

This leaflet has been produced with involvement from Heads Count, a user led network for people who access mental health services, carers and everyone with experience of or affected by mental health matters in and around the city of Plymouth.

Cover illustration by Georgia Thomson Illustration

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## Seeing a clinical psychologist



Information for people seen by the  
Assertive Outreach Service

## What do clinical psychologists do?

Clinical psychologists use their knowledge about how minds work to help people with a wide range of emotional or mental health difficulties. They do not prescribe medicine or admit people to hospital. They talk with the person in order to help him or her:

- Make sense of difficulties and how they relate to the person's life history
- Identify and change repeating patterns and vicious cycles of thoughts, feelings and behaviour
- Develop new ways of coping with difficult thoughts and feelings or approaching difficult experiences and relationships

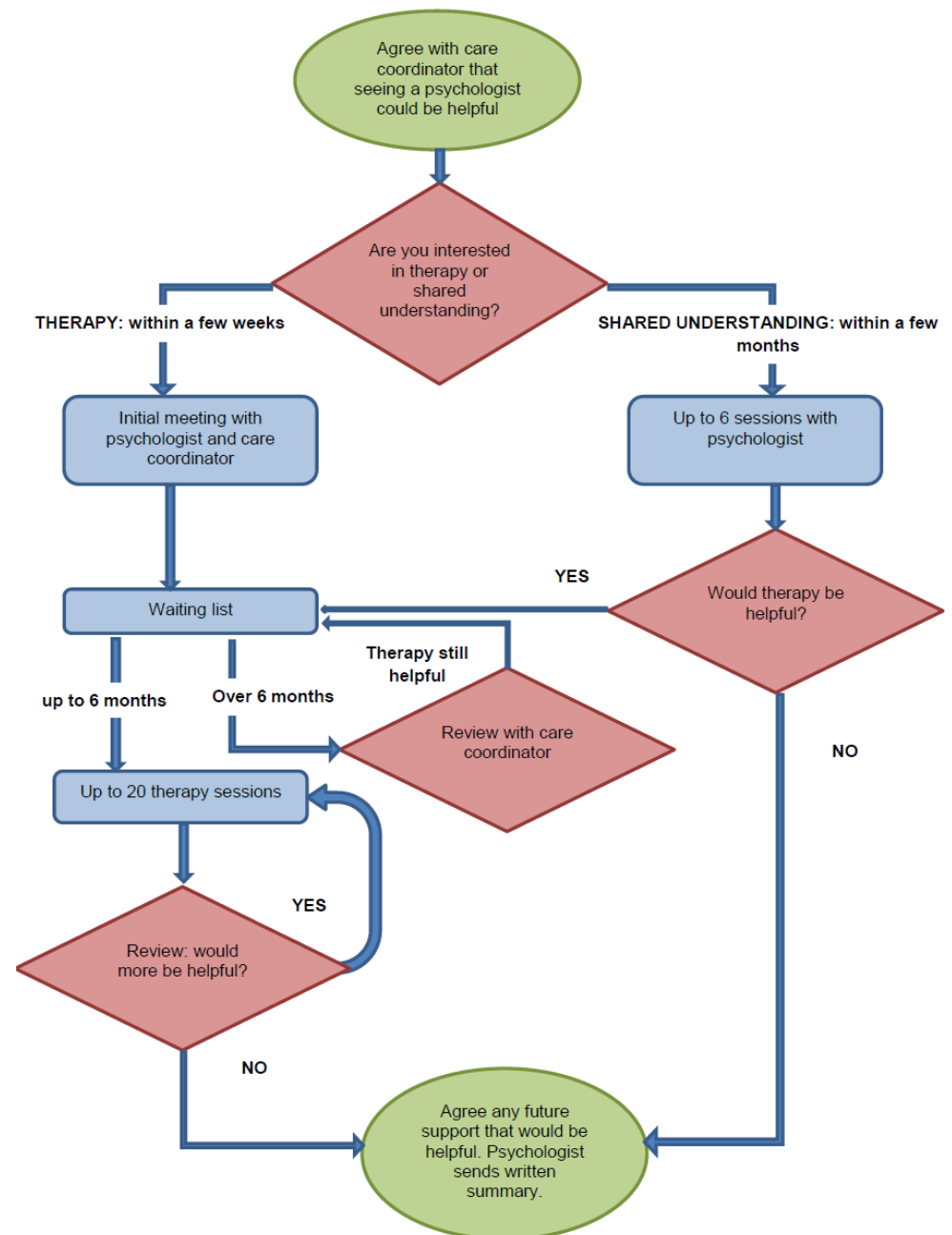
You can choose to meet with a psychologist just to try and develop a shared understanding of your difficulties or for a period of psychological therapy.

## What does developing a shared understanding involve?

A shared understanding could help you, and other people supporting you, understand where your difficulties have come from and what is keeping them going. This can help to identify approaches that are likely to be helpful. Developing a shared understanding involves:

- Meeting with a psychologist for up to six sessions
- Talking through your difficulties, life history, strengths and hopes for the future
- For some kinds of difficulties, completing questionnaires or tasks to help identify your strengths and weaknesses
- Receiving a written summary and agreeing how to share this with other people

## Accessing clinical psychology: process



## How can I access clinical psychology?

If you think you would like to try meeting a clinical psychologist, please discuss this with your care coordinator. She or he can help you work out what you would like to get out of seeing a psychologist, including whether you would like to work on a shared understanding or if therapy would be helpful. Your care coordinator can also help you think about any additional support you might need to get to the sessions or cope with any concerns the sessions bring up for you. If you are interested in having psychological therapy, your care coordinator will arrange an initial meeting with the psychologist. You can talk to the psychologist about what you would like to get out of therapy and if there is anything else you can try that might help with your difficulties.

## How long will I have to wait to see a psychologist?

Unfortunately, there can be long waiting times to meet with a psychologist. You can usually have an initial meeting, including your care coordinator, within a few weeks. If you would like to begin by working on a shared understanding you will usually meet with the psychologist within a few months. These are both opportunities to start thinking about what else you can try to deal differently with your difficulties. However, the wait for psychological therapy may be many months. While you are waiting, the psychologist will offer to meet with you, together with your care coordinator, every six months, to review whether therapy is still likely to be helpful and any other strategies you are using.

Once you have developed a shared understanding, you may decide that you would like to go on to work on your difficulties in psychological therapy.

## What does psychological therapy involve?

Clinical psychologists draw on a range of different approaches to psychological therapy. This could be working on difficult events and feelings from the past or focussing on how to cope better in the present. The psychologist will work out with you what approach you find most helpful. The process of psychological therapy involves:

- Agreeing a number of sessions to meet with the psychologist, usually between six and twenty
- Possibly agreeing tasks for you to try between sessions, to build on the work you are doing together.
- Reviewing your progress after the agreed number of sessions and agreeing whether to extend them.

## What will sessions be like?

Psychology sessions usually:

- last about an hour
- take place at a mental health team base
- Can include someone else you want to bring, if it helps you feel comfortable

However, the psychologist can be flexible and will try and find ways of meeting that work for you.

Psychology sessions can be upsetting, so it is a good idea to think about how you will manage this. Some people find it helpful to plan to do something enjoyable afterwards or to spend time somewhere they feel safe.

## Is it confidential?

Clinical psychologists maintain the same level of confidentiality as other healthcare professionals. They may share information about you with other people involved in your care to help them support you as well as possible. Clinical psychologists are also required to keep notes in your electronic records. These notes can be accessed by other workers directly or indirectly involved with your care. You can choose what information you share with your psychologist. If there is something you wish to discuss with your psychologist that you are not comfortable being shared with other people involved in your care, please discuss this with the psychologist. If the psychologist is concerned that you, or another person, are at risk of harm they are duty bound to inform the relevant professionals. If this comes up, where possible, the psychologist will discuss this with you and try and reach an agreement about how to share information.

Clinical psychologists also routinely discuss their work in supervision, usually with another psychologist. This will help the psychologist work with you in the best possible way. The supervisor will work to the same standards of confidentiality as the psychologist.

## Will seeing a clinical psychologist help me?

Research shows that psychological therapy can be helpful and it is a recommended treatment for many types of difficulty. However, it does not work for everyone. It can be a difficult process that takes time and effort before things start to feel better. It may also be just one step towards dealing with your difficulties and it is important that you feel ready for it. People usually don't know whether or how psychology will help them until they start the process.

It is important to talk to your psychologist if you are not finding the sessions helpful, so they can work out with you what the most helpful approach is likely to be.

## Are there any challenges involved in seeing a clinical psychologist?

Some people find that talking about their difficulties can be distressing and you will need to be prepared for this. If you are finding your sessions too distressing it is very important that you talk to someone about this, either the psychologist or your care coordinator. The psychologist can then work with you on this and help you decide what kind of approach will work best for you, or what else you may need to do to be ready for therapy.

## What if I want more sessions than I originally agreed?

Once you have had the agreed number of sessions, the psychologist will review how the therapy has gone with you. If there are still things that it would be helpful for you to work on, then the psychologist will agree another series of sessions with you. Unfortunately, sessions cannot go on indefinitely but they can take place over an extended period of time if that is going to be helpful. The psychologist will work with you to think about what will help you feel ready for the end of the sessions.

## What will happen when the sessions come to an end

You will continue to receive any other support that you have from the Assertive Outreach Team. You may also agree a plan with the psychologist that will help you keep up any changes you have made. This could be doing things yourself or getting involved with other activities or organisations that might support you. The psychologist will write a summary of your progress to help remind you about what you have achieved and any plans you have made. This can be shared with your care coordinator and anyone else supporting you.