

EXCERPT



The Client's Guide to Therapy *How to Get the Most Out of Your Counseling Experience*

April 8, 2025 | \$18, 168 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0882-9

In this accessible guide, psychologist Terri Watson provides an expert's perspective on how to get the most out of your counseling experience. For any Christian considering or receiving clinical mental health care, as well as mental health professionals and those who make referrals, this guide to therapy is an encouraging, helpful companion.

How Can Psychotherapy Help?

Every counseling journey begins with hope. Something in your life is not how it should be, and you long for change. You may hope for relief from the nagging distress of painful thoughts and feelings. Or you are reeling in the aftermath of a traumatic experience or loss and hoping for someone to help you find your footing again. Maybe you know something is out of alignment in your life, relationships, or career and wish for the time and space to figure things out. Perhaps you long for a life free from destructive habits or addictive behaviors and need a trusted ally to help set you on the path to recovery. The many challenges encountered during a lifetime bring each one of us to that moment where we recognize that we need help. Seeking help from others is an act of *hope* that we do not have to struggle alone in our present suffering.

When the inevitable difficulties in life occur, a psychotherapist can be an invaluable companion and guide for the journey toward health and wholeness. As you bring your problems to a mental health professional, you develop a new and different perspective on your issues that removes obstacles and creates a pathway forward for both acceptance and change. In the context of a confidential and trusting counseling relationship, you make connections, gain insights, and slowly but surely begin to move steadily along the pathway to restoration and transformation. Psychotherapy can be quite an illuminating journey where, in addition to dealing with pain and suffering, you deeply explore life questions about who you are and where you are going. These essential questions often get pushed aside in the busyness of everyday living.

People seek counseling and psychotherapy for many different reasons and with a variety of goals in mind. Some examples include:

- for help with emotional difficulties stemming from a loss, transition, or crisis
- to improve relationships with family, friends, or colleagues
- to address professional burnout and career concerns
- for parenting support and help related to concerns for a child or adolescent
- to cope with intrusive or distressing thoughts
- to break free of addictive or compulsive behaviors
- to deal with problems in self-esteem and identity
- to address spiritual or existential struggles and make meaning of suffering
- for growth in self-awareness and understanding
- to address long-standing challenges and unresolved issues from the past
- to accept those aspects of ourselves and our circumstances that may not be changeable
- at the request of a friend, family member, or employer

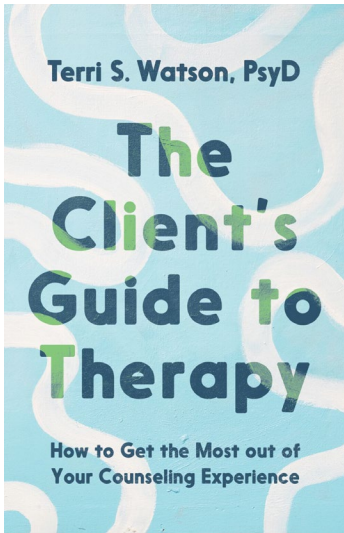
When a client comes to me for psychotherapy, I often find that their most urgent question is this: "If I invest my hope in the counseling process and in you as my therapist, can you help me? When I begin to lose hope, can I borrow your hope that things can truly get better?" The answer to this essential question is an unequivocal yes. As therapists, we honor this investment of hope from our clients as a sacred trust. We recognize just how hard our clients have worked to solve problems on their own and know how difficult it is to hold on to hope for the possibility of change when so many attempts have been unsuccessful. Our commitment to you is to be a trustworthy companion on your journey toward wholeness and healing as we draw from our professional training and personal experiences to provide informed guidance.



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Ultimately, the journey toward health begins with the recognition that we do not have to travel alone in our quest to address the problems in our lives. Psychotherapy brings the hope of change and the promise of a trusted companion and guide on the pathway to emotional, relational, and spiritual health. The question, "Why should I consider psychotherapy?" comes down to this: *Where do I hope for change in my life?*

—Taken from chapter one, "How Can Psychotherapy Help?"



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Terri S. Watson (PsyD, ABPP) is a professor of psychology at Wheaton College. She is also a board-certified clinical psychologist, an approved clinical supervisor with the Center for Credentialing and Education, and an approved supervisor with the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. She maintains a private practice and provides supervision and clinical consultation for community and private organizations.

Practical Advice for the Counseling Experience

What led to your interest in writing a practical guide to counseling?

Terri S. Watson: As an enthusiastic advocate for the benefits of psychotherapy, particularly for Christians, this is a book that I have wanted to write my whole career. The mental health pandemic fueled by COVID-19 with rising rates of anxiety and depression has only intensified the urgency to reduce the barriers to counseling access that still exist for many in society and especially in the church. Myths and misconceptions about psychotherapy pose significant obstacles to participation in counseling, making mental health care inaccessible to many people who would greatly benefit from psychotherapy. Some fear that counseling will undermine their Christian faith commitments. Others anticipate judgment, discrimination, or bias and doubt that they will ever find a therapist who understands their unique experiences. Many people are confused by the various approaches to counseling, including teletherapy, and are unsure about which one is the best fit for their needs. I firmly believe that now is a critical time for a practical guide to counseling that reduces the stigma of mental illness and provides a hopeful vision of the benefits of psychotherapy for personal and spiritual formation.

What do you hope readers learn from reading *The Client's Guide to Therapy*?

Watson: This book aspires to be a modest guide to the counseling and psychotherapy process from start to finish. Integrating wisdom gained from science about effective counseling with real-life experiences from both counselors and counselees, *The Client's Guide to Therapy* addresses common questions and provides guidelines for each stage of the counseling journey. By incorporating key findings from science, practical wisdom, and brief client and therapist narratives, my hope is to educate and empower current and future psychotherapy clients for proactive partnership with their therapist in an authentic human encounter that leads to growth and transformation. Appropriately locating the counseling experience as one of the many opportunities that God can use for sanctification and character formation, this book invites clients (and therapists) to think beyond the therapeutic goal of alleviation of suffering to embrace God's greater purposes (and is a distinctive contribution of the book). The combination of practical wisdom, key findings from science, and use of client and therapist examples (including my own experiences as both a client and therapist) is also a unique and helpful contribution to the literature.

Who did you have in mind as you were writing this book?

Watson: *The Client's Guide to Therapy* is for individuals who are either considering counseling or currently seeing a psychotherapist and are interested in a deeper understanding of the therapy process. My hope is to educate and empower the thoughtful Christian consumer of mental health services to increase access to care and encourage active participation in the therapeutic process toward optimal outcomes.

This book is written, too, for mental health professionals as I aim to address the key questions that every therapist wants their clients to know about the therapeutic process. My intent is to draw from science, stories, and practical wisdom rather than one specific theoretical orientation to provide a primer that is relevant to most, if not all, therapeutic approaches. I would love to write a book that therapists can give their clients at the outset of therapy as a roadmap for the therapeutic process that can be creatively customized based on the unique needs of the client and the therapeutic orientation of the therapist.



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What do you hope your book contributes to conversations around the role of psychotherapy in Christian communities?

Watson:

1. This book provides an inviting and accessible introduction to counseling, translating professional terms and practices for a lay audience to increase access to psychotherapy services.
2. Counselors, pastors, and Christian leaders can use this book as a trustworthy guide to encourage people to consider psychotherapy and support them throughout the process.
3. Counseling clients will be empowered to partner with their therapist to gain the most benefit from their psychotherapy experience, integrating psychological growth and spiritual formation.



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