

Survival Guide: Psychotherapy

The wildest myths and stories surround Psychotherapy. Many questions and uncertainties are often triggered by the topic. With our little survival guide, we have tried to explain some aspects in more detail and in a comprehensible way in order to shed some light on the field of Psychotherapy.

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What is Psychotherapy?

Generally speaking, Psychotherapy is about the treatment of psychological/mental illnesses. The treatment consists exclusively of conversations and does not involve medication. There are various scientifically approved therapeutic methods. The health insurance fund covers the costs for the following four:

- Analytical Psychotherapy
- Psychodynamic Psychotherapy
- Behaviour Therapy
- Systematic Therapy

Explanations about the different methods can be found below.

When is Psychotherapy needed?

Since stress, problems, worries, fears etc. are always subjective; such a question can only be answered individually. However, a disease must contain two essential factors: Suffering and impairment.

It is important to take every form of emotional stress seriously and not dismiss them. It often helps a lot to talk to people close to you, such as your partner, a good friend or family members. Sometimes, however, the emotional stress is so intense, or the situation lasts for a very long time that one cannot cope with the situation alone. In such cases, it is advisable to seek professional help. You do not have to be afraid that you have tricked yourself into a therapy place. The first session with a therapist is the so-called consultation hour, which serves primarily to clarify whether the concern requires therapy.

Who conducts Psychotherapy?

There are many different professions. We will explain the different in the following:

- Psychologists: Psychologists have a degree in Psychology (either Bachelor/Master or Diploma). They are not allowed to carry out therapy. If they work therapeutically e.g., in psychiatric wards, only under supervision. Consulting activities may be carried out independently.

- Psychiatrists: Psychiatrists have a degree in Medicine and additionally many years of professional training as a consultant. They do not normally perform Psychotherapy, but are responsible for drug therapy.

- Psychotherapists: A distinction is made here between psychological and medical psychotherapists:
 1. Psychological psychotherapists have a Diploma or Master Degree in Psychology and additional training as a psychotherapist.
 2. Medical psychotherapists: There are several options here, but to put it simple: doctors who have undergone further training to become psychotherapists. They can sometimes also offer drug therapy in addition to talk therapy.

Psychological and medical psychotherapists own a practice and perform ambulant psychotherapy. You can contact these people if you are in need of a therapy place.

Do I have to pay for Psychotherapy?

Psychotherapy is fully covered by statutory health insurance so there are no costs.

How long do I have to wait for a therapy place?

As a rule unfortunately several weeks up to months. Therefore, it is recommended to start looking for a place as soon as possible.

Do I need a referral from my doctor for Psychotherapy?

No, a referral from your doctor is not necessary.

What are the therapeutic methods and how do they differ?

There are various different therapeutic methods. In Germany, the costs for the following four are covered by statutory health insurance:

- *Analytical Psychotherapy:*

Analytical psychotherapy is the origin of psychotherapy and goes back to Sigmund Freud. That is what most people imagine psychotherapy to be. Classical Analytical Psychotherapy takes place lying down. It is about uncovering and reprocessing unconscious conflicts that developed in (early) childhood and continue to prevail in one. Therefore, this therapeutic method deals a lot with one's childhood and past. The classical Analytical Psychotherapy differs from other therapeutic methods as it is not only problem-focused but tries to work on the personality of the patient which results in a much larger volume of hours than the other procedures (for the volume of hours, see below).

- *Psychodynamic Psychotherapy:*

Similar to the Analytical Psychotherapy, the Psychodynamic Psychotherapy is about uncovering and reprocessing early childhood conflicts, which have manifested. In order to achieve this, the main part of this therapy consists of dealing with one's own childhood. The basic theoretical framework is therefore almost the same for both therapeutic methods. However, the Psychodynamic Psychotherapy is much more

problem-focused and places a focus on feelings and relationship dynamics. Another difference to the Analytical Psychotherapy is that patients sit and do not lie down.

- *Behaviour therapy:*

Behaviour therapy is a form of self-help. It is assumed that in our life history we have consciously or unconsciously developed behavioural and thought patterns through experience, which now influence our actions. In therapy, the conditions for the development and maintenance of the symptoms are worked out with the patient in order to define therapy goals based on this. The goal is to use already existing resources and competencies of the patient to integrate long-term strategies for improved self-regulation. Various methods and exercises are used to encourage patients to confront destructive beliefs, thought and attitude patterns and to promote understanding of their own emotions and needs.

- *Systematic therapy:*

Systematic therapy is a solution-oriented approach to problems and challenges. As in the behaviour therapy, it is about using already existing competencies. In this therapeutic method it is possible to involve a reference person. Systemic therapy assumes that the key to understanding and changing the problem is found in the context in which the problem is located.

Whom do I contact when I want to start therapy?

There are several possibilities:

1. *Registered psychotherapists:*

The best way is to contact registered psychotherapists. As many as possible. This increases the chances to get a therapy place as capacities may have become available at short notice. If there are no free therapy places, you can still be put on a waiting list. An advantage here is that you can already get in touch with a psychotherapist meaning you can already get to know each other. Unfortunately, this option is often frustrating, as psychotherapists have fixed consultation hours and it might be hard to reach them sometimes. Regardless of this, this still

is the most promising way of getting a therapy place as soon as possible. You can find a list of registered psychotherapists in our download area.

2. *Psychiatric outpatient clinic (PIA):*

Bigger clinics with psychiatric/psychological wards oftentimes have a PIA. In Magdeburg, e.g. you can find a PIA at the Universitätsklinikum Magdeburg or the Klinikum Olvenstedt. Patients there are not treated as inpatients, but as outpatients. Outpatient care applies to both talk therapy (psychotherapy) and drug therapy. Psychotherapy is usually carried out by psychologists who are in training to become psychotherapists (always under supervision) or by qualified (licensed) psychotherapists. Often the PIAs are overcrowded, because naturally they try to connect the patients, who were previously treated as inpatients in the clinic, immediately to the PIA. In most cases, however, patients can be placed on a waiting list.

3. *Outpatient clinics of training institutes:*

In the training to become a psychotherapist, it is obligatory to treat outpatients. Some training institutes have their own outpatient clinics for this purpose. In Magdeburg, for example, the MAPP, the IVT or the IPM. Psychotherapists in training are under supervision. In practice, this means that the psychotherapist in training conducts the conversations and usually discusses the case with the supervisor after 4 hours of therapy. There too can be long waiting times, but you normally always get on a waiting list.

4. *Appointment via the Central Research Institute of Ambulatory Health Care Sachsen-Anhalt: (Kassenärztliche Vereinigung Sachsen-Anhalt)*

Via the phone number 116 117 or the homepage of the 116 117 you can get an appointment with a registered psychotherapist. As a rule, the waiting time for an appointment should not exceed 4 weeks. Sounds good at first. BUT: What you get is a so-called consultation. In this consultation it is about clarifying whether a therapy is recommended and if so, which therapeutic method. During the consultation, you will be given a piece of paper (PTV 11). However, the psychotherapist is not obligated to offer further therapy. So you would have to start all over looking for a therapist or again seek help with the 116 117. So it may well be that you get to know 2-3 different psychotherapists before you end up with the final one.

What can I do if the waiting time for Psychotherapy is too long?

If you are in a very bad state, for example, if you show self-injurious behaviour and/or cannot distance yourself from suicidal thoughts, you should go to the emergency department. If necessary, inpatient treatment will be recommended there and you will be referred to the appropriate ward (always assuming, of course, that there are capacities).

In serious situations of danger for yourself or others, we strongly recommend dialling the emergency number 112. There is absolutely no need to have a guilty conscience. The staff is trained for this and it is part of their daily tasks and duties to move out for this type of emergency as well.

In less serious cases, you could try to get help from a counselling center. This is where the PSB comes into play. We try to arrange an appointment as quickly as possible. In most cases, this is much faster than getting therapy. For whom the counselling is available, how to get an appointment with us and many other questions and answers can be found on our homepage under FAQ's (Social Issues and Counselling -> Consulting FAQs).

Further counseling services in Magdeburg can be found in our download area.

What is the procedure of Psychotherapy?

Normally a therapy session lasts about 50 minutes and takes place weekly. The only exception is Psychoanalysis, which takes place three times a week.

The procedure of a Psychotherapy can be divided into three sections:

1. Consultation hour

As already mentioned, the first session is called consultation hour. It is about defining whether Psychotherapy is needed and if so, which therapeutic method is most suitable.

2. Probatory

Probatory for adults consists of four hours. For psychotherapists the probatory is about getting an image of the problems, to generate working hypotheses and make an initial diagnosis (or diagnoses). However, these can of course be adjusted in the course of the therapy. For the patient, but also for the psychotherapist, the most important thing is to find

out whether you can work well together. A good relationship between patient and psychotherapist is the decisive factor for a good therapy result. Much more decisive than the chosen therapy method.

3. Therapy

If both parties agreed on working together, the therapy is applied for. There are generally two options:

1. Short-term therapy

Short-time therapy consists of 12 hours (KZT 1) and can be extended by another 12 hours (KZT 2). Thus, it would be a total of 24 hours.

2. Long-term therapy

If the probatory shows that a longer process is necessary to solve the problem, a long-term therapy can be applied for directly afterwards. There is a different amount of hours for the different therapeutic methods:

- Analytical Psychotherapy: 160 hours
- Psychodynamic Psychotherapy: 60 hours
- Behaviour Therapy: 60 hours
- Systematic Therapy: 36 hours

It is also possible to apply for long-term therapy for continuation after a short-time therapy. In that case, the hours of the short-term therapy will be credited to the long-term therapy. Example: After a short-term therapy (KZT 1 + KZT 2 = 24 hrs.) a long-term therapy in Behaviour therapy is applied for. Then one receives another 36 hours (24 hrs + 36 hrs = 60 hrs).

Long-term therapy may also be extended again, resulting in the following total hours:

- Analytical Psychotherapy: 300 hours
- Psychodynamic Psychotherapy: 100 hours
- Behaviour Therapy: 80 hours
- Systematic Therapy: 48 hours

In the above example, a maximum of 20 additional hours could therefore be requested, making a total of 80 hours.

How do I request Psychotherapy, what do I have to do for it?

There are various forms of applying for psychotherapy, all of which psychotherapists have on hand. As a patient, you only have to sign one form on the spot. Furthermore, in order to apply for therapy (the actual therapy, not for consultation or probation), proof must be submitted that the psychological problems do not have any physical causes. For this purpose, there is a specific form, which is handed out by the psychotherapist and must be filled out by the general practitioner or specialist. Medical psychotherapists can sometimes fill it out themselves.

I do not get along with my therapist. What can I do?

As mentioned before, the purpose of the probatory is to see whether there is a good connection between the patient and the psychotherapist. If problems or something else occurs during the probatory of therapy, these should definitely be addressed and discussed. In most cases, problems solve themselves. However, if problems cannot be solved or you just do not feel good, you are not obligated to finish the therapy. As a patient you can always stop the therapy. There are no costs or other negative consequences. However, you would then have to start the exhausting search for a psychotherapist all over again.