

What is Sought from Psychotherapists & Finding a Good Match

**Michael Groat, PhD
Chief Clinical Officer
Associate Professor of Psychiatry and
Behavioral Neuroscience**

Learning Objectives

- Review the options available in mental health treatment today.
- Discuss findings from national surveys and research on what matters most when picking a therapist.
- Discuss the different therapeutic approaches available and how to choose among them.

Psychotherapy Survey

- Study drawn from U.S. representative sample of 1,535 respondents (margin of error is $\pm 2.53\%$ for the total results, with a 95% confidence level) during early March of 2020. The sample was representative of the population in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, geographic region, and household income.

(Delboy & Michaels, 2021)

Psychotherapy Survey Findings

- While the public appreciates mental health issues, many do not generally have strong awareness, understanding, or opinions about psychotherapy.

(Delboy & Michaels, 2021)

Psychotherapy Survey Findings

- People were queried with terms related to the types of offerings provided in therapies today, including skills and deep understanding.
- People were queried about key elements of a quality therapy experience.

Psychotherapy Survey Findings

- “Skills” and “depth” were equally valued, followed closely by feeling cared for and not judged by the therapist.
- People accept that therapy takes time and can be worth the investment.
- Vast majority prefer therapy that gets to root causes and offers lasting benefits.
- Having an empathic, validating therapist and learning new coping skills were noted as critical.

(Delboy & Michaels, 2021)

Psychotherapy Survey Findings

- People are more likely to consult with their doctor and insurance to start therapy, instead of word of mouth and online search.
- In choosing a therapist, practical considerations top the list, while what school of therapy a therapist is trained in (psychodynamic/CBT) is towards the bottom.
- Main objections to seeking therapy include expense, duration, and preference for handling problems oneself, with family/friends, or one's faith.

(Delboy & Michaels, 2021)

Psychotherapy Survey Findings

- Psychoanalysis and CBT have similar awareness and self-reported familiarity, at around two thirds of respondents.
- All other forms of therapy (existential-humanistic, Gestalt, etc.) have lower awareness levels.

(Delboy & Michaels, 2021)

Psychotherapy Survey Findings

- **Feel heard:** Therapy is a place where you will be heard and understood without judgment.
- **Change and choice:** Change old patterns of behavior and relationships, to make different choices in your life.
- **Worth it:** Therapy is worth the effort, the time, and the investment, because you are worth getting to know, and grow.
- **Get to the root:** Therapy is a way to increase self-awareness and get to the root of problems.
(Delboy & Michaels, 2021)

What People Want from Therapy



At the Heart of It: The Relationship

- The therapy relationship makes substantial and consistent contributions to psychotherapy outcome independent of the specific type of treatment.
- Moreover, efforts to promote best practices or evidence-based practices *without including the relationship* are seriously incomplete and potentially misleading.

Average effect size of relationship factors = .55

Average effect size of different treatment method = .00 - .20

Norcross and Lambert (2014), Psychotherapy

Common Factors Matter

“Much, if not all, of the effectiveness of different forms of psychotherapy may be due to those features that all have in common rather than those that distinguish them from each other.”

Jerome Frank (1961): Persuasion and healing

Relationship Common Factors

Effective in improving psychotherapy

- Therapist inspires hope and instills positive expectations
- Positive alliance with the therapist
- Experience of empathic connection with the therapist
- Therapist seeks and welcomes client feedback

Probably effective in improving psychotherapy outcomes

- Therapist seeks consensus on goals for the treatment
- Therapist approaches the relationship collaboratively
- Therapist demonstrates positive regard for the client

Promising as effective in improving psychotherapy outcomes

- Therapist is genuine and actions align with words (congruence)
- Therapist attends to and repairs alliance ruptures
- Therapist effectively manages their feelings and reactions

Norcross & Lambert, 2011

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FINDING A THERAPIST

PRO TIP #1: Identify Someone You Can Trust

Defining Trust

- A trusting relationship entails the therapist's commitment to a joint goal of *safeguarding your well-being*.
- In other words, "I am looking out for you."
- Trusting entails vulnerability but, in the context of trustworthiness, reduces vulnerability.

Trust is Earned

Two senses of trusting in psychotherapy

- trusting in the treatment modality (e.g., CBT, psychodynamic)
- trusting in the therapist
- patient and therapist ideally trust in, and are trustworthy, to each other

Competence (professional)

- knowledge of the psychotherapy
- works from a theoretical framework
- skillful in treatment methods

Care (personal-interpersonal-ethical)

- love and respect
- empathy, positive regard, and genuineness
- secure attachment (flexibility in responding to attachment patterns)
- personal knowledge from history of relationships
- skillfulness in being human

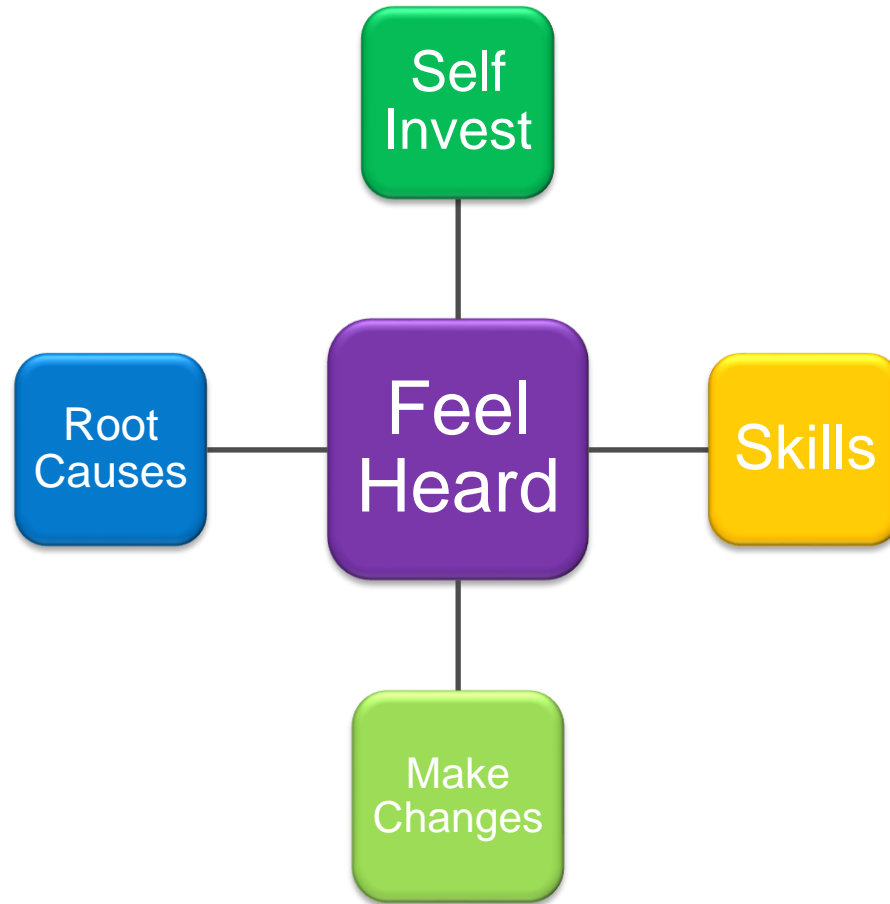
Allen, 2023

Common Factors: Caveat

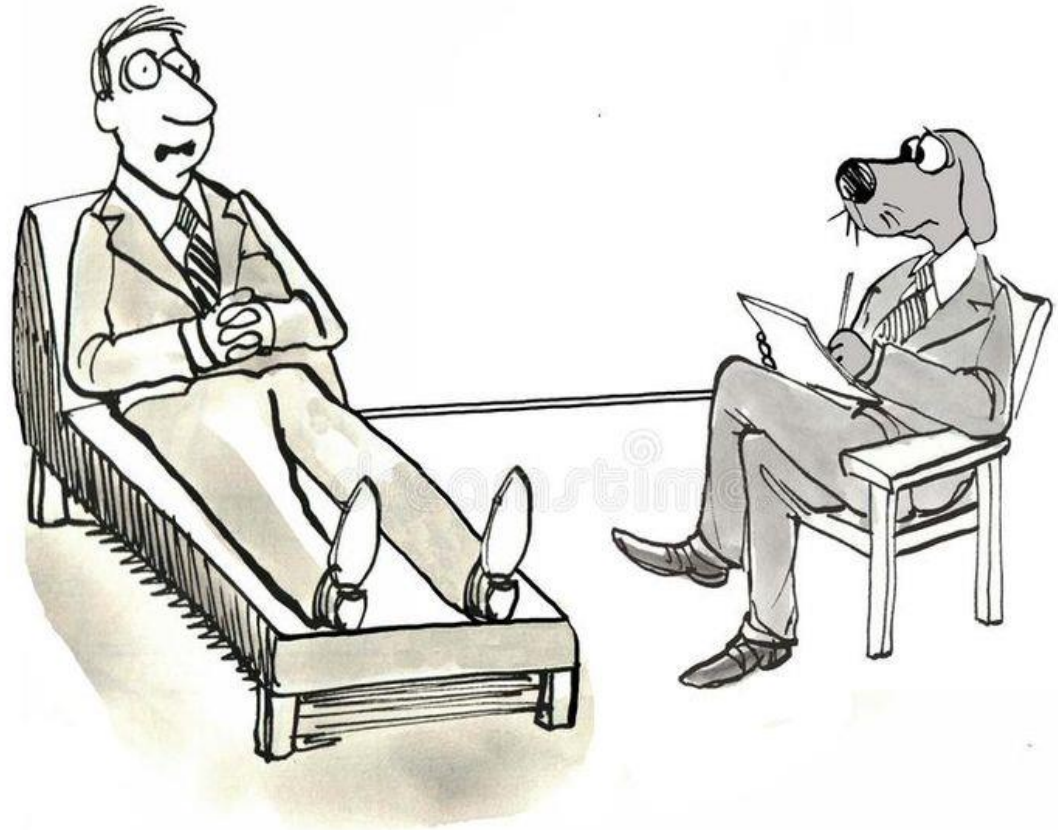
- Common factors always influential in the context of treatment methods; need a treatment!
- Specialized treatments superior for specific symptoms
- Methods must be credible to therapist and patient – part of what helps form a strong therapeutic alliance.

PRO TIP #2: Learn About & Choose Your Approach

What People Want from Therapy



Exploratory

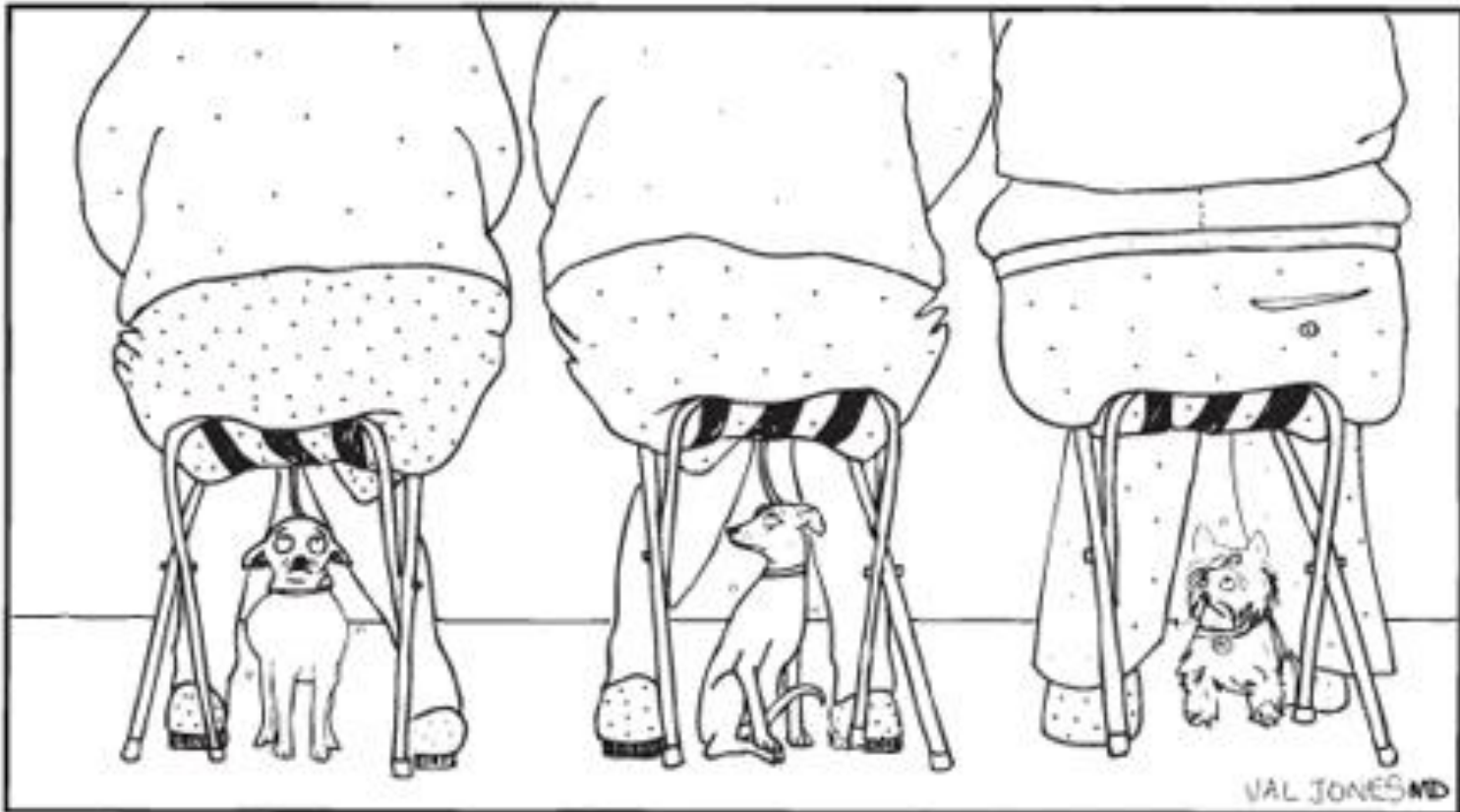


**“I woke up one day and said to myself,
‘Why do I keep chasing the bone?’.”**

Exploratory Approaches

- Often include exploration of root causes, including developmental disruptions (parental divorce, losses, etc.)
- Are often open-ended and less structured
- Therapist often plays an interpretive role; helps foster insight and addresses underlying motivations and patterns of behavior
- Often referred to as psychodynamic or psychoanalytic

PET THERAPY



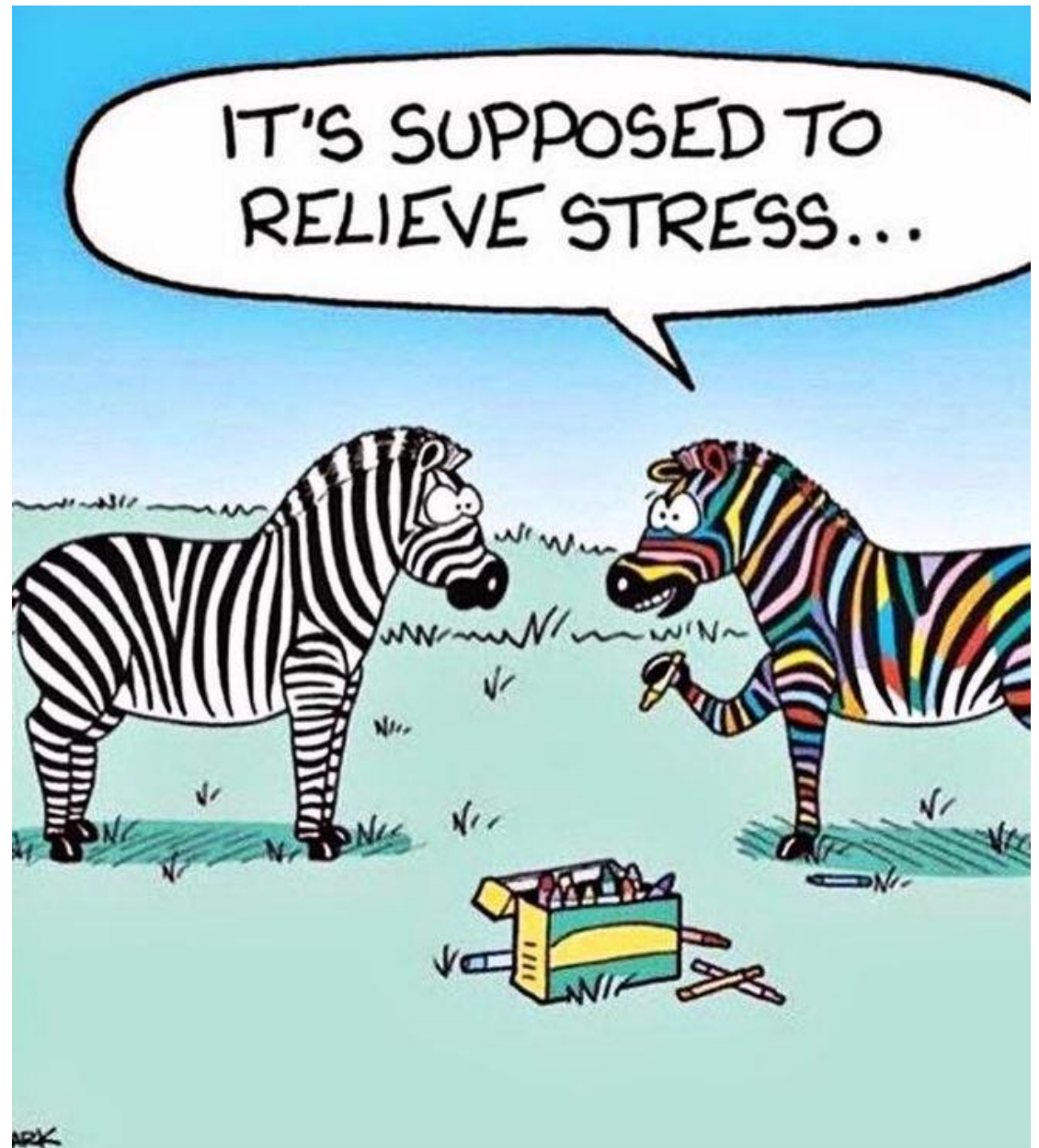
"Nervous little dogs 'face their fears' at an anxiety management seminar."

Action-Oriented

Action-Oriented/Supportive

- Often includes active psychoeducation and homework assignments
- Often focus on practical problem-solving strategies and coping skills
- Therapist can provide instruction, direction and/or lead structured activities (e.g., relaxation, exposure)
- Often referred to as cognitive-behavioral or behavioral in approach

Experiential



Experiential

- Crafting
- Art therapy
- Dance therapy
- Trauma-informed yoga
- Eye-movement desensitization and reprocessing therapy (EMDR)
- Psychodrama
- Gestalt therapy
- Roleplays

PRO TIP #3

If You Don't Know or Are Stuck: Seek Consultation

Consultative Options

- Specialists in mental health treatment can listen to your problems and identify potential pathways.
- Expert assessments can detail treatment specific recommendations.



Psychiatry

"-iatry" suffix means
medical treatment

Treats with medication
and therapy

Assess both mental
and physical aspects of
problems

Psychology

"-ology" suffix means
field of study

Specializes in
psychological testing;
treats with therapy

Assess both mental and
social aspects
of problem

Experts in
Mental
Health

Conduct
Psychotherapy

Ways of Assessing

| DSM Diagnosis | Case Formulation | Treatment-Centered |
|---|--|--|
| Symptom-focused | Goes beyond observable symptoms | Synthesizes empirical and clinical findings |
| Historical review, including medication and therapy trials, course of illness and cluster of symptoms | Weaves in information about history, development, trauma, stressors, coping strategies | Identifies what needs treating, and homes in on the factors associated with successful treatment |
| Can include symptom and disorder-specific scales | Often includes a narrative hypothesis | Often relies on specific psychological measures for added empirical inferences |

Reasons for Therapy

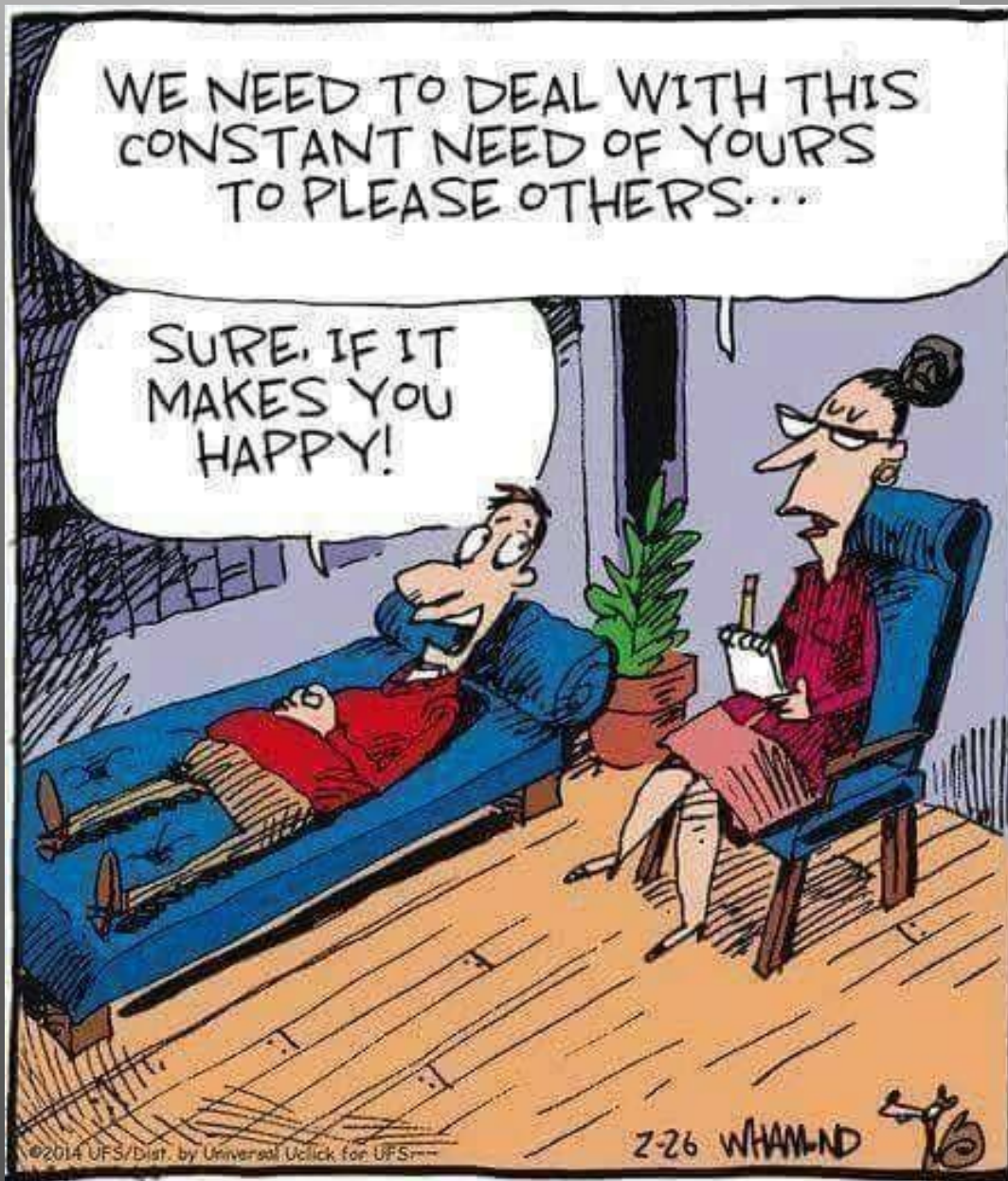
- We seek psychotherapy not only for the treatment of psychiatric disorders.
- We also seek psychotherapy to help us address problems in living—usually involving interpersonal relationships—with which psychiatric disorders invariably are intertwined.
- For millennia, problems in living have been the domain of philosophy and/or religion/spirituality: ethics (how we live) and morality (how we live with each other).
- Accordingly, psychotherapy is a messy amalgam of ethical-moral and scientific-technological work.

PRO TIP #4

Readiness Matters

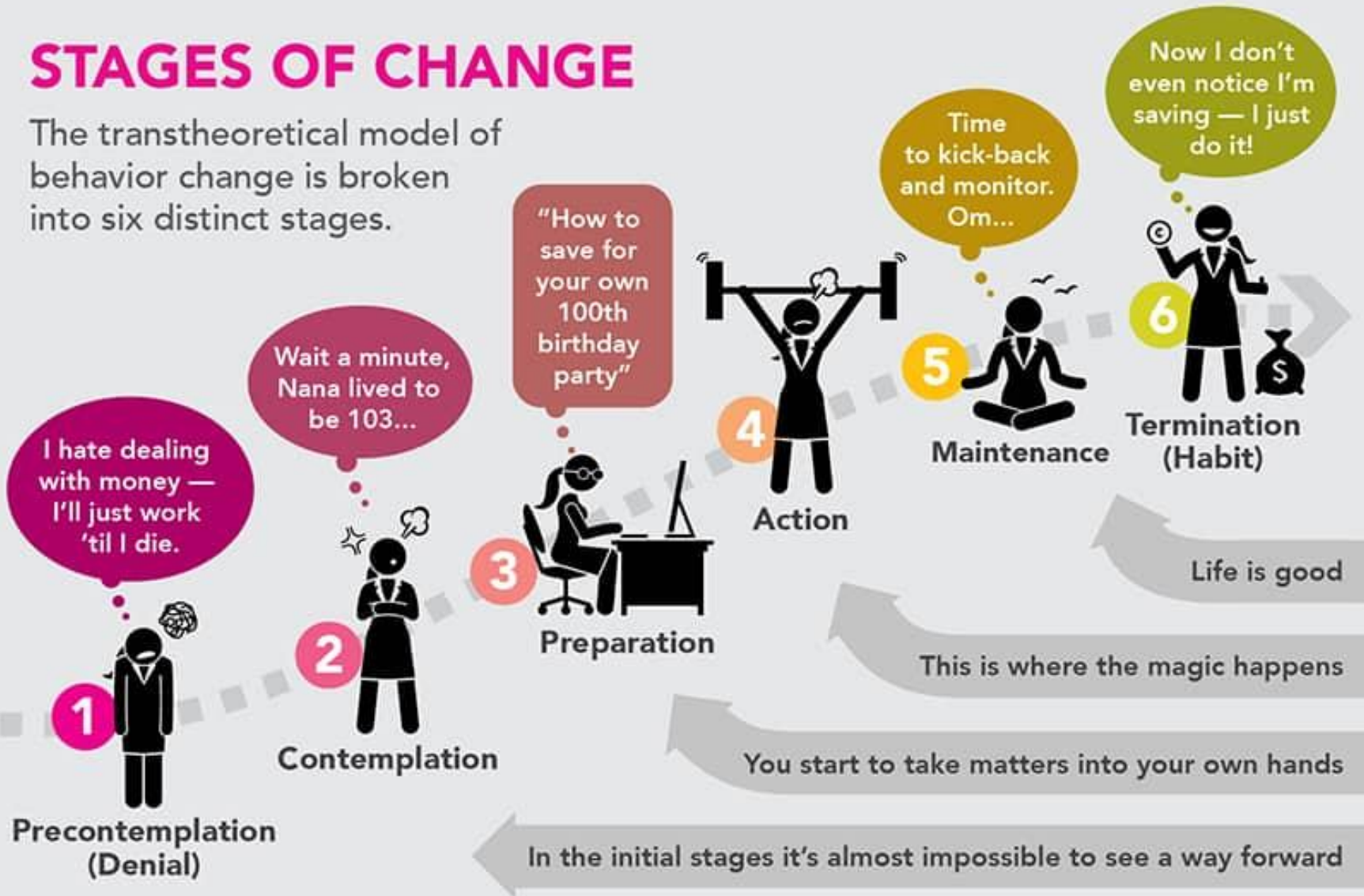
WE NEED TO DEAL WITH THIS
CONSTANT NEED OF YOURS
TO PLEASE OTHERS...

SURE, IF IT
MAKES YOU
HAPPY!



STAGES OF CHANGE

The transtheoretical model of behavior change is broken into six distinct stages.



Population Prevalence

40-40-20 rule in general population

- 40% precontemplation
- 40% contemplation
- Only 20% preparation/early action

PRO TIP #5

Give Mental Health Due Time


Give Mental Health Its Due

- Recent research indicates that on average 15 to 20 sessions are required for 50 percent of people to recover (as indicated by self-reported symptom measures).
- In practice, patients and therapists sometimes prefer to continue treatment over longer periods (e.g., 20 to 30 sessions over six months), to achieve more complete symptom remission and to feel confident in the skills needed to maintain treatment gains.


Lambert (2017), Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics

Short or Long: It's All Okay

Clinical research suggests that people with co-occurring conditions or certain personality difficulties may require longer treatment (e.g., 12 to 18 months) for therapy to be effective.



There are a few individuals with chronic problems who may require extensive treatment support (e.g., maintenance therapy to reduce risk of psychiatric re-hospitalization), but such patients are a minority of those who need or seek treatment.



Lambert (2017), *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*

Which Therapy Works Best?

- It depends!
- It depends in particular on the client (readiness, motivation, extra therapeutic factors)
- Includes both diagnostic and non-diagnostic features (gender, ethnicity, etc.)
- And it depends more on the relationship and responsiveness than a method

Norcross, 2021

Summary of PRO Tips

1. Find a therapist you can trust.
2. Learn about the options and choose an approach (Ask lots of questions!).
3. If you don't know where to start or are stuck, seek consultation.
4. Readiness and preparation for change matters.
5. Give mental health its due time.

Vive la Difference!

