

The initial consultation

The purpose of the initial consultation is to get a feel for whether we can do therapeutic work together. On my side, that involves assessing whether I am able to offer you effective therapeutic support, and whether I feel my approach is going to be useful for you. On your side, that involves getting a feel for whether you will be able to bring whatever you need to bring to our sessions.

I don't apply a set formula to these consultations. However, there are three basic areas that we will need to address. These don't need to occur in a set order, though you are welcome to say if you have a preference. Generally, I think of these as three themes that need to be addressed throughout the consultation:

Overviewing your needs

You're seeking therapy for a reason, so we need to take an initial look at what that reason is. If you don't know what that reason is, then that's still a great starting point, as we can explore some of the feelings that have got you thinking you need therapy.

The main thing to emphasis is that this is an initial overview; you don't need to bare all. This will be the first time you've ever met me, so while I do need to have a reasonable idea of what you want to explore, I will also be keeping in my awareness that we don't know each other yet.

Everyone's level of comfort with going into details in the initial consultation is different, and I don't necessarily need to know many details at this point. What's more important is what our connection feels like, how we respond to each other, and whether I feel I am able to offer you effective support for what you want to open up.

Contracting

I will go through a written contract with you that describes the framework within which I work. This is so you have an explicit statement that covers areas like: how confidentiality will work; how often we will meet; my fee; my policy around cancellations. These are all standard aspects of clinical practice; my preference is to make this explicit so that our therapy is well held.

I will also suggest that we agree an initial focus for our work. This is the unwritten part of our contract, and forms the guiding star for our work. For short-term work, we will most likely agree that our therapy has come to an end once that focus feels complete. For longer-term work, we will most likely change that focus as and when it feels like we're moving into different territory. I will usually suggest we review our work so far and re-contract for a new general focus when this happens.

Questions and clarifications

You may already have things you want to know about me and my approach when you come for the initial consultation, or questions may occur to you over the course of the consultation. Alternatively, you may not have any questions at all. In any case, one area for us to explore in the initial consultation is what you might need to ask or clarify in order to best be able to decide whether or not to enter into therapy with me.