. My coach explained how my stress levels were affecting my thought processes, so my first task was to learn a breathing technique so my "logical brain" could take charge again. Everything was practical – such as looking for positives in my life or spotting unhelpful thinking patterns. I had four sessions. My life didn't change, but my reaction to it was completely transformed.'

HOW TO FIND A THERAPIST

1 See Your Doctor Your GP can tell you what's available on the NHS. The government's IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) programme aims to increase access for anyone suffering from depression or anxiety. So far, the main one available is CBT but you may find couples' counselling and mindfulness-based therapy offered in some areas.

2 Call the Mind Infoline Ring 0300 123 3393 (Mon-Fri 9am-6pm) and a trained advisor can tell you about therapies available on the NHS, through Mind or privately. Or contact your local branch (see mind.org.uk), where you may be offered free or low-cost therapy. The therapies on offer vary between branches, but usually include CBT, group support and ecotherapy.

3 Go private Therapists charge from £25 to £150 a session. Some offer a sliding scale of rates in line with income. The BACP has a government-approved register of therapists whose work has to meet strict standards. They are also bound by the BACP's ethical code. Visit itsgoodtotalk.org.uk. If you find one via another route, check they're on the BACP register. ♦